

THE ROLE OF MUSIC FESTIVALS IN CONTEMPORARY MOROCCO

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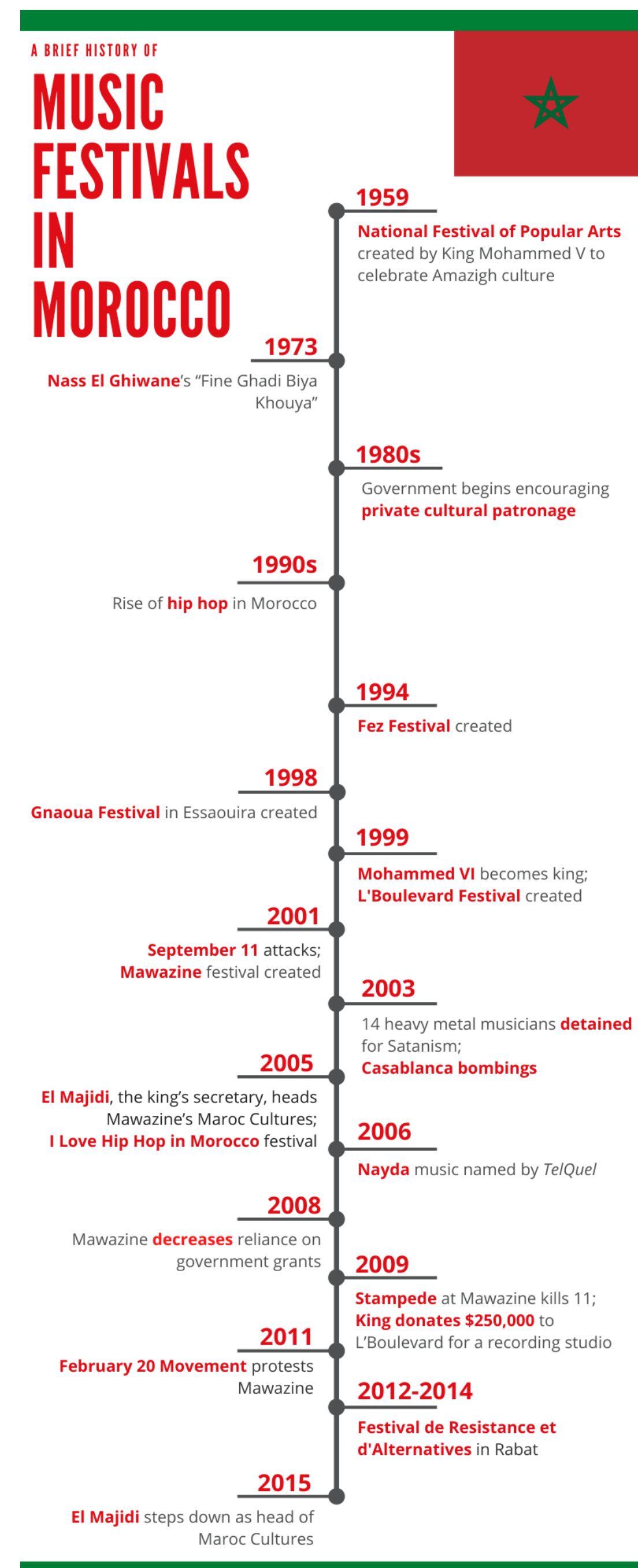


Abstract

This research examines how sponsorship has impacted the role of Moroccan music festivals in society. As identified by previous research, government sponsorship of music festivals has helped create a tolerant and progressive image of the country, partly to encourage tourism, while also sowing divisions among artists. The first component of the project explores how government and corporate sponsorship is perceived by young people through a survey of 16 Moroccan youth and musicians. The results showed diverse perspectives among the participants and neutral opinions on average. Second, this project analyzes festival posters from four major Moroccan music festivals, revealing especially clear differences in the languages used and presence of corporate sponsors. These results suggest that each festival has a unique engagement with cultural patronage according to its image and interests, but more research should be done on festival advertising as well as youth opinions.



Introduction & Methods



Beginning after Morocco's independence in 1956, the government became actively involved in music to create a national culture, promote a positive image of Morocco and Islam, and suppress the state's Islamist rivals (Graoui & Belghazi, 2013). The king created one of the first festivals in Morocco, the National Festival of Popular Arts, in 1959 to celebrate – and exoticize – Amazigh (Berber) culture (Boum, 2012). In the 1980s, the Moroccan state began encouraging private cultural patronage, while also supporting cultural production itself, both directly and indirectly (Graoui & Belghazi, 2013). In 2003, 14 heavy metal musicians were detained for Satanism. Shortly thereafter, Casablanca was bombed in a major terrorist attack, leading the government to reconsider its relationship with musicians (Boum, 2017; El Maarouf 2015). The state began supporting hip hop and rap, which was flourishing in the *Nayda* movement, to provide a controlled outlet for youth (Boum, 2017). Patronage masked underlying socioeconomic inequality, improved the economy by drawing in tourists, and revitalized music (Boum, 2017).

This project consisted of two components to investigate the impact of patronage:

1. Survey of 16 young people and musicians in Morocco, advertised online; offered in French, Arabic, and English.
2. Analysis of 78 posters from four festivals.

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Music Festival Poster Analysis

Mawazine vs. L'Boulevard

Mawazine is an annual music festival in Rabat. It is now is the largest music festival in the world by total attendance. Especially during the February 20 Movement, the festival was criticized for its multimillion-dollar budget and connections to the monarchy (Almeida, 2017; Boum, 2012). Mawazine is no longer funded by the state or by public companies. L'Boulevard, in Casablanca, is unique among Moroccan music festivals for its Tremplin, a competition intended to promote young and talented musicians. Despite its alternative image, the festival accepted 2 million dirhams from the king in 2009 (Almeida, 2017).

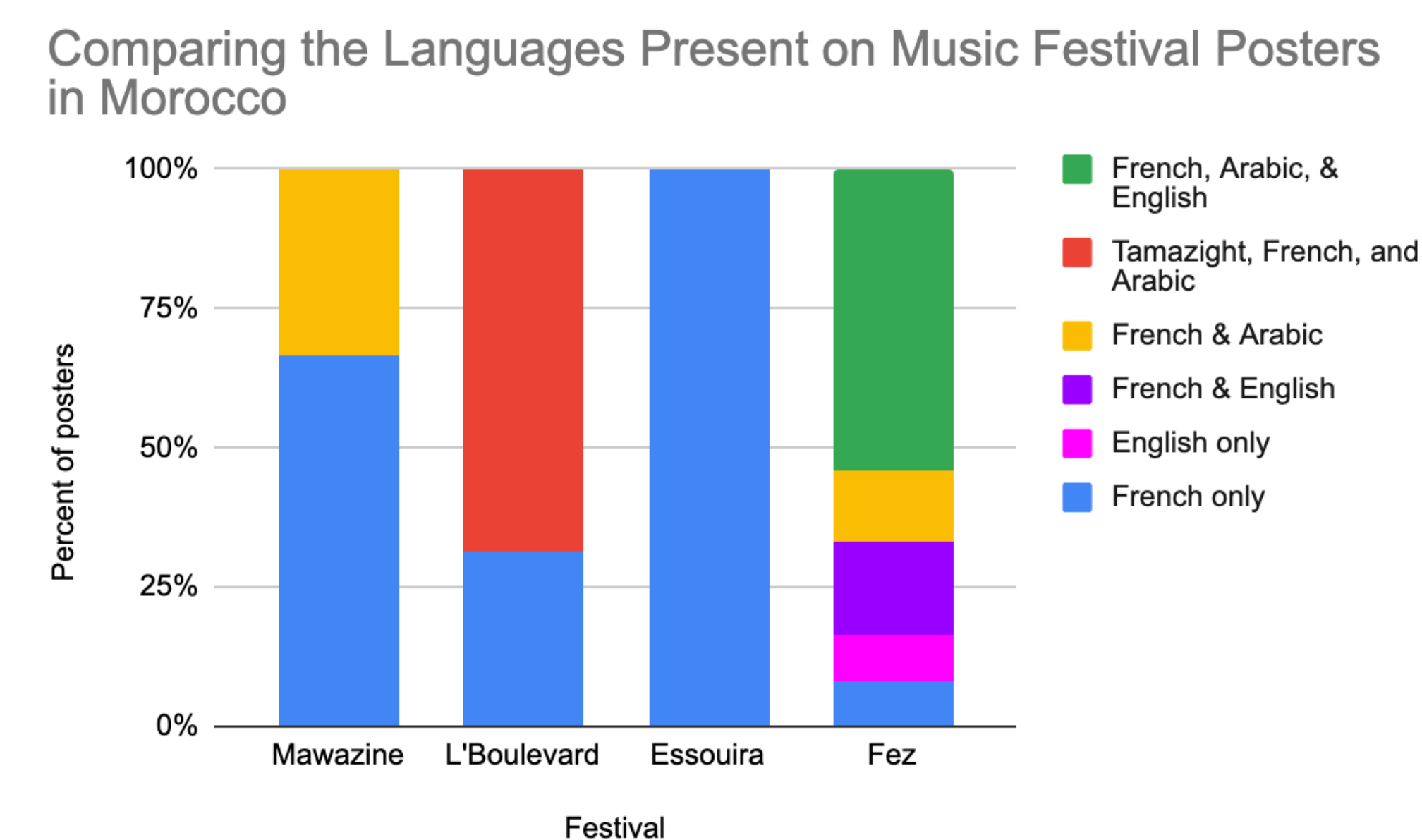
- 72.2% of Mawazine posters displayed corporate sponsors, compared to 50% of L'Boulevard posters studied.
- 100% of Mawazine posters included a statement of royal patronage, 83.3% of the time in French. Only 6.3%, or one, L'Boulevard poster mentioned state support, in French. Both findings are consistent with the (oversimplified) perception of each festival – L'Boulevard as independent, and Mawazine as commercialized and closely tied to the government.



Languages Used on Four Moroccan Music Festival Posters

French was the most common language used while English appeared most rarely. Interestingly, L'Boulevard often uses several languages on each poster, including Tamazight, making it seem more inclusive and reflective of Moroccan identity. Fez included the most different combinations of languages, perhaps due to its status as a world music festival. In this way, the content analysis reveals how the unique perspectives of each festival are expressed through poster advertising.

Figure 1



References

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Survey Analysis

Results

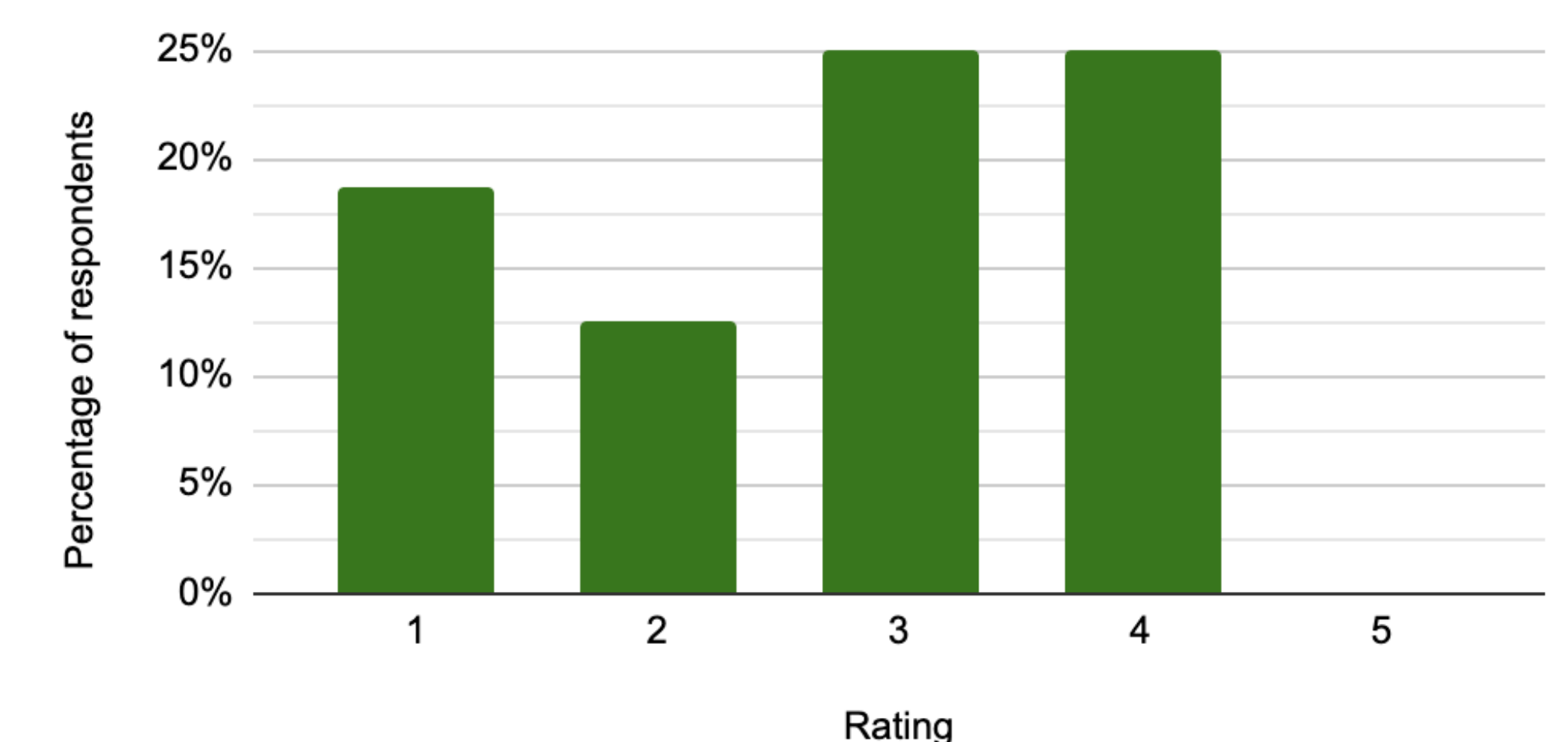
Ten men and six women, including four musicians, answered questions about their opinions on music festivals. Results include:

- Using a scale from 1 (very negative) to 5 (very positive), participants rated their opinion on festivals at 2.94 on average.
- Participants rated corporate sponsorship at an average of 2.94, with a range of 2-4, indicating ambivalence. When asked if corporate sponsorship has ever influenced their decision to attend a festival, the average rating was 2.68, indicating very slight influence not to attend.
- Twelve out of 16 participants indicated that they did not know anything about government sponsorship of festivals. This is surprising and unlikely. It is possible that some participants responded in this manner in order to avoid the sensitive questions that would have followed, given that four participants have ties to the government.
- Of the four participants who indicated knowledge of government sponsorship, they rated it at an average of 1.75.
- Of the four musicians, three have performed at music festivals, and described neutral and/or positive experiences.

Figure 2

Opinions of Moroccan Music Festivals

Rated by 16 participants on scale of 1 (very negative) to 5 (very positive)



“Waste of state funds, with those billions [of dirhams] you can build schools, hospitals, repair infrastructure, fight marginalization in villages and valleys.” – Survey respondent

Discussion and Conclusion

Much of the time, participants seemed ambivalent about festivals. Most questions elicited on average neutral or occasionally positive responses – artists that performed at festivals usually described meaningful experiences, and respondents that have been to festivals rated their experiences at an average of 3.33. This relative neutrality is significant due to the effort that music festivals have put into increasing their popularity. For the 16 participants studied, it seems that the advertising has not necessarily persuaded them to think more highly of festivals or corporate and government sponsorship. However, it is clear that participants had a wide range of opinions on these topics. The results of the survey show that the opinions of young people on music festivals in Morocco should be studied more carefully and extensively.