Politics in Morocco

Executive monarchy and
enlightened authoritarianism

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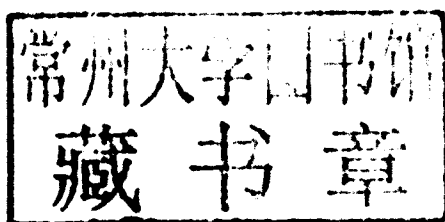# Politics in Morocco

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This book is dedicated to my wonderful grandmother, loving mother, caring dad, amazing sisters, and fantastic wife.

Preface

The death of King Hassan II in July 1999 allowed for the transfer to a gentle form of government, but the traditional features of authoritarian politics remain unchanged. Instead, they have been stabilized and at times readjusted to suit the twin goals traced by the new regime: economic development and perpetuation of its monopolistic power in the political, social, religious, economic, administrative, and judicial spheres. King Mohamed VI has done a fine job in advancing social reforms and administrative modernization but has ignored the task of institutional reform. The Moroccan monarch has stated numerous times that a constitutional amendment reconstructing the political structures of the country is unnecessary for the consolidation of the rule of law and meaningful institutional pluralism. In other words, the monarch is unwilling to part with his massive executive prerogatives at a time when the country desperately needs the existence of autonomous institutions of accountability that function independently from the whims of the ruling establishment.

Since the ascent of King Mohamed VI to the throne, most striking has been his ability to extend the monarchy's monopoly over the exercise of power as well as refurbish its international image. His endeavors to invent a new ruling bargain that breaks with the worst features of his father's authoritarian reign yet perpetuates the dominance of the monarchy have succeeded in creating an image of Morocco as a modern and progressive constitutional monarchy. Domestically, however, the king is struggling to deliver on his promises, leaving a large number of Moroccans impatient for the real political and economic reforms they hoped for when he assumed the throne. Reforms to the country's economic structures have only been partial and selective. As such, they have failed so far to produce a dynamic and competitive economy that is capable of providing the promised social goods (healthcare, affordable housing, efficient education, and so forth) and advancing the social bases of democracy.

The monarch's other top-down reforms have also failed to effectively address the many deficiencies of the public administration system, major shortfalls in governance processes, serious shortcomings in the administration of justice, and the broad lack of institutional accountability. The current generation of young adults still complains of the same old practices of privilege, nepotism, and cronyism that have plagued the country for decades. These stubborn political failings have

retarded meaningful advances in human development and robbed generations of Moroccans of their basic fundamental rights, breeding widespread public cynicism and despair in the country's governance institutions. This public disillusionment was on clear display during the massive boycott of the 2007 legislative elections. The miserable low turn-out and the high percentage of spoiled ballots came to confirm the extent to which the public has become deeply distrustful of routinized politics where the power apparatus enjoys no constitutional limits on its power.

Most analysts of Moroccan politics would agree that, since assuming the throne in 1999, King Mohamed VI has presided over economic, administrative, and social reforms, but few would contend that such reforms significantly strengthened good governance or had any democratizing impact on the way major policy decisions are made. The mechanisms of authoritarian rule that have prevented the construction of a stable democracy and upheld for over fifty years the status quo still persist unbroken. But the continuing prevalence of an authoritarian governance structure that is unresponsive to popular demands for accountability and broad-based development policies cannot be ascribed solely to the actions of the monarchy. King Mohamed VI has not broken down the major relationships and culture of his father's regime, nor has he widened the scope of participatory politics. This, however, cannot fully explain the kingdom's continuing political stagnation and slow economic progress.

Students of authoritarian politics in the Arab world have not fully tackled this conceptual challenge of moving beyond understanding the resilience of authoritarian rule through the prism of the coercive capacity of the state. For a long time, scholars of the Arab world have over-emphasized the role played by agency (coercive rulers, totalitarian Islamists) in perpetuating non-democratic rule in the region. Few studies have looked at factors beyond coercion to explain regime durability and stability at a time of international turbulence and ongoing societal transformations at the national level.

This book, therefore, investigates the key impediments to good governance and democratic reforms in Morocco through an examination of the dynamics and logic of political rule and participation in the kingdom. In so doing, it sheds fresh light on how monarchical rule is maintained, legitimized, and buttressed. The reader will also have an opportunity to learn about the roles and functions of (secular) oppositional institutions in perpetuating authoritarianism as well as the interesting dynamics of political inclusion of Islamists in the structures of formal contestation.

Writing this book has not been an easy road to navigate. The task of treading carefully with regard to the regime's sensitivities can be very frustrating. Equally frustrating and at times emotionally exhausting is the near impossibility of escape from one's own personal encounter with the authoritarian structures of the past and ongoing discontent with the power structures of today. My hope is that my modest findings, informed by my own experience with the conditions of alienation and encounter with the profound contradictions of social structures and authoritarian orientations of the political system, contribute positively to the raging debates about the dynamics and durability of authoritarian regimes in the Arab world.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ADL	Alliance des Libertés (Alliance of Liberties)
Al-Adl	Al-Adl Wal Ihsan (Justice and Charity)
AMDH	Association Marocaine des Droits Humains (Moroccan Association for Human Rights)
CAM	Comité d'Action Marocaine (Moroccan Action Committee)
CGEM	Confédération générale des entreprises du Maroc (Moroccan association of entrepreneurs)
CIH	Crédit Immobilier et Hôtelier
CNI	Congrès National Ittihadi (National Ittihadi Congress)
CNSS	Caisse Nationale de la Sécurité Sociale (National Social Security Fund)
COSEF	Commission Spéciale de l'Education et la Formation (Special Commission for Education and Training)
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CSE	Conseil Supérieur de l'Enseignement (Higher Council of Education)
FC	Forces Citoyennes (Citizen Forces)
FDIC	Front pour la Défense des Institutions Constitutionnelles (Front for the Defense of the Constitutional Institutions)
FFD	Front des Forces Démocratiques (Front of Democratic Forces)
FIS	Front Islamique du Salut (Islamic Salvation Front)
GIA	Groupe Islamique Armé (Armed Islamist Group)
GICM	Group Islamique Combatant du Maroc (Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group)
GSPC	Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (Salafist Preaching and Combat Group)
ICG	International Crisis Group
IER	Instance Équité et Réconciliation (Equity and Reconciliation Commission)
IFC	International Finance Committee
IGAT	Inspection Générale d'Administration Territoriale (General Inspection of Territorial Administration)
IGF	Inspection Générale des Finances (Inspectorate General of Finance)
INDH	Initiative Nationale de Développement Humain (National Initiative for Human Development)

LIFG	Libyan Islamic Fighting Group
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
MDS	Mouvement Démocratique et Social (Social Democratic Movement)
MNP	Mouvement National Populaire (Popular Movement)
MP	Mouvement Populaire (Popular Movement)
MPDC	Mouvement Populaire Démocratique et Constitutionnel (Constitutional and Democratic Popular Movement)
MUR	Mouvement de l'Unification et Réforme (Movement for Unity and Reform)
NDP	National Democratic Party
OADP	Organisation d'Action Démocratique et Populaire (Organization of Democratic and Popular Action)
OCP	Office Chérifien des Phosphates
ONA	Omnium Nord Africain
PADS	Parti de l'Avant-garde Démocratique Socialiste (Party of the Democratic Socialist Avant-Garde)
PAM	Parti Authenticité et Modernité (Party of Authenticity and Modernity)
PB	Bureau Politique (Political Bureau)
PCM	Parti Communiste Marocain (Moroccan Communist Party)
PED	Parti de l'Environnement et du Développement (Environment and Development Party)
PI	Parti l'Istiqlal (Istiqlal Party or simply Istiqlal)
PICD	Parti Initiative Citoyenneté et Développement (Party of Citizenship Initiative and Development)
PJD	Parti de la Justice et du Développement (Party of Justice and Development)
PND	Parti National-Démocrate (National Democratic Party)
PNUD	Programme des Nations Unies pour le Développement (United Nations Development Program)
PPS	Parti du Progrès et du Socialisme (Party of Progress and Socialism)
PRE	politically relevant elite; also Parti du Renouveau et de l'Équité (Party of Renewal and Equity)
PRV	Parti de la Renaissance et de la Vertu (Party of Renaissance and Virtue)
PSD	Parti Socialiste Démocratique (Democratic Socialist Party)
PSU	Parti Socialiste Unifié (Unified Socialist Party)
PT	Parti Travailliste (Labor Party)
PUMD	Parti d'Union Marocaine pour la Démocratie
RNI	Rassemblement National des Indépendants (National Assembly of Independents)
RTM	Radio Television Marocaine
TI	Transparency International
UC	Union Constitutionelle (Constitutional Union)
UMT	Union Marocaine du Travail (Moroccan Labor Union)
UNEM	Union Nationale des Etudiants du Maroc (National Union of Moroccan Students)
UNFP	Union Nationale des Forces Populaires (National Union of Popular Forces)
USFP	Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires (Socialist Union of Popular Forces)

Contents

Introduction

Steps toward meaningful political reform in the Arab world have stalled, blocked by official changes of heart about the merit of representative democracy in stemming the tide of rising popular disaffection and violent extremism. To be sure, support for democratic principles by the region's rulers has always been ambivalent at best. It is hard to believe that any authoritarian ruler would willingly agree to implement genuine change, which would necessarily entail fair elections and constitutional reforms that dilute executive power and empower legislative and judicial branches of government. Even King Mohamed VI of Morocco, well known for his penchant for reforms and repeated rhetorical calls for embracing modernity and democracy, has shown no real taste for the diffusion of power, the structural base of any democratic polity. Despite evidence of liberalization and the king's stated noble motivations, the Moroccan political system lacks any meaningful framework of checks and balances.

Since his ascension to the throne in July 1999, the Moroccan monarch has learned quickly how to reconfigure his father's authoritarian rule in a way that has made the monarchy less rigid and more resilient (Azzouzi 2006: 113). Indeed, most of the reforms he has skillfully introduced accomplished their dual desired objective of reinforcing monarchical authoritarianism while at the same time domesticating the political opposition and pacifying the country's international patrons. In the end, the young Moroccan king, like his Arab counterparts, has proven that he likes to talk about political reforms but in reality he has no intention of translating his rhetorical promises and vague endorsements of reform into concrete programs that could open the way for more power diffusion.

Mohamed VI admitted as much in a speech he delivered to mark the eighth anniversary of his enthronement: "The governance system I seek to apply is that of an efficient, civic-minded monarchy which cannot be reduced to a mere distribution of powers between an executive organ, a legislative body and a judicial authority." During the same speech, the king outlined his perspectives on democracy and expectations of electoral politics.

> Elections are not a contest on national identity or on the nation's fundamental values . . . Nor are elections about such major, strategic orientations of the

nation as the rule of law, citizenship rights and obligations, economic liberalism, free enterprise, solidarity and social justice, or openness to the world.

(Maghreb Arab Press 2007)

In other words, elections might reflect the will of the people but it is nevertheless the monarch who designs government *policies* and shapes its actions (see, for instance, Tozy 2008).

Much has been said about the presumed democratizing potential of free elections (Carothers 2002: 8). But free elections are unfortunately poor guides to assess the true state of affairs in any country (see, for instance, Posusney 2002: 34–62; Geisser 2000). The fact that Morocco holds relatively free elections means little as long as all power is concentrated in the hands of a regime that jealously guards its full powers and prerogatives (La Guérivière 2003). For elections to matter, their outcome should be first unpredictable. But even this criterion of uncertainty cannot be determinative of the transition process towards real democracy. Assuming otherwise commits what Terry Karl calls "the fallacy of electoralism" (see, among others, Karl 2000; Carothers 2002: 5–21; Diamond 2002: 21–35). The problem of democracy in Morocco, therefore, is not the lack of free elections but the *powerlessness* of *elected institutions.* As in other authoritarian regimes, elections are not contests whereby political actors vie to shape or redefine the rules of the game. Rather, they provide an arena for political battles over access to state privileges and its patronage resources (see Lust 2009: 122–35).

But the absence of competitive democratic patterns in Morocco, and indeed throughout the Arab world, cannot be ascribed solely to the actions of the undemocratic regimes of the region. The latter have certainly done very little to strengthen brittle governance structures, deepen government accountability, and widen the scope of participatory politics. This, however, cannot fully explain the enduring democratic deficit that still plagues the Arab world. In fact, neither the intimidating coercive capacity of the state nor the fear of the formidable powers of political Islam can account fully for the durability and resilience of state authoritarianism.

The major problem of democracy in the Arab world is the weakness of oppositional institutions and their inability to mobilize mass constituencies. The organizational inefficacy and inability or unwillingness of oppositional forces to push for meaningful tangible reforms have largely discredited them in the eyes of populations increasingly depoliticized and tempted by violent radicalism. Throughout the Arab world, secular parties, civil society organizations, and labor unions appear stuck and trapped in decrepitude. With few exceptions, they have failed to take advantage of opportunities to press for the improvement of governance and accountability. Even those allowed to serve in government have demonstrated a troubling ambivalence towards reform. The absence of even a semblance of a vision for the future and an inability to offer effective and coherent alternatives to a stagnant status quo reflect a disquieting reality of oppositional politics in the region.

For a long time, scholars of authoritarianism have focused on the potential of political opposition parties, civil society organizations, labor unions, and the

business class to induce political change through successful pacted transitions or revolutions. Few studies, however, have focused on how authoritarian these oppositional institutions are and how they act as impediments to democratic change (see, for instance, Albrecht 2005: 378–97). Most oppositional forces, for example, serve as political allies of Arab regimes. The bourgeoisie, private sector, and the top military brass support the regimes' authoritarian rule because that serves their self-interest. The professional middle classes are unwilling to lobby for more rights and the business elites seem untroubled by encroaching authoritarianism as long as their basic interests are not challenged (see, for instance, Heydemann 2004, Kienle 2003, Catusse 1999, Gobe 1999).

The endurance of authoritarian control of politics resides on the fact that most social forces see Arab rulers as indispensable for the stability and safety of their political and material interests. In such authoritarian setting, their function becomes that of regime-influenced institutions of cooptation as well as legitimators of the states' image of pluralism and democratic façade. The political opposition also serves a channeling and moderating function (Albrecht 2005: 393). By channeling dissent, the opposition helps Arab regimes better assess the degree of opposition to their policies and the potential for such resistance to evolve into militancy. The regime in Morocco, like its counterparts in Egypt, Algeria, Jordan, and other Arab states, use managed pluralism and toleration of limited dissent as means of turning radical resistance into controlled opposition. As such, pluralist policies function as valuable mechanisms of social control rather than instruments of collective empowerment.

The focus of this study

This study's goal is to investigate the real impediments to political reform and change in semi-authoritarian political systems by focusing on Morocco, a country that has been held as a potential (successful) model for democratization in the Arab world. It would almost be impossible not to find Morocco mentioned or examined in any book that deals with Arab democratization. Yet there have been very few studies that have attempted to explore the working mechanisms of the politics of authoritarianism in the kingdom and the roles and functions of secular and Islamist opposition forces in perpetuating monarchical authoritarianism. And even those that did, their analysis was informed by the agent–structure problem, which has long divided theoretical studies of democratization. The persistence of authoritarianism was attributed to either structural issues (religion, history, economic development, political culture) or agency (coercive rulers, Islamists, and strategic rents).

Some scholars, mainly anthropologists, have credited Islamic culture with enabling the resilience of the monarchy. Clifford Geertz (1968), for example, classified Moroccan local Islam as a main factor in the persistence of royal authority in Morocco. Likewise, Abdellah Hammoudi (1997; 1999) singles out Moroccan culture as the main legitimizer of political domination in his native Morocco. This distinguished anthropologist argues that at the heart of Moroccan power

relations lies a paradigm of authority rooted in historical and mystical initiation, social loyalty, and gift exchange. This configuration is what Hammoudi calls the master–disciple dialectic.

The problem with this anthropological approach is its heavy reliance on the "ethnography of dispersed authoritarianism" to explain almost everything that is wrong with Moroccan society (1997: xiv). Little attention is paid to the role that party pluralization and increasing electoral competitiveness and inclusiveness play in securing regime dominance. The few studies that have recently attempted to examine the political dynamics in Morocco failed to move beyond the democratization scenario outlined in the theoretical framework of the transition school (see, for instance, Storm 2007). Consequently, our understanding of the dynamics of monarchical authoritarian rule and its implications remains limited. "The transition paradigm," as the Moroccan political scientist Saloua Zerhouni (2008a: 259) correctly pointed out, "has so far failed to explain and capture the 'change in continuity' that has characterized the kind of political openings taking place in the region."

It is, therefore, crucial to move beyond the frame of references set by the wide literature on the transition paradigm. Rather than focusing on when the whole process of democratization can begin in Morocco or how the repressive capacity of the regime accounts for its resilience, this study examines authoritarian survival strategies beyond coercion to explain the dynamic and logic of political rule and participation in the kingdom. In so doing, it sheds fresh light on how authoritarian rule under the new reign of King Mohamed VI is maintained, legitimized, and buttressed by a wide array of formal and informal political and social networks.

The Moroccan case is very important to study. The kingdom has a long tradition of political pluralism. It is also one of the few countries in the Arab world where free elections are held and where moderate Islamists are allowed to participate in the political system. An in-depth investigation of political participation in Morocco offers students of authoritarianism in the Arab world an opportunity to learn about the formal and informal working mechanisms of authoritarian rule, the roles and functions of secular opposition forces, and the dynamics of political inclusion of Islamists in the structures of formal contestation. The research also has policy implications for the country's foreign supporters.

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, American and European officials rightly identified authoritarianism as the main breeder of violent extremism. But their democracy promotion efforts have proven inconsistent, incoherent, and ineffective. Policy prescriptions developed from general democratic theories of (secular) political opposition and economic liberalization. Few policy practitioners, however, have examined how dysfunctional oppositional political institutions are and how ineffectual the neo-Tocquevillian paradigm of (secular) civil society's democratizing role is in the Arab world. Most have been guided by a narrow vision of how Arab elites and popular masses oppose, collaborate and co-exist with authoritarian regimes (Alhamad 2008: 34). An in-depth inquiry into the nature and modes of political participation in a resilient authoritarian setting

would therefore contribute not only to the wider scholarly literature on the politics of authoritarian regimes but also to Western policy-making debates about the best approach to promote democracy in the Middle East.

Theoretical considerations

After years of excitement and hope about the prospects of democracy in the Arab world, the discrepancy between expectations and reality has finally caught up with a number of scholars and experts of the region. The old debate of what "democracy is . . . and is not" is finally back (Schmitter and Karl 1991: 75–88). Contrary to speculations and unsubstantiated claims about the linkage between liberalization and democratic transition, it is now a confirmed fact that liberalization of authoritarian rule does not always lead to a transition to democracy (El Alaoui 2008). More importantly, state-initiated liberalization rarely escapes the control of the policy initiator(s). As demonstrated in most Arab countries that have embarked on liberalizing their regimes, the selective use of the electoral aspects of democracy never leads to the institutionalization of democratic rights. This realization vindicated those political scientists who have long warned against the "fallacy of electoralism" or the "the faith that merely holding elections will channel political action into peaceful contests among elites and accord public legitimacy to the winners—no matter how they are conducted or what else constrains those who win them" (Schmitter and Karl 1991: 78).

Now it is conventional wisdom that minimalist conceptions of democracy cannot be the definitive criterion that a transition has begun. Regimes that have embraced a minimalist form of party pluralization do not represent partial forms of democracy as many scholars have characterized them. Rather than being in a half-way transition from authoritarian rule toward democratic rule, these regimes can be simply characterized as "hybrid regimes" or "liberalized autocracies" (Diamond 2002; Brumberg 2002). Even a term such as "semi-democracies" (Case 1996) is hardly used today because it implies that these regimes are locked in a prolonged though uncertain transition to democracy.

This debate over what constitutes a transition to democracy has shifted into more positive directions. First, it has shed light on the limits of electoralism as a necessary but insufficient component of democratization. Second, it moved the focus from the causes of democracy to the causers of democratization. Most transitologists have broken with the once established finding that economic development triggers profound social changes that in turn foster the creation of democratic political institutions (see, for instance, Lipset 1959: 69–105). This empirical connection, which Geddes (1999: 155–83) described as "beyond reasonable doubt," is increasingly challenged on grounds that it failed to differentiate between regimes that made the leap into democracy and those that were in transition mode (see also Przeworski and Limongi 1997: 155–83). Greater wealth is not the most important prerequisite to democracy, nor is it the main causer of democratization, as the cases of China and Singapore amply demonstrate. Indeed,

the reverse of the *causality* from economic *development* to *democracy* might be true. As Larry Diamond (1992: 450–99) convincingly demonstrated, it is democracy that usually leads to development, and not the other way around.

A broad dispersion of wealth is necessary for the durability of democracy but not for the extrication from authoritarianism (see, for instance, Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub and Limongi 2000). To be sure, economic growth can produce greater social mobility, higher levels of education, and large entrepreneurial middle classes, all of which can lead to increasing demands of political representation and political inclusion (see Lipset 1960; Dahl 1971: 65). The problem with development theorists, however, is that they failed to take into account how economic development and modernization can contribute to regime persistence and survival (see De Mesquita and Downs 2005: 77–86). Barrington Moore's (1966: 418) celebrated argument that "no bourgeoisie, no democracy" failed to take hold in societies that saw the emergence of new bourgeois social forces acting as allies of state authoritarianism rather than proponents of democratic change. Boosted by capitalist industrialization and state sponsorship (business contracts, bank credit, licenses, just to name a few), the professional middle classes and business entrepreneurs in several developing authoritarian countries have become champions of the status quo (Bellin 2000; El Alaoui 2008; Hibou 1999: 11–69).[1]

The social-force mobilization theory of democratization has long argued that economic development can lead to democracy only if "a certain social force plays a mediating role between economic development and democracy" (He and Feng 2008: 147). But the lack of enthusiasm of both capital and labor to act as agents of democracy belies the thrust of the theory's argument. As the concluding chapter of this book demonstrates, Moroccan capitalists and laborers are "contingent democrats" at best (Bellin 2000: 175–205), whose commitment to democracy hinges on the compatibility of their interests and political reforms (see also O'Donnell 1992).

When democratization failed to take hold in the Arab world at the income levels that made democracy a reality in some non-Arab countries, the intellectual supporters of modernization and social-force mobilization theory blamed the region's culture and religion for being the main culprits for frustrating their theories' assumptions. There was little effort on the part of these analysts to re-examine their thesis's shortcomings to account for how sophisticated authoritarian regimes in China, Singapore, Vietnam, and most of the Arab world have managed to take full advantage of economic growth to secure their grip on power.

Blaming Islam

There has long been an important body of literature that dealt exclusively with the eternal dilemma of the authoritarian Muslim. Muslim/Arab exceptionalism was blamed for the perpetual system of the Arab authoritarian state. Whereas democracy requires open and tolerant civic cultures, Islam was depicted as the antithesis of individual freedom, political rights, and civil liberties. For this school of thought, Islam cannot be but a totalitarian ideology that repudiates