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Never-Ending Reformism from Above and Dissatisfaction from Below

The Paradox of Moroccan Post-Spring Politics

Francesco Cavatorta
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Abstract

For scholars, policy-makers and casual observers, there is no doubt that Morocco has undergone an impressive transformation process since Mohammed VI came to power in 1999. The country projects an image of liberal-democratic modernity and socio-economic progress that the international community is happy to go along with. But at the heart of Moroccan modernization lies a glaring paradox: despite two decades of reforms, the dissatisfaction of ordinary citizens with the way the system works has been consistently high, and a number of socio-economic and political indicators do not support the regime's claim that the country has democratised or is democratising. This article examines the country's political system through the reformist process – political, economic and social – that began in the 2000s, continued with the constitutional changes of 2011 and culminated with the two PJD-led governments that followed the parliamentary elections of 2011 and 2016. In particular, this study examines the reformist drive in the context of the inter-paradigm debate between democratisation and authoritarian resilience. We employ four criteria to determine to what extent Morocco has democratised: the accountability of decision-makers, the participation of a plurality of voices in the formulation of policies, the degree of individual freedoms and the protection of human rights. This article concludes that the reformist process is simply a narrative the regime has adopted to fend off international criticism and to reconfigure domestic institutions. The fundamentally authoritarian nature of the regime has not changed, and the dominant institutional role that the monarch – unelected and unaccountable – plays undermines all claims of democratisation.

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Francesco Cavatorta

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Abbreviations

ADFM	Democratic Association of Moroccan Women / L'Association démocratique des femmes du Maroc
AMDH	Moroccan Association for Human Rights / L'Association marocaine des droits humains
AWI	Justice and Charity Group / al-Adl wal-Ihsan
CNI	National Ittihadi Congress / Congrès National Ittihadi
FGD	Federation of the Democratic Left / Fédération de la gauche démocratique
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MP	Member of Parliament
PADS	Socialist Democratic Vanguard Party / Parti de l'avant-garde démocratique et socialiste
PAM	Authenticity and Modernity Party / Parti authenticité et modernité
PJD	Justice and Development Party / Parti de la justice et du développement
PPS	Party of Progress and Socialism / Parti du progrès et du socialisme
PSU	Unified Socialist Party / Parti socialiste unifié
RNI	National Rally of Independents / Rassemblement national des indépendants
UNFP	National Union of Popular Forces / Union nationale des forces populaires
USFP	Socialist Union of Popular Forces / Union socialiste des forces populaires

1 Introduction

The summer of 2019 saw the 20th anniversary of Mohammed VI's ascent to the Moroccan throne. At the time of his inauguration, considerable hopes were pinned on the young monarch who for years had been groomed to take over for his father, King Hassan II, and conclude his modernisation project. For a casual external observer visiting Morocco after 20 years of Mohammed VI's reign, the first and most striking impression is that a certain type of modernisation has indeed occurred. There are modern train stations, new airports, kilometres of highways, a high-speed train, a futuristic financial city in Casablanca and new ports in Tangiers and several other cities. In addition to modern infrastructure, other features of this modernisation process include the liberalisation of the economy (privatisation of many public companies and services, the development of a competitive banking system, the establishment of tax-free areas and the signing of a number of free trade agreements), the reform of the family code with greater rights for women, the signature of the international convention of human rights, the implementation of political and constitutional reforms that provide for greater powers for elected institutions and a pluralistic press. In short, Morocco projects the image of a modern, reasonably liberal, and quasi-democratic country, functioning under the protective wing of its well-established monarchy, which will over time lead the country to a genuine democratisation.

There is no doubt that Morocco has indeed undergone an impressive process of transformation over the past two decades. However, this picture of liberal-democratic modernity must be seriously scrutinised and problematised because the Moroccan model of development – both political and economic – has encountered significant scholarly and political criticism. At the heart of Moroccan modernisation lies a glaring paradox: despite 20 years of reforms, the dissatisfaction of ordinary citizens with the way the system – in most of its aspects – works has been consistently high. Thus, the question that should be asked is how can such discontent exist in light of all the reforms that have taken place. This paper examines the country's political system through the reformist process – political, economic and social – that began in the 2000s, continued with the constitutional changes of 2011 and culminated with the two governments led by the Justice and Development Party (PJD) that followed parliamentary elections in 2011 and 2016. In particular, this study examines the reformist drive within the context of the inter-paradigm debate between democratisation and authoritarian resilience. However, to answer such questions we must go beyond the two paradigms (Pace & Cavatorta, 2012) to verify exactly what kind of change has really occurred in Morocco, how it has been perceived among ordinary citizens and how it can be categorised. This analysis uses four criteria to determine the degree of Morocco's democratisation: the *accountability* of decision-makers, the *participation of a plurality of voices* in the formulation of policies, the extent of *individual freedoms* and the *protection of human rights*. Theories of democratisation argue convincingly that for a country to be considered on the path away from authoritarian power structures towards democratic ones it needs first and foremost to render decision-makers accountable to the electorate. Despite the criticism that free and fair elections should not simply be equated with democracy, they nevertheless remain crucial to ensuring the accountability of decision-makers to ordinary citizens. In a democratising state, the powers of those who are unelected and unaccountable should, therefore, progressively disappear.

A second fundamental element of democratisation is the "liberation" of the public space. This allows a plethora of civil society actors to organise, debate, advocate and disagree on all

matters related to governance. In short, open public debate should inform policy-making. A democratising country should also implement legislation that expands individual freedoms, particularly when it comes to civil and political rights. The same can be said of the effective protection of human rights, which authoritarian systems regularly abuse through a range of measures that can include violent repression. In short, the presence or absence of these four elements allows us to clearly separate authoritarian and democratic systems, confirming the relevance of the framework Schmitter and Karl first proposed in 1991. The success or failure of democratisation should be evaluated on the effects that reforms actually have on the ground rather than on the simple announcement that reforms have been introduced. Finally, this study provides some insights into the future democratic development that Morocco may undertake.

This paper is organised as follows. We first summarise the broader literature on democratisation and examine how it has dealt with the Moroccan case over the past two decades, with a specific focus on the role of the monarchy. After a brief methodological discussion in Section 3, we examine in some detail the relationship between monarchical tutelage and political institutions in Morocco in Section 4, looking specifically at how monarchical powers – formal and informal – continue to limit accountability and pluralism, rendering the transition process an exercise in futility. In Section 5, the focus moves to the issue of individual freedoms and human rights, outlining how the rhetoric and discourse of human rights is simply a legitimating tool the regime employs for external consumption. When the *Makhzen*[1] and the monarchy are challenged, the response is to use the apparatus of the state, notably the security services and the justice system, to infringe on the freedoms and rights of ordinary Moroccans. This paper concludes with a discussion of the nature of the current regime and its inherent contradictions.

2 Literature review

In a recent article, Di Peri (2019) examines the dominance of the paradigms of democratisation and authoritarian resilience in political studies of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Through a historical narrative, the author traces how both paradigms came about and how they came to struggle for scholarly supremacy. Like other regions of the world, MENA was analysed in the 1980s and early 1990s through the lenses of the democratisation model, which was dominant at the time. The liberalising reforms that Arab regimes undertook during those years were seen as an indication that liberal-democratic politics had come to the region just as it had gone to Eastern Europe and Latin America (Korany, Brynen, & Noble, 1998). By the late 1990s, the idea that the region was about to follow the rest of the world in embracing democracy was optimistically revived when a new generation of leaders came to power or acquired more policy space across the region (Mohammed VI in Morocco, Abdallah in Jordan, Bashar al-Asad in Syria, Gamal Mubarak in Egypt and Saaif al-Islam Gaddafi in Libya). Neither the generational change nor the liberal reforms, however, led to genuine processes of democratisation because transformations were self-serving and not intended to fundamentally alter the essence of the existing regimes (Brumberg, 2002; Dillman, 2000). In fact, the paradigm of democratisation itself had come under intense scrutiny by the early 2000s, with Carothers (2002) suggesting that political

1 *Makhzen* refers to the informal network of power that centers on the monarchy and includes political, military, economic and bureaucratic elites.

reality had clearly demonstrated that it was no longer working, as democratisation in many countries had stalled or been reversed if it had even begun at all.

By the mid-2000s the paradigm of authoritarian resilience had become dominant in studies of MENA regimes because even the category of illiberal democracy (Zakaria, 1997) was no longer capable of capturing the idea that countries with façades of democratic mechanisms and political pluralism were only "stuck" there until a new push would lead them to march again on the road towards democracy. A number of authors (Anderson, 2006; Hinnebusch, 2006; Schlumberger, 2007) thus suggested that authoritarianism in general and in the Arab world in particular had proved much more resilient than expected and that authoritarian political systems should, therefore, be studied as a fixed category rather than as temporary systems on their way to liberal-democracy. Furthermore, liberalisation does not equate with democratisation. Regimes did relax the rules for political participation, established institutions that are usually found in democratic states and passed legislation that would nominally protect individual freedoms and rights – they liberalised – but such changes never brought about genuine accountability and pluralism – they did not democratise. In short, although many regimes did undertake liberal reforms, the intention behind them was to adjust to the international environment and to domestic social pressure in order to solidify the regime and prevent democratisation (Heydemann, 2007). Quite perversely, liberal reforms were employed to co-opt new social actors into the regime and thereby strengthen authoritarian rule.

The debate between the two paradigms was particularly interesting because many of the contributions to the broader theoretical discussion came from studies focused on Arab countries. Faced with the seemingly unchanging authoritarian nature of Arab regimes (Alexander, 2010), the success of the paradigm of authoritarian resilience seemed unassailable. Then the Arab Spring occurred. Although the majority of scholars were surprised by the popular challenge to authoritarian rule (Gause III, 2011), there were some who had indeed predicted the uprisings (Allal, 2010). Whether surprising or predictable, the uprisings led to the return of the democratisation paradigm to centre stage (Kaldor, 2011; Stepan, 2012, 2018), particularly when Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya all seemed on their way to construct liberal-democratic systems. As the uprisings failed to deliver liberal-democracy across the region (with the exception of Tunisia), the return of the authoritarian resilience paradigm at the forefront of explanations for political events taking place in the region was inevitable (Heydemann & Leenders, 2011).

The broader literature summarised above has influenced the way in which Morocco has been analysed. Since the arrival of Mohammed VI to power, scholars have oscillated between identifying the country as democratising (Borshchevskaya, 2014; Desrues & Moyano, 2001; El-Ghissassi, 2006; Howe, 2001; Laskier, 2003; Vairel, 2008; Vermeren, 2002) and authoritarian (Amar, 2009; Barari, 2015; Cavatorta, 2016; Dalmasso, 2012; Vermeren, 2009). The difficulty many scholars have had in clearly categorising Morocco depends largely on the fact that the regime is often judged on the reforms it undertakes rather than on the effects that these reforms have in practice for ordinary citizens over the long term.

When Mohammed VI came to power, Morocco was deemed to be on the path of democratisation because the new king promoted a series of liberalising reforms in a rather short period of time. The new monarch fired many of his father's advisers, allowed far greater civil society activism, reformed the family code, made royal protocol less burdensome and

set up a truth and reconciliation commission to investigate the human rights abuses of his father's regime. However, from then on, periods of relative liberalism alternated with policies and measures that went in the opposite direction. This has also held true since the 2011 protest movements, which saw the monarchy first promoting liberal reforms and then retreating away from them or failing to implement them. This oscillation renders categorisation problematic and is characteristic of Moroccan political functioning.

2.1 The role of the monarchy

Central to the issue of democratisation and authoritarianism in Morocco is inevitably the role of the monarchy. There is an extensive pool of literature dealing with the way in which the Moroccan monarchy concentrates political, economic and religious power, making it the most important and powerful institution of the country (Daadaoui, 2011; Fernández Molina, 2011; Maghraoui, 2001). Therefore, according to most analysts, the existence of a pluralist political system (multiparty politics and free and fair elections for both local and national bodies) must be not overestimated (Storm, 2012). Although multiple political parties have existed since independence, the condition of their existence has always been the acknowledgment of the king's supremacy (Tozy, 1999). Unlike Tunisia and Algeria – its North African neighbours that are also former French colonies – Morocco was founded with the principle of party pluralism enshrined in the 1962 Constitution.

This *asymmetrical duality* of the Moroccan institutional system drove the evolution of the political system towards a *sui generis* parliamentary monarchy, a frame that allows change and continuity at the same time (Darif, 2012). It is in this context of asymmetrical duality that the reforms of the past two decades, and in particular the ones implemented since 2011, must be understood. There are two paradoxes at the heart of this reform process. The first is that in spite of the depth and reach of the reforms, they do not seem to have made much of a positive impact insofar as many socio-economic indicators suggest that the country has not made the expected progress (Human Development Index of the country has not risen much, going from 0.530 in 2000 to 0.676 in 2018 (UNDP, 2019); Freedom House (2020) still classifies Morocco as "partly free" and its freedom status has actually decreased in recent years; and the country's Corruption Perception Index has increased rather significantly since 2000 (Transparency International, 2020)). Furthermore, ordinary Moroccans hold mostly negative views regarding the indicators of good governance. The second is the top-down nature of the reforms, which the king exclusively initiates but, crucially, is not bound by or accountable for.

3 Methodology

This research uses a mixed methods approach in which survey-based descriptive statistics and in-depth interviews with actors selected for their knowledge of different policy domains form the basis of the analysis.

For the political anthropology part of the study, the idea was to let actors speak freely and provide an assessment of politics and governance in the country. As mentioned earlier, the principle objective of this study is to employ democratic indicators (*accountability*,

pluralism, individual freedoms and *human rights*) to discuss and explain the chasm between the scale, depth and intent of the reforms and the way in which ordinary citizens experience and judge them. The focus of the interviews is, therefore, on how stakeholders relate to the indicators. A democratic system is defined here as a political and institutional system that can be contested, opposed and managed by people who are responsible for their actions *vis-a-vis* citizens through elections or other forms of democratic mandate (Schmitter & Karl, 1991). To be considered democratic, the political system must have the accountability of decision-makers at its core. As mentioned in the introduction, the other three indicators are also crucial in evaluating the degree of progress – or lack thereof – that the country has made. For the interviews, stakeholders were encouraged to engage with such indicators in the context of their area of expertise. Rather than employing a questionnaire that would impose uniformity, the choice was made to carry out semi-structured interviews tailored to the specific expertise of the interviewees. The goal was to elicit informed opinions of individuals representing organisations and entities directly affected by and/or involved in the reform process. Instead of soliciting the opinion of scholars, journalists and observers, which can be gathered from their writings, we privileged representatives of political parties and civil society.

We selected parties from the whole ideological spectrum, including ones without official legal status, to discuss political and constitutional reforms; we selected representatives of trade unions to discuss issues linked to social and economic satisfaction or dissatisfaction; and we selected representatives of civil associations to discuss the effects the liberal reforms promoted over the past two decades and their consequences on individual freedoms and human rights. All interviews were held in Arabic, with the exception of the one with Amina Lotfi, the former president of the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM), because she explicitly requested to speak in French. The interview quotes in this paper were translated to English by the authors. Most of the interviews were recorded except for those in which the interviewee asked not to be recorded. As it is customary in this methodological approach, we offered anonymity to all interviewees, but all of them were happy to waive it. For details on the primary sources, Table A1 of the Appendix displays information about the interviews and interviewees.

For the descriptive statistics, we used the data from the Arab Barometer and the Arab Transformations Project. Wave V of the Arab Barometer has recently been published and the data for Morocco are up to date. While we recognise that survey methodology in the Arab world is often problematic, it is also important to underline that the data collected have a degree of validity given the improvement in survey techniques over the past decade (Clark & Cavatorta, 2018). In addition, the political openings that occurred following the 2011 uprisings in a number of countries allowed researchers, for at least a few years, to have much easier access to the population, which in turn, might have increased truthful responses.[2]

2 It should be noted that in Morocco it is forbidden to ask survey questions about the monarchy and how it operates.

4 Accountability and pluralism: the Moroccan model between system and anti-system politics

As the brief literature review outlined, the monarchy is central to political power in Morocco and politics evolve around the degree to which the monarch permits other actors to participate in the governing process. This issue goes to the heart of accountability and pluralism, as the formal and informal powers the monarchy possesses shape the type and degree of accountability that institutional decision-makers have and determine the degree of pluralism that is accepted and acceptable in the political system. Political parties, elected officials and assemblies are the core institutions of democratic systems, and an examination of the tutelage the monarchy exercises over them illustrates how accountability and pluralism are still limited despite 20 years of supposedly democratic reforms. However, the extent of such tutelage has varied considerably over time and it is this variation that has been the subject of intense scrutiny to determine whether the country is moving towards a genuine constitutional monarchy or not.

4.1 Under tutelage: parties and parliament in Morocco

Although there were brief periods during which parliament was closed, parliamentary life has existed since independence in 1956, but the role of parliament was extremely limited until 1997. Just a small number of loyal parties participated in elections and formed governments, all under the severe watch of Hassan II who retained almost exclusive executive powers. Only in 1997 did parliamentary life and party politics become freer and more responsive to the wishes of the electorate, as the *Gouvernement d'Alternance* (Government of Change) led by the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) was sworn in. Since then a number of legislative and constitutional reforms have provided a greater policy role for the elected chamber and the government, although the monarchy has kept significant executive powers.[3] This asymmetrical duality in terms of decision-making power has produced two types of political actors: political parties that participate in parliamentary life belong to the category of "system parties" and political organisations that oppose the idea of institutional participation are categorised as "anti-system" actors.

The parties belonging to the first category have widely divergent political ideologies, but they have all accepted and submitted to the primacy of the monarchy in the political system and its religious legitimacy to rule. In short, they have accepted monarchical tutelage. It should be highlighted though that system parties are not entirely subdued by the monarchy and, therefore, do not constitute a monolithic block. These parties can all be considered monarchical in the sense that they do accept the monarchical frame of the state, but they do not do so in the same way and can, therefore, be divided in two subcategories.

Belonging to the first subcategory under "system parties" are the administrative parties (*idari*), which subscribe unconditionally to the institution of the executive monarchy and do its bidding in parliament as they are often the direct emanation of the palace or the creation

3 Key among such powers is the exclusive power to appoint the most important ministers in the cabinet, such as the Minister of Interior and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Furthermore, the monarch relies on a council of advisers that formulates policies the Council of Ministers, which he chairs, executes, undermining and weakening elected representatives.

of individuals closely connected to the monarchy. Belonging to the second subcategory under "system parties" are the "opportunistic" parties (as we labelled them). They also acknowledge the primacy of the monarchical system, but they believe they can carve out increasing spaces of policy-making autonomy at the expenses of the monarchy. We define them as opportunistic because they have seized the opportunity to participate in the political system despite their lukewarm enthusiasm for monarchical rule. In a sense, such parties have decided that the benefits of participation – making incremental changes and seeing some of their most-preferred policies adopted – outweigh the costs of explicitly recognising the primary role of the monarch in the system. In doing so, opportunistic parties argue that working within the system is the best strategy to bring about incremental democratic accountability. Among the opportunistic parties there is a further distinction that is important to make. On the one hand, there are those parties like the Islamist PJD, the nationalist Istiqlal Party, the centre-left USFP or the more leftist Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS) that actively and fully participate in parliamentary life and try to take advantage of the political space the king concedes. On the other hand, there is the Federation of the Democratic Left (FGD) parliamentary group (composed today of only two members of parliament (MPs),[4] which refuses to fully participate in institutional life by rejecting offers of becoming a partner in a coalition government. In fact, the party advocates a two-fold political strategy: parliamentary and extra-parliamentary. It has the aim of democratising the monarchy and believes in fact that the present political framework does not guarantee even a minimum of genuine democratic participation.

The anti-system parties and political organisations are either sceptical of the monarchy and its democratising potential or are quite openly republican. They remain outside the institutions of the state because they refuse to recognise the primacy of the king – religious and political – and because they reject the idea that the monarchy is going to willingly democratise. In short, these political movements do not believe that the system can be reformed from within and rely on social and extra-parliamentary activism to attempt to change the system and to exercise the maximum of pressure on it. Because they do not accept "the rules of the monarchical game", the activities of these movements are much more restricted and some of these organisations operate in a grey space between legality and illegality. The most important of these anti-systemic actors is the Islamist *al-Adl wal- Ihsan* (AWI), a movement largely considered by the interviewees to be the strongest opposition in the country. This category also includes the radical left-wing party *Nahaj Democrati* and a number of Salafi groups. It is important to note that none of these organisations advocate the use of violence to overthrow the monarchy.

4.2 Accountability and participation in the Moroccan political system

As mentioned, two of the defining traits of democratic and democratising systems are the *accountability* of decision-makers and the *participation of a plurality of voices* in the system. In Morocco, the assumption has always been that incremental progress is being made during the reign of Mohammed VI with respect to the two criteria, but the reality is more complex,

4 Called the *Fédération de la gauche démocratique* in French, the FGD is an alliance of three parties: the Unified Socialist Party (PSU), the Socialist Democratic Vanguard Party (PADS) and the National Ittihadi Congress (CNI). This coalition was born in 2007 but did not participate in the 2012 elections because it believed that the elections were a betrayal of the 20 February Movement's demands.

and the presence of multiparty politics, as we have seen above, should not be confused with democratic progress. This section examines this reality in detail.

The accountability of elected representatives to the electorate was weak throughout Hassan II's reign and it has not become much stronger under Mohammed VI, although the constitutional reforms after the 2011 demonstrations seemed to indicate that the monarchy was willing to empower parliament and system parties and render them responsible for policy-making. The key problem is that the elected bodies are constrained by the existence of non-elected institutions (controlled by the monarch) where real decision-making power resides, leaving elected officials to execute policies that are formulated without any sort of accountability.

The monarchical strategy, when it comes to opportunistic parties, is fairly simple and effective (Storm, 2013; Szmolka, 2010). During his reign, Hassan II built a façade of political pluralism with a number of co-opted parties, while more popular political actors remained outside the system. Among them the USFP was the most popular and best organised. The objective of a façade of political pluralism was to challenge the hegemony of the USFP, in the knowledge that the king had a constitutionally mandated stranglehold on executive power and appointed the prime minister. The latter did not have to be the leader of the largest political party and did not have to be an elected representative either.[5] Marginalising anti-system parties weakened them over time and the USFP eventually decided to join the system when Hassan II made the offer of letting the party lead a coalition government, provided it became the largest political party in the 1997 elections. The USFP seized the opportunity of participation in the hope of being able to erode some monarchical policy-making power from within, and after winning the 1997 legislative elections, its leader was duly appointed prime minister in a coalition government. Thus, the Socialists found themselves in government, but, crucially, not in power, as policy-making still occurred in the palace. Unable to keep the promises of change that the party had made to the electorate, the USFP declined electorally and was effectively neutralised.[6]

The fate of the USFP illustrates quite well how accountability functioned in Morocco under Hassan II and the early days of Mohammed VI's reign. Citizens might vote a specific party into government and later vote it out of government if they are dissatisfied with its performance, but there is a significant difference between government and power for two reasons. First, genuine policy-making power on important matters rests with the monarch and his shadow-cabinet of advisers as well as the reserved ministries he appoints and not with the prime minister and the ministers he nominates, which disqualifies Morocco from belonging to the category of democratic or democratising countries. Second, the electoral system and the fragmentation of the party system mean that only coalition governments are possible in Morocco. Within government coalitions there are often "administrative parties", which are

5 Most of our interviewees remembered that Hassan II's discretionary power had led the monarch to state, "If I want, I can choose my car driver as Prime Minister".

6 The historical National Union of Popular Forces (UNFP) was born in 1959 out of a branch of the Istiqlal Party. The party was in an open struggle against the monarchy. In 1975, the USFP was created as a breakaway from the former. After ruling in an historical government from 1998 to 2002 (called the *Gouvernement d'Alternance*), the USFP began to progressively lose political power. The party won 57 seats (out of 325) in the 1997 election; 50 in 2002; 38 in 2007; 39 in 2011; and 20 in 2016. For the anti-systemic interviewees, today the Socialists are even considered one of the administrative parties. This shows, unequivocally, how much legitimacy they lost.

more responsive to the wishes of the monarchy than to their coalition partners, further weakening governmental actions.

When the changes promised by the opportunistic parties do not occur, voters tend to punish them, but the paradox is that these parties do not have the actual power to make such changes to begin with and voters cannot by definition sanction the king. The flaw of the system in terms of democratic accountability is that inclusion in the system provides only the illusion of a democratic praxis because it implies the acceptance of an undemocratic system led by the palace. Typically, during periods of social and political crisis, the king puts forth constitutional reforms and calls on all the political parties to participate in a new season of reformism. The largest opposition party is then asked to participate fully in elections and lead the government. Once the party accepts, it falls into the trap of the system: deprived of effective decision-making powers and worn down in a parliamentary system where administrative parties play a significant role, it inevitably fails. The king naturally takes no blame for this failure. The way in which the monarchy dealt with the challenge of Political Islam is illustrative.

As the Socialists' popularity and electoral fortunes declined during the 2000s after the failure of the *Gouvernement d'Alternance*, the Islamists rose and by the early 2000s the challenge facing Mohammed VI was their inclusion in the political system with the objective of defusing their potential anti-systemic challenge. Despite claims of a new democratic era for the country, Mohammed VI, like his father, quite quickly began promoting the creation of new administrative parties – notable among them is the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM) – to oppose the Islamists, while at the same time encouraging the latter to participate in elections and thus validate the monarchical system. As it happened, the Islamist PJD was developing a strategy of *entrisme* and accepted the offer of the monarchy to stand for election. Initially, Mohammed VI allowed the Islamist party to participate in the elections only in a limited way and the PJD complied.[7] This was done to avoid the "Algerian scenario",[8] but eventually, once the king had prepared the terrain for their inclusion, the party participated fully. The strategy worked and the monarchy remained the most important and unassailable political institution in the country, while projecting an image of modernisation and democratisation.

While Mohammed VI was following on the path of his father's last years of reign, his reformism initially seemed to be much more radical and genuine. In fact, it seemed that the initial reformism was meant to make the Moroccan system as a whole both more accountable and more participatory. To begin with, he inaugurated a period of national reconciliation and

7 The PJD participated in parliamentary elections for the first time in 2002 and won 42 parliamentary seats; then 46 in 2007; 107 in 2011; and 125 in 2016. The party, however, presented candidates only in a small number of electoral constituencies because it knew that the king would not tolerate more than that (Willis, 2002). This restriction was raised after 2011.

8 The "Algerian scenario" refers to the events surrounding the failed transition to democracy in Algeria between 1988 and 1992. When the Algerian regime decided to liberalise the political system and permitted the formation of political parties and their participation in free and fair elections, it had not foreseen the rise of the Islamist party *Front Islamique de Salut* (FIS). The latter won the first round of elections in December 1991 and was poised to win two thirds of all the seats following the second round. To prevent this scenario from occurring, the Algerian military, afraid of an Islamist democratic takeover, intervened to stop the second round of elections, ultimately triggering a brutal civil war. In order to ensure that such a scenario would not occur in Morocco, the PJD decided to run candidates in a limited number of constituencies to avoid sweeping the board and triggering a violent reaction on the part of the authorities.

opened up the discussion on the authoritarian abuses of the past. This retrospective accountability seemed to represent a fundamental step in the construction of a new system because it implied that the monarchy had a role in the politics of authoritarian repression of the past. The commission on equality (or equity) and reconciliation thus became a building block for a political transition that was supposed to lift the country from an authoritarian regime to an accountable, democratic regime (Vairel, 2008). Another important step was the reform of the family code (*Mudawwana*) in 2004, which vastly improved the legal status of women and promoted gender equality and was the outcome of intense activism on the part of women's rights organisations (Ennaji, 2016). The reform both validated and expanded the participation of women in the life of the country. The king also established the commission for regionalisation that was thought to be a step towards a more accountable political system by delegating some administrative functions to locally elected representatives (Ben-Meir, 2010). The project also aimed to better regulate Western Sahara. The religious camp was reformed to provide greater clarity about the type of Islam that the kingdom would practice and export, with a crackdown on more extremist forms of religious interpretation (El-Katiri, 2013). Finally, the king cleaned up Moroccan elections, ensuring that they would be free and fair in contrast to the way they were under his father's reign. In parallel to the political reforms, the monarchy drew a plan for wide-ranging economic reforms based on liberalisation of the economy, the opening of the country to foreign capital and the growth of exports (Harrigan & El-Said, 2009). In short, these reforms made the system more accountable, and political participation increased, but they were also self-serving and never intended to bring about genuine democratisation. The monarchy succeeded in projecting a liberal image, while ensuring that the lack of socio-economic progress, and more broadly the problems of the country, would be blamed on elected representatives.

Thus, the asymmetrical duality of the political system and the lack of genuine electoral accountability did not threaten the stability of the political system. Ordinary citizens negatively evaluated the performance of the government in a number of dimensions, but this did not affect the monarchy. The trend, however, changed dramatically with the events of the Arab Spring of 2011. As Mounaim Ouhti, a leader of the 20 February Movement, emphasised, "an unexpected wind of freedom came from the sky". It was clear by that time that very few people, both inside and outside of political institutions, believed in a process of genuine democratisation led by the monarchy, as reality caught up with the image the king projected. In fact, while projecting a more liberal image and promoting incremental political reforms, Mohammed VI was not that different from his father and Morocco had remained at best a "liberalised autocracy" (Brumberg, 2002). The 2011 protests in Morocco specifically recognised this chasm between image and reality. In an interview, Nabila Mounib, an MP for the FGD, explained that after a couple of weeks of widespread protests and marches all over the country, the king "with the advice of his close friends inside and outside the country" took the initiative to announce that the reform process would deepen. Although pressure from the streets and the changing regional environment pushed him to action, Mohammed VI carefully avoided mentioning the movement's demands during his speech to the nation in March 2011 and made it look like he was the one who had taken the initiative (Abdel-Samad, 2014). In the words of Mounib, "he (the king) said: I reform the system. I'm the reformer…. As if this was the most natural thing to do for a king. The message was: we have been reforming, we still reform". Most of the official political elite, including a good part of those participating in the 20 February Movement, supported the king's reform plan (Ottaway, 2011). For the administrative parties this was simply the confirmation that the king is the

indispensable engine of the system. For the systemic opportunist parties, and especially the PJD, this was an opportunity to be seized, according to Abdelali Hamidin, one of the leading members of PJD, in so far as the party could benefit from the need the monarchy had to present a genuine plan for institutional change. According to anti-system parties, the king had simply tricked the people. As Mounib stated, "people, that I would define as naïf or 'reformist', said: no need any more to demonstrate, the king will make the reforms requested".

In June 2011, a constitutional draft (drawn by a commission of experts the king had appointed) was proposed to a referendum. The constitutional modifications were approved on 1 July with 98.49 per cent of the vote and an official turnout of 72.65 per cent, despite the call for a boycott on the part of sections of the 20 February Movement. Most of the official political parties and sectors of the civil society welcomed the 2011 Constitution as a step forwards in the democratisation of the country. The most enthusiastic of all were the Islamists, who supported the king's initiative and prepared for the legislative elections. Nabil Benabdallah, secretary general of the PPS, explained that the king courted the PJD, especially his leader Abdelilah Benkirane, who was proud to have been the architect of the Islamists' integration into the monarchical system. Mohammed VI aimed to deal with the PJD in a similar way as his father had dealt with the Socialist party in the 1990s. The PJD, just like the Socialists, had the intention of taking the reins of government and hoped to carve out the policy space necessary to implement its agenda. Crucially, one of the key provisions of the new Constitution was the greater competency given to the executive and, in particular, the obligation for the king to name as prime minister a member of the largest party in parliament. This meant that the PJD's leader would become prime minister, provided the party could top the polls. The PJD had worked within the system for more than a decade to be precisely in the position of leading a government and the elections duly delivered a relative majority for the PJD.

4.3 Accountability and participation under the new Constitution

The nature of the constitutional reforms (in terms of governance) and the experience of the governments that followed provide a solid test for the new "democratic" impetus supposedly provided to the reformist process in terms of accountability and participation. From the point of view of the opportunistic parties, the most important novelties of the new Constitution were, as mentioned above, the provision granting the government explicit executive powers (art. 89) and the provision forcing the king to appoint the head of government from within the leading party in the legislative elections (art. 47). These two articles provided for greater opportunities for a strong and more accountable elected government.[9]

From the administrative parties' perspective, however, other elements stood out in the new text and emphasised that the centrality of the king in the institutional system was strengthened because it was now enshrined in a new constitutional chart voted in a "quasi consensual referendum" according to both Popular Movement MP Lahcen Sekkouri and the anonymous

9 Among other competencies introduced in the Constitution are: the power to propose and dismiss cabinet members, the power to coordinate government action and the power to dissolve the lower house of parliament (after consulting the king, the house speaker and the head of the Constitutional Court) (See Constitution, section 5; art. 87-94).

respondent. The king's competencies are indeed outlined in Section 3 of the Constitution (art. 41-59) and they are considerable, although he lost the qualification of "sanctity" sanctioned in the previous chart. In any case, his person is still "inviolable", and he must be "respected and revered" (art. 46).[10] He is the protector of the *milla* and religion,[11] because he is the *Amir al-Mu'minin* (Commander of the Faithful) (art. 41).[12]

When it comes to the institutional balance in Morocco, there are two key bodies: the Council of Ministers and the Government. The first is headed and coordinated by the king (art. 48) and the second by the prime minister (art. 87). The competencies of the first are regulated in the section dedicated to the king's powers (art. 49), while those of the second are found in the section dedicated to the government (art. 92). The government is one, but the practical management of governing is divided in two. The general guidelines of the government's actions are planned and approved in the "king's council" (Council of Ministers) while the "prime ministerial council" (the Government) works for its application.[13] The first is "the board of directors, which decides on policies and is an extension of the king; the [second] is [that of] the managers, which implements them", as Foued Abdelmoumni, general secretary of Transparency International, explained. The king is the head of the state (art. 42). He holds direct control over the security sector (he is the head of the supreme security council (art. 54)), the judiciary (art. 56-57) and defence (art. 53)). He names the ambassadors and signs the international treaties (art. 55) as he has control over all the highest appointments of the state through the Council of Ministers (art. 49). It is also conventionally established that the king appoints the "ministers of sovereignty" (Interior, Religious Affairs, Foreign Affairs, and Defence) while only for the remaining posts does the prime minister have a relatively free choice (all the interviewees agreed on that point).

In an interview, Abdelmoumni explained how the system functions in practice:

> The king is the head of the Council of Ministers which takes political decisions and that disposes of another council that executes it. To be clearer, the king's council takes decisions on the financial budget, on the nomination of the high institutions…all the national institutions the judiciary, the president of the institutions of the general attorney, the Council of Human Rights, the Council of Free Competition, the council of the fight against the corruption, the various minor councils like that of the youth or of the women, and so on. All this is of the competence of the president of the council, which is the king. (Abdelmoumni, General Secretary of Transparency International, 11 September 2019)

How to reconcile then the claim of the administrative parties with the hopes of the opportunistic parties? In other words, is the government – expression of the popular will and holder of the voters' mandate – able to rule independently, or is the essence of power still in

10 According to Omar Iharchane, one of the leaders of AWI, this change was not a big deal because the concept of *horma* replaced that of sanctity.

11 *Milla* is a Quranic word that means "the religion of God".

12 According to Omar Iharchane, the king does not even have the religious requisites for such a title (Interview).

13 The king has in fact the power of initiative in several fields. For example, he can react to a negative political juncture by ordering the prime minister to change tack on a certain point or opt for a governmental reshuffle. He also promotes the broad and important guidelines in matters of development, as was the case at the beginning of the 2000s and most recently after the social protests of 2017/2018. This usually happens through the formation of a commission of experts (*lajna*), which drafts a general working plan to be applied later by the government. The king typically triggers this process in an official televised speech.

the hands of the palace? While the Constitution states "the political regime in Morocco is a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary social democracy" (General Provision, art. 1), it actually depicts a "government without governance" – *hukuma bila hukm*, as Monjib Maati, a prominent civil society activist and opponent of the regime, stated. Our interviewees (of all political persuasions) are clear on this point: the king is still the centre around which the political game turns. In short, the political, institutional and constitutional reforms are a form of tinkering at the edges of the system and are not intended to do anything other than project an image of incremental liberalisation. The reality is that without clear reforms to drastically diminish or eliminate the executive powers of the monarch, the political system still possesses an authoritarian core. Despite all this, it is important to analyse how the new Constitution has worked in practice since the PJD became the largest party in the country and its leader was appointed head of government.

4.4 The PJD, the monarchy and the new Constitution

Although the centrality of the king in the new constitutional frame was guaranteed, and considerable executive powers remained in the hands of the palace (Madani, Maghraoui, & Zerhouni, 2012), many in the political arena thought that the 2011 reforms brought "a breath of fresh air in the country" and this was recognised even in anti-system circles, as leading member of the AWI Omar Iharchane explained. Following the 2011 elections, the leader of the PJD, Abdelilah Benkirane, became the first Islamist prime minister of the country. Benkirane came to power with the mission of showing to his own electoral base that it was possible, in the new political and institutional context, to implement the party's policies as far as the government coalition permitted (Szmolka, 2015), just like in established democracies. This was only possible by stretching to the maximum the room to manoeuvre the Constitution permitted and by showing at the same time respect for the king's primacy in the political game. If one uses the outcome of the 2016's legislative elections as a validation of the PJD's strategy, then the Benkirane-led government was a success, as the PJD topped the polls once more in the legislative elections.[14]

In reality, most of our interviewees agree that the Islamist leader never tried to really challenge the king. Quite the opposite is true. According to Aziz Mouchouat, a prominent sociologist and former journalist, Benkirane "presented himself and [his] party as the guarantor of the monarchy". It looked like he played the role of being monarchist and believing in his capacity to play the system at the same time. According to Benabdallah, his closest non-Islamist ally, Benkirane "wants the king to maintain his powers but he wants a democracy at the same time. A democracy without a parliamentary monarchy". Hamidin confirmed this without equivocation: "Benkirane is…praising all the time the king and the kingdom as it is now. In his statements, he always says: I'm a simple civil servant, I am a simple employee of the king". Finally, Youssef Raissouni, a leading civil society activist and executive director of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH), put it plainly: "in Morocco there is a difference between the governing and the government".

While showing reverence towards the figure of the sovereign and notwithstanding the limitations the Constitution imposed, Benkirane was very shrewdly able to infuse the figure

14 The elections were held on 7 October 2016. The PJD was again the largest party and gained 125 parliamentary seats.

of head of government with genuine political protagonism, something of a novelty in Morocco. Mohammad Masbah, the director of the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis, argued that Benkirane was a real "political animal" and was able to exploit his role until the 2016 election. The greater role that the prime minister played should not suggest that the degree of democratisation of the political system and with it the degree or electoral accountability had increased following the 2011 protests. Moreover, ordinary citizens' attitudes towards the government and the job it was doing were negative. According to our interviewees, the political success of Benkirane was more in communicating, rather than in the actual empowerment of the executive. Abdelmoumni told us that he spoke out about the limitations of his government, explaining to people exactly what the system allowed him to do and what it did not:

> [Benkirane] never took any decision or position that opposed the will or the interests of the palace, but he was very good in communicating it, saying it overtly, in public speeches or TV debates. He always spoke in a transparent manner about the political and personal dynamics between his government and the palace or the king directly. Contrary to all the prime ministers that preceded him, he was very frank and talked a lot. (Abdelmoumni, General Secretary of Transparency International, 11 September 2019)

This impression was confirmed by Abdellatif Wahbi, a member of an administrative party, when he told us that Benkirane "was all the time talking about his relationship with the king to the point that he made appear the king a normal person.…The king, in Benkirane's speeches, was like his friend".

Notwithstanding all the limitations that he faced, the Islamist leader undoubtedly succeeded in one aspect. According to Benabdallah, Benkirane became "the key political figure of the country". More than the other prime ministers who had preceded him, Benkirane was able to carve out some limited policy space for his government action, giving some credence to the conviction of opportunistic parties that the monarchical institutional system was constructed in a such a way as to provide a degree of autonomy, particularly when strong political leadership was exercised. His supporters argue that Benkirane had a positive impact on the democratic evolution of the system. As Benabdallah stated, "as long as there is a strong democratic movement within the institutions, there is the possibility to widen democratic freedoms". This is, however, debatable and the idea that the king had decidedly advanced the country on the path of genuine institutional democratisation was erroneous.

The political crisis that erupted after the 2016 election was a dramatic awakening from the belief that the PJD and its leader could contribute to democratising Morocco. Although never anti-monarchical, Benkirane came to occupy a very strong position through his personal charisma. As Benbdallah argued, "his personality became hegemonic in the public scene" and "this fact was disturbing". Furthermore, the electoral success of the PJD in the 2016 elections was without any doubt to be interpreted as a popular vote for a second Benkirane government. This, however, never happened and from that moment onwards, the political system reverted to its usual *modus operandi*. The palace ordered the administrative parties to make such impossible requests for Benkirane to enter his coalition government that it became

very difficult to create one.[15] In particular, the most royalist of the parties – the Nationalist Rally of Independents (RNI) – played a disturbing role by setting unrealistic conditions for its participation in the government. This would have been impossible in 2012, when the king had given the green light for the creation of an Islamist-led government. Abdelmoumni said that this was "the classical manoeuvring of the king who instructed the administrative parties to make it impossible for Benkirane to form a government and to finally destroy his political standing". Mounaim Ouhti, member of PADS-FGD, explained the relationship between Benkirane and the palace:

> You have to look back to the Youssefi government [socialist *Gouvernement d'Alternance* in the 1990s]. The palace exploited his popularity until he was completely devoid of political capacity. This is the case with the PJD and Benkirane today. It (the Socialist party) was the biggest party in the country and it is now a dead body. The palace used [the Socialist party's] credibility and popularity for its own purpose; when it was not useful anymore, it threw it away….With the PJD, the aim was to burn it out. And this within a completely legal frame…with the Constitution at hand. (Outhi, Member of the PADS-FGD and activist in the 20 February Movement, 20 September 2019)

Although Ouhti's assessment might be too strong and too conclusive, what clearly emerges from the analysis of contemporary Moroccan politics is that there is profound disillusionment among opportunistic parties about the credibility of the reform process. Hamidin's words reflected the mood regarding this political juncture:

> The meaning of 'democratic change' remains an open question. At the end of the 1990s there was hope; in 2002 a regression. In 2011 a new start occurred and then again a regression in 2016, which culminated with Benkirane's exclusion from government after he won the elections….Therefore, the meaning of democratic transition evaporated and I would rather say that we are in a process of democratic construction (*bina wa la intiqal*)….This process is not always in a straight line. It can increase and decrease or turn itself around. The move can sometimes be very slow. (Hamidin, Leading member of the PJD, 11 September 2019)

The result of the 2016 political crisis was to make the political elites and the political parties appear litigious and only interested in ministerial offices instead of being interested in the fate and needs of the country, which is what the palace wanted citizens to believe, absolving itself of any responsibility. This was a typical *Makhzen* outcome, as the king lifted himself above the petty fray and recovered his position as the only key political player that had somewhat lost in the 2011 juncture with the emergence of Benkirane. Thus, the monarchy continues to work as usual and according to consolidated old mechanisms. In conclusion, the Moroccan political system does not envisage either genuine accountability or widespread political participation because an unelected institution – the monarchy – provides the parameters for both through formal and informal powers. Parties are accountable to voters, but they have little decision-making power. Participation is guaranteed for both parties and civil society actors, but ultimately reforms depend on monarchical approval.

15 Appointed by the king for a new governmental coalition, Benkirane was not able to form a government, especially because of the disturbing role of the National Rally of Independents (RNI), the administrative party of the moment. The crisis lasted for months until a new government was formed, only after the intervention of the king, who decided to name a new prime minister.

However, this political crisis was much deeper than a simple parliamentary deadlock. Almost in parallel with Benkirane's fall, a tremendous movement of protest coming from the Rif region rocked the country and the political system, which highlighted the shortcomings of the other reforms that had been undertaken, namely in the sphere of human rights, personal freedoms and economic development.

5 The retrenchment of authoritarianism: individual freedoms and human rights under attack

There is no doubt that under Mohammed VI, civil liberties and the protection of human rights were greatly expanded when compared with what took place under his father. Upon sitting on the throne, the new king permitted Moroccan society to breathe, allowing for a freer press, the creation of many civil society organisations, a more pluralistic public debate about a number of contentious political and social issues and a significant decrease in human rights abuses. However, individual freedoms and the protection of human rights quickly became a legitimating discourse rather than a protracted reality. First, a number of red lines in public debates could not be crossed (criticising the monarchy or questioning Moroccan sovereignty on Western Sahara, for instance). Second, when criticism became too strong, repressive measures were quickly employed (journalists have been often silenced through imprisonment or exile). Third, violence against political opponents has also been employed rather regularly when they expose the country to international criticism (Western Sahara activists have been regularly and severely repressed, and security forces often break up strikes and sit-ins across the country). In short, individual freedoms and human rights have limits in Morocco and it is the monarch – unelected and unaccountable – that decides what the limits are. The post-2011 period should have seen a progression in the field of individual freedoms and human rights, as the king vowed to keep the country on the democratisation path, but the reality has been different, particularly since 2016 when the Rif Hirak shook the regime and when it became clear that the democratisation process the monarch was talking about was never ending. It is at this juncture that the genuine nature of the regime emerged and when the rhetoric of reform – political and economic – and rights met the reality of immobility and repression.

The post-2016 election period was one of profound distress for the country, both politically and economically. While under Benkirane's leadership there was a certain hope for the capacity of the government to improve the economy and crack down on corruption, that hope faded in 2016. This is shown clearly by the 2019 Arab Barometer survey results. Regarding their satisfaction with the current government's performance, 71.8 per cent are completely or moderately dissatisfied (only 3.6 per cent are completely satisfied). The nature of the people's dissatisfaction is clear from the following responses. The respondents judge the government's performance in creating job opportunities negatively: 42.9 per cent say it is "very bad", 36 per cent rate it "bad", and only 15.9 per cent and 2.6 per cent rate it "good" and "very good", respectively. A similar result emerges for the government's performance in dealing with regional disparities: 25.6 per cent and 37.2 per cent rate it "very bad" and "bad", respectively. The ratings of the government's ability to keep prices down (43.2 per cent "very bad", 33.7 per cent "bad") and narrow the gap between rich and poor (36.5 per cent "very bad", 39.1 per cent "bad") also demonstrate profound dissatisfaction. What is interesting about the change in public opinion towards elected institutions is that it tracks with Benkirane's government. When asked about their trust in parliament, in 2007, 51 per cent

said they did not trust it; in 2013, following the 2011 elections, that number dropped to 45.9 per cent; in 2016 it was at its lowest (35.4 per cent); and in 2019, after Benkirane's forced departure from office, the distrust bounced back up to 49.4 per cent.

When read in combination with the numbers related to the government's performance, the data seem to suggest that citizens are aware of the government's limited ability to act. The public recognises the efforts of the PJD and other parties to better represent citizens in parliament when given the opportunity, although trust in the parties is low. While the number of people with little to no trust in institutions is still very high, citizens are able to recognise when some actors make an effort. It is also worth noting that parliament and political parties are seen as marginal actors in the functioning of the state,[16] which suggests that citizens are aware of who is really in charge – and potentially to blame.

The negative turn in public opinion after 2017 reflects Morocco's state of crisis. It is precisely in these times of crisis that we tend to see a deterioration in the two other pillars of the democratic system (*human rights* and *individual freedoms*). As mentioned earlier, in both dimensions, Mohammed VI's record is better than his father's, but the progress made during his reign has been overestimated considerably. Throughout the past two decades, when confronted with growing discontent, Mohammed VI has never hesitated to employ coercive measures, flouting human rights and persecuting both political opponents and critics of his regime (Cavatorta, 2016). Benkirane's failure to form his second government and the spectacle of a litigious political elite projected the image of a country that had lost "the constructivist reformist spirit", as Benabdallah explained, no matter how limited that spirit might have been.

The justice system, which is directly linked to the protection of human rights and freedoms, has undergone reforms that ultimately indicate its lack of independence and have made it a powerful arm in the repressive arsenal of the regime. It is no surprise, therefore, that the courts and the judiciary suffer from very low trust (only 24 per cent of Moroccans trust the judiciary (ArabTrans, n.d.)), as many other state institutions do. This is borne out in the interviews. Raissouni, highlighted that since 2014 there has been an increasing use of the justice system for the persecution of political opposition and dissent. He emphasised that AMDH has been "under attack since 2014. The *sulta* [the power system] began accusing us of all sort of things: traitors, 'band of homosexuals', sell-outs to a foreign political agenda".

According to the human rights activists we met, the *sulta* began using a sophisticated system to silence the opposition that activists call the *tuensana* (the Tunisian way), in reference to the method the former Tunisian dictator Ben Ali employed against political dissenters. Maati explained how *tuensana* works:

> The regime does not attack a political opposition leader directly for his stances….Rather it attacks the individual himself….For example, if anyone criticises the king, the regime does not say: we will proceed against you because you criticised the king, but it will instead accuse you of having sexual relations outside marriage. (Maati, Civil society activist, 9 September 2019)

16 In 2011, the election turnout was 45.5 per cent (Election Guide, 2020), the highest to date. In 2016, the election turnout was 43 per cent (Mahon, 2016).

The attack is intended to diminish the dissenter personally by attacking his character and behaviour, making up scandalous stories intended to distract from the political message the dissenter is attempting to send. Sexual "misbehaviour" is a typical accusation. Maati has himself been victim of such persecution because of his political activism and critical journalism and for his work in the Ibn Rushd Centre, where left wing and Islamist opposition gathered.[17] Maati related that "the president of the administrative section was accused of *zina* [sex outside marriage], and the security services [informally] spread a rumour that the place was a centre for prostitution and that I was the head of a prostitution ring".

Connected to this form of political aggression is the questionable level of independence that the judicial system has (Buehler, 2016). The cases of human rights abuses have been numerous over the past few years, denoting a clear neo-authoritarianism that engages in political repression, making the interior and the judiciary ministries directly dependent on the palace and overriding the power of the allegedly executive body, that is, the government.

Referencing the two most famous judicial cases against journalists in the past few years, Maati sees the same authoritarian machine that has been fabricating crimes for years. He stated that "the judge who is now persecuting Hijar Raissouni is the same who judged Hicham Mansouri because he is part of the judges of the state security". The reference to Mansouri and Raissouni is telling. Mansouri is an independent investigative journalist who spent 10 months in prison in 2015 after being arrested for allegedly committing adultery and operating a brothel. Hijar Raissouni is at the centre of the most recent case of persecution of free journalism. She is an independent journalist who covered the Rif Hirak and interviewed its leader, Nasser Zefzafi. Hijar Raissouni was sentenced to one year in prison in 2019 for an alleged illegal abortion and sexual activities outside of marriage.[18] *Al-Akhbar al Yawm*, which Hijar Raissouni writes for, is the only relatively independent newspaper in Morocco; its director, Tawfik Bouachrine, was arrested in 2017 and given a 12-year prison sentence for sexual assault and human trafficking. In a recent article for *Jadaliyya*, Errazzouki (2019) illustrates the broader trend of how the regime reacts to criticism:

> The journalist Omar Radi now finds himself facing a term of up to one year in jail — ostensibly because of a single tweet [criticising the incarceration of Rif Hirak activists]. That would be bad enough by itself. In fact, though, Radi's case is emblematic of a much broader trend: the steady erosion of Morocco's once-vibrant independent press. Dozens of other journalists and activists are already behind bars. (Errazzouki, 2019)

For Youssef Raissouni, the government has lost all legitimacy because of its powerlessness in front of the *sulta*:

> Since 2014, when we [the association] tried to establish a communication with the government [concerning the restriction the association was experiencing], they replied: the issue is bigger than us. Of course, it is clear that the first responsible of the state is not to be found within the government [he is in the royal palace instead]. (Raissouni, AMDH, 24 September 2019)

17 The Ibn Rushd Centre's activities began in 2007, despite all the restrictions, and it was closed down by authorities in 2014.

18 She was later freed by a royal amnesty. See Amnesty International, 2019.

According to Maati, the PJD's government could not even protect its own members or those ideologically close to it, like the aforementioned journalist Tawfik Bouachrine (a liberal Islamist). For instance, Hamidin was persecuted for an event that occurred 25 years ago after he wrote an article accusing the king of not respecting his constitutional limits.[19] Foued Abdelemoumni explained that the king does not need to micromanage the judges: "the [judge] understands the political nature of the case-file in front of him and he acts as it is expected. If he does not, he knows he will find obstacles in his professional and personal life". Hamidin agreed:

> There is a difference between the practice and the theory. Formally, the judicial system is independent, but in practice it is not. The judges are most of the time corrupt and it is known that they can become very rich [because of corruption]. Concerning the political processes, it is well known that the judges do not go against the will of the real wielder of power; even without any specific order, they apply consciously or not its will, and the judges know very well when a trial comes after an accusation coming from someone with links to *le pouvoir*. In that case, the judge will not even bother to investigate the potential innocence of the accused, because the judge knows that if the victim will not be found guilty, he will pay the price. The judges are in theory protected by the law (immunity), but they can be threatened in many ways and will never take a risk. (Hamidin, Leading member of the PJD, 11 September 2019)

According to all interviewees, the judicial system is an instrument of repression centred in the palace and not in the government, which further confirms the lack of accountability that Moroccan institutions suffer from. This is the case even though the judicial system has been reformed with the promise of making it more accountable and efficient in the delivery of justice. The key point of the reform has to do with the appointment of the public attorney, who is now named by the head of the high judiciary authority, rather than the Minister of Justice, to eliminate governmental oversight. This reform was welcomed as a step towards independence of the judiciary system by the administrative parties, which claim that this is another step in the process of democratisation that the king is engaged in. However, for all the others, the reform is more than problematic. While they acknowledge that it eliminates the influence of the government, it instead gives it to the monarchy. For Maati, there is no doubt that this is a trick of the system because "the head of the judicial system is the king…[this is] a false reform". The king is in fact the one appointing the head of the high judiciary authority. The absence of trust in the judiciary goes hand in hand with the rather low levels of trust in the police: 57 per cent of ordinary Moroccans do not trust the police at all or very much. What is even more worrying is that it is the younger generation that trusts the police much less than any other group age, suggesting that the low trust in state institutions is destined to be reproduced for the foreseeable future. When one looks outside state institutions the picture is even worse: there are very low levels of trust in civil society organisations (only 36 per cent of Moroccans trust them), in the media (24 per cent) and in religious leaders (32 per cent). To top all this off, there are very low levels of personal trust: 77.5 per cent of Moroccans state that "most people are not trustworthy" (ArabTrans, n.d.).

19 This case dates back to 1993 when a left-wing activist was killed at Fes University during a riot. Hamidin was sentenced to two years in prison for participating in the murder. In 2004, he appealed to the equity and reconciliation commission for the abuse he received during the judicial process, and he received compensation. Since 2011, his case has been re-opened several times following complaints by the parents of the murdered activist. The last case was brought back after a media smear campaign by newspapers close to the palace, notwithstanding the fact that there were no new elements of the case (Maroc Diplomatique, 2019).

5.1 The Rif Hirak

The popular protest movement that grew across the Rif region in 2016 and 2017 is both a paradigmatic illustration and a distillation of the problems of the country. The worsening of the situation in terms of individual freedoms and human rights, for instance, was strikingly clear during the Rif Hirak and its aftermath,[20] as was the poor economic situation for vast swathes of the population.

From October 2016 to May 2017, protests and marches took place in Houceima and spread all over the northern part of the Rif region. The cycle of protests was triggered by the death of Mouhcine Fikri, a fishmonger, who was crushed inside a garbage truck while he was trying to retrieve fish confiscated from him by authorities. The rage surrounding the incident became a social movement that demanded social justice and equal developmental plans. Instead of handling the unrest calmly and trying to assuage the movement's lack of trust in state institutions, the *sulta* reacted violently. Smail Hamoudi, a specialist in security policy and an *Al-Akhbar al-Yawm* journalist, argued:

> [The systemic parties] accused the Hirak of Rif of separatism, and receiving foreign funding, which contributed to handle the protests with extra-ordinary security measures, by dealing with it as "security threat" instead of a socio-economic problem, which justified, by the end, the use of exceptional measures to face it. (Hamoudi, 2019, p 5)

The crackdown started on 26 May 2017, when the leader of the movement, Nasser Zefzafi, verbally attacked a preacher who during the Friday sermon had condemned the movement as *fitna*. This was in line with the strategy of the Minister of Interior, who had the government issue a statement condemning the movement earlier in the month, as Hamoudi explained.

The long cycle of protests ended in a court of justice. On 26 June 2018, "after eight months of biased, unfair and surreal proceedings, the criminal division of the Casablanca Court of Appeal pronounced very harsh verdicts for the movement's leaders, from 10 to 20 years" (AMDH, 2018). For the AMDH there is no doubt that "in Morocco, we're seeing a continuation of the Years of Lead" (2018).

It is clear from these events that both the judicial system and the interior ministry are instruments of the *sulta*. The palace, the real centre of power, decides when and how to use both; depending on the political juncture it can be more clement or more severe. In any case, the decision of how to use those instruments of power rests solely with the king and his advisors, and there is no independence whatsoever, putting to rest the idea that Morocco has in any way transformed into a country where the rule of law prevails, as its liberal image might suggest.

The events in the Rif had an impact on how ordinary citizens feel about the freedom to participate in peaceful protests and demonstrations, negatively affecting how political participation occurs. While prior to the events nearly 54 per cent of Moroccans stated that this freedom was guaranteed to a great or medium extent, after the events only 43 per cent thought so. The same argument can be made regarding the freedom to join civil associations and organisations. While after the 2011 demonstrations, more than 73 per cent of Moroccans

20 The Arabic term *hirak* means "agitation" or "protest". It is applied to the Rif protest movement to mean "the protest par excellence".

in 2013 and 89 per cent in 2016 stated that the freedom to join was guaranteed to a great or medium extent, only 67 per cent thought so in 2019. All this speaks to a tangible change on the part of the state authorities in dealing with dissent. In fact, the extent to which these freedoms are protected always depends on how the monarchy perceives the political situation. When individual freedoms and human rights are context-dependent and are subjected to the whims of an unelected and unaccountable institution, it is impossible to speak of the rule of law.

5.2 Where does Rif Hirak come from?

The Rif protests are very interesting, but not only for their political dimension and the discursive link they have with the 20 February Movement and its emphasis on political change (Monjib, 2020). They also crucially bring attention to the legacy of the *economic reforms* that the monarchy has undertaken over the past 20 years. This connection between political reforms and the economic model of development has not escaped the attention of the majority of scholars of Morocco and also emerges from the most acute analyses of our interviewees. For an anonymous respondent,

> [the monarchy's change] has been neo-liberal from independence. While the national parties kept the country backward, [21] the 2000s were the years in which the country could finally free its energy. (al-Omrani, economics expert, 23 September 2019)

Mounib agreed regarding the neo-liberal nature of the king's reformism, but she evaluated it differently and more negatively:

> We really believed [in] it at the beginning…also because the reformation process included the [relative] liberalisation of the independent press and the acceptance of the women movement's requests….Many of us believed that this was a process leading to democracy. When I look at this period, however, with the eyes of today, I realise that it was all but opening the country to the foreign investment. (Mounib, MP for the FGD, 24 September 2019)

Some of the most important reforms were indeed intended to open the Moroccan market to foreign companies that were supposed to bring capital to support the country's development. The so-called "opening" meant also creating a comfortable investment environment for both foreign companies and the local bourgeoisie. Morocco, according to the king's vision, had to become a modern country with a proper environment for development and a western style of life, but this rendered the welfare state more fragile (Catusse, 2009) and led to the capture of the state by those businesses with links to the palace. This process included democratic reforms because they would facilitate economic growth, and, as we have seen, the first half of the 2000s was rife with "optimism and constructivism" as Benabdallah explained. Morocco did indeed experience a partial economic growth, but this was insufficient, unequal and localised. The export-led growth proved to be somewhat of a failure (Harrigan & El-Said, 2009), and the reform of the financial sector did not provide the expected growth either (Yu, Hassan, Mamun, & Hassan, 2014).

21 The nationalist parties (*wataniyya*) are the Istiqlal Party, the USFP and the former Communist Party (today the PPS).

While macroeconomic indicators suggest that poverty has decreased considerably during the reign of Mohammed VI, the reality is that a multidimensional approach to poverty assessment reveals that both poverty and inequality have grown (Oxfam France, 2019). The report states that in terms of income distribution, Morocco is the most inequitable country in North Africa and in the bottom half of the most unequal countries in the world; the rise in inequality represents a grave risk for continuing the fight against poverty (Oxfam France, 2019). The issue of inequality is particularly significant and is at the root of various social movements and campaigns – including the boycott of specific companies – that have recently emerged both locally and nationally.

For Rachid Aourraz, an expert on economic policy, the problem is that the economic development that was planned and put in practice has not been able to lead the country to the expected economic boom. Notwithstanding an average annual growth of between 3 per cent and 3.5 per cent over the past two decades, the country has not been able to make the necessary shift to catch up to better-performing developing countries. The enormous investment efforts in transportation infrastructure, the Tangier industrial parks and the Casablanca Financial City, among other projects, have not been sufficient to attract foreign companies that would produce high value-added goods and services in Morocco. The expansion of trade links into Sub-Saharan Africa is not enough to compensate. Crucially, the economic system is still not able to create the number of jobs needed for those entering the labour market. According to Aourraz, estimates suggest that over the past few years the economy has created 100,000 jobs per year but has been confronted with 400,000 new job seekers each year. The result is that according to Arab Barometer data, 70 per cent of the youth wish to emigrate. In addition, the economy is the main preoccupation of ordinary Moroccans and the majority think that the economic situation has been and is dire, which puts pressure on the political system. According to Masbah

> the desire for emigration may well be caused by a perception and not always a real state of economic despair. It is a clear sign, however, of a lack of hope for the future as well as a lack of trust in this model of development. (Masbah, Director of the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis, 13 September 2019)

For Aourraz, the real problem Morocco faces is that

> economic liberalisation without a real democratisation cannot work because economic operators do not trust the accountability of the system. The result is increasing crony capitalism and the opportunism of those who are able to be close to the circle of power [i.e., in the palace]. It is to be highlighted here the problematic role the monarchy plays in all of this. (Aourraz, expert on economic policy, 18 September 2019)

As already mentioned, the system favours companies and businesses intimately linked to the palace. More worryingly, the most powerful economic actor in the country is also the king who, through different companies and holdings, is involved in myriad economic sectors. This represents a problem in terms of accountability, fair competition and legal protections, particularly for foreign companies, which end up playing a corrupt game to remain in country (Akesbi, Berrada, Oubenal, & Saadi, 2017).

For Mounib, the consequence of this neo-liberal model is generalised corruption:

> So, finally the investors came in….First, they look for cheap labour and second, the elites of the country, through the complicity and collaboration of foreign investors, found an easier way to bring their money abroad, to put it in secure hands outside the country. (Mounib, MP for the FGD, 24 September 2019)

This suggests that there is very little re-investment in the local economy, a point that Achcar (2013) has made convincingly about Arab economies more broadly. According to Aourraz:

> Foreign companies do not invest into the strategic sectors. The national entrepreneurs are the ones who could invest in strategic production (i.e., heavy industrialisation); and those are investments for the long term and they need to trust in the system in the long term. (Aourraz, expert on economic policy, 18 September 2019)

The lack of competition then becomes an obstacle because no economic actor can trust a system in which a competitor is the dominant political institution in the system. A decentralisation plan to ensure that regions would be able to establish their own priorities using democratic principles did not succeed. Houdret and Harnisch (2019) discovered that

> The reform articulates important democratic principles and formally opens new spaces of action that may facilitate more efficient and participative governance. However, historical legacies of centralised control, few opportunities for participation, low institutional capacities and weak accountability, and also unclear regulations within the reform, are still hindering effective decentralisation. (Houdret & Harnisch, 2019, p 935)

As mentioned earlier, one of the crucial shortcomings of the system is its inability to reduce the wealth gap between social groups, as the king himself seemed to have finally acknowledged in July of 2019:

> The effects of the progress and the achievements made have not, unfortunately, been felt by all segments of Moroccan society….Indeed, some citizens may not directly feel their positive impact on their living conditions…in terms of helping them meet their daily needs, especially in the areas of basic social services, the reduction of social disparities and the consolidation of the middle class. (Morocco World News, 2019)

While this has been an historical problem for Moroccan society since independence, the spectacular investment that was concentrated only in certain areas of the country doubled the lack of confidence in the system and created a tinderbox.

5.3 Human rights and social malaise

The crisis of the reformist experience and the worsening of the human rights situation are strictly linked to the chronic social strife and the failure of the developmental model that the monarchy has implemented over the past 20 years and compounded by decreased social spending and the interference of international financial institutions (Hanieh, 2015). While cracking down on the Rif movement, the monarchy began to revise its stance on the country's models of economic and social development. This was evident during the king's speech on Throne Day 2019, which was the 20th anniversary of his coronation. He acknowledged:

> In recent years, our development model has proven to be inadequate in terms of helping us meet the growing needs of a segment of the population, reduce social inequalities and

> tackle regional disparities….It is a fact that, at times, we did not accomplish all that we were hoping to achieve….I realise that, though important, infrastructure development and institutional reforms are not enough on their own. (Morocco World News, 2019)

The post-2016 political crisis with its loss of credibility of the political elite was the result of the crisis of trust towards the reformist model of Mohammed VI that seemed to account for both a lack of democratisation and economic development. At least this seemed the lesson to be learned from the Rif movement. Mohammed VI reacted to the new situation with tried-and-tested strategies that would deflect blame away from him, calling for the formation of an independent committee to examine the situation, the reshuffle of the government and a renewed reformist drive. Fabiani highlights a number of proposed reforms designed to meet at least in part the demands of the protesters:

> The first initiative has been the re-introduction of military conscription – an ill-defined project that has been imposed in a top-down manner on Morocco's political class and population. Among its many stated goals, this law aims to provide an opportunity for young Moroccans (particularly for those who have dropped out of school) to acquire a set of transferable skills that should contribute to raising human capital levels… more promising the new education bill and the goal of broadening access to pre-school facilities to all four- and five-year-olds by 2028. These measures aim to overhaul Morocco's educational system… finally, the authorities have recently injected some momentum into the discussion on competition. The existence of monopolies and cartels between the main economic actors in almost all domestic markets has hampered productivity growth and depressed innovation and job creation…by targeting fuel distributor Afriquia (owned by Akhanouch himself), dairy firm Centrale Danone, and bottled water company Sidi Ali, online activists have shed light on the incestuous ties between political power and some of the biggest enterprises in the country. (Fabiani, 2019)

Before that, however, the king made sure to silence the leadership of the Rif movement, creating a climate of fear. It is not clear what kind of new reformist dynamic this new initiative can really set in motion, although the fiction of democratisation seems clear to most.

6 The inescapable contradictions of the Moroccan model

What emerges from all of this is the contradiction between the many reforms that have been put in place and the broad dissatisfaction with the outcomes of those reforms. A further paradox is that many Moroccans argue that they enjoy a number of important political freedoms and they can exercise them despite suggesting that they do not live in a democracy.

The political system is open enough for political parties to operate and campaign, but the tutelage of the palace is inescapable. In addition to having to recognise the monarch as the predominant political actor in the system, elected officials are reduced to being the "executors" of policies designed and conceived by unelected and unaccountable bodies appointed by the king. Individuals can join parties and enjoy a broad range of freedoms, but such freedoms are at the monarch's mercy. Thus, there are red lines that cannot be crossed (the figure and powers of the king key among them) and issues that cannot be discussed. When criticism challenges the regime it is swiftly extinguished using repressive measures. Elections take place regularly and are considered free and fair, but they do not lead to responsive elected bodies because such bodies do not have accountable decision-making

powers, hence the poor turnout. Furthermore, some parties are excluded because they fail to recognise the primacy of the king. The largest party will form a government, as the 2011 Constitution provides.

Yet, there is also widespread awareness that elected representatives still operate within severe constraints. The monarch enjoys considerable executive powers as provided in the Constitution and significant informal power, which allows him to dictate his agenda to the government. Between 2011 and 2016, the PJD-led government attempted to somewhat challenge monarchical dominance but failed. The majority of scholars argue that the role of the monarchy is the stumbling block on the road towards democratisation and the reason why there is such a profound disconnect between citizens and state institutions. Citizens know that the monarchy is in charge of the policy process and are, therefore, reluctant to participate in elections and trust political parties and parliament because the mechanisms and institutions in place do not deliver what they promise. The failure of the economic development model that the king put forth upon coming to power has not reduced inequality (Bogaert, 2018), which is the most pressing issue for ordinary citizens. If anything, it has aggravated inequality, and small, delusive political openings are scant compensation. It would be, therefore, tempting to argue that the monarchy and its commitment to remain the central unassailable and unaccountable dominant institution in Morocco is to blame for the country's crisis. There is truth to this, but there are other compounding factors.

First is the uneven and at times limited pressure from below to push for more liberalising reforms that eventually lead to democratisation. While it is true that the monarchical regime has put in place a number of institutional obstacles for actors who demand reforms that would see a considerable reduction in monarchical powers, survey data suggest that the majority of Moroccans are more preoccupied with socio-economic issues than with political-institutional ones. The two sets of issues might not be easily separated in practice, but when asked what are the most important traits of a democratic system, the majority of Moroccans mention economic equality and an end to corruption (ArabTrans, n.d.). This means that issues of accountability, pluralism and human rights are not perceived as crucial.

Linked to the first point is the realisation on the part of many Moroccans that pushing demands for democratisation might lead the country to chaos and conflict. The regime naturally plays on those fears, but the experience of Morocco's Arab neighbours since 2011 weighs heavily on the strategies of political actors opposed to the monarchy. The fear of insecurity and instability is strong.

7 Conclusion

It is impossible to foresee what the future holds for Morocco. Will the monarchical model of governing continue to work? Will it be able to deal with the contradictions inherent in the system, especially in a regional context where demands for democracy and development have become more urgent? How can the seemingly never-ending democratisation of the country be dealt with?

These questions elicit the same tired responses. System parties argue that there is no alternative to the monarchy and even anti-system parties have difficulty imagining a country without a leading role for the monarchy. Interviewees repeat that the 300-year-old institution represents the model of the Moroccan nation-state, with the king maintaining unity between the diverse cultural and regional sensibilities across the country. For the administrative parties, the king is the real centre of the system and he is the only one who can guarantee development and stability. For the opportunistic parties, more reforms are necessary but within the monarchical frame. They realise that they do not have the strength to impose their will on the king, but they hope for a shake-up in the general political context, as occurred in 2011, that could shift the balance of power in their favour.

In the meantime, socio-economic conditions are not improving at the rate that was hoped and expected, and corruption is a real concern for many citizens. This explains why street politics, which have characterised Morocco for a number of years, seem to be gaining strength. According to Mounib, the protests of the past three years have shown that there is greater awareness among the people, especially the younger sectors of the population. Citizens are taking more risks and want to test the limits of freedom of expression and protest set by the regime.

What can, however, be said is that Morocco is not and never was democratising. There is no democratisation process when the most important political institution of the country has the power to excuse itself from the process. As long as the monarchy holds on to its executive power and has the ability to guide reforms, there is no real democratisation, and political reforms become simply tinkering with the system to ensure the monarchy survives as the sole, true decision-maker. The system can only offer limited liberalisation because the central institution is both unelected and unaccountable. This has significant repercussions for the degree of accountability of the political system and its pluralism. While there are a number of elected institutions, decision-making power does not rest with them. A plurality of voices are permitted to participate in the public debate – be they parties, unions or civil society organisations – but there are issues and voices that cannot be heard because Moroccan pluralism has strict limits. In turn, overly critical voices are repressed through the instrumental use of the security apparatus and the justice system, demonstrating that individual freedoms and human rights are contingent, rather than absolute as they should be in a democratic state.

Shortly after Mohammed VI's ascent to the throne, Maghraoui (2001) wrote that the new monarch had "two alternatives: he [could] invent a new 'ruling bargain', prolonging his father's authoritarian rule in a new guise, or he [could] spearhead serious political reforms". Two decades on, the same two alternatives remain. The political reforms the king has promoted have been superficial, and a new authoritarian bargain has indeed been struck. The regime's rhetoric of democratisation and human rights no longer adequately obscures Morocco's reality.

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Appendix

Table A1: Names and qualifications of the interviewees (September 5-30, 2019)

Name	Role	Recorded	Date	Place
Foued Abdelmoumni	General Secretary of Transparency International	Recorded	09/11/2019	Rabat
Jamahiri Abdulhamid	Leader of the UNFP	Not recorded	09/17/2019	Casablanca
Adnan al-Omrani	Economics expert	Recorded	09/23/2019	Casablanca
Essaid Ameskane	General Secretary of the Popular Movement	Not recorded	09/26/2019	Rabat
Rachid Aourraz	Expert on economic policy	Recorded	09/18/2019	Rabat
Nabil Benabdallah	Secretary general of the PPS	Recorded	09/27/2019	Rabat
Abdelali Hamidin	Leading member of the PJD	Not recorded	09/11/2019	Rabat
Omar Iharchane	Member of the general secretariat of AWI	Recorded	09/10/2019	Casablanca
Amina Lotfi	President of ADFM	Partly recorded	09/18/2019	Rabat
Monjib Maati	Civil society activist	Recorded	09/09/2019	Rabat
Mohammad Masbah	Director of the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis	Recorded	09/13/2019	Rabat
Aziz Mouchouat	Sociologist, former journalist and expert on civil society	Recorded	09/09/2019	Casablanca
Nabila Mounib	MP for the FGD	Recorded	09/24/2019	Casablanca
Mounaim Outhi	Member of the PADS-FGD and activist in the 20 February Movement	Recorded	09/20/2019	Casablanca
Youssef Raissouni	AMDH	Recorded	09/24/2019	Rabat
Lahcen Sekkouri	MP for the Popular Movement	Not recorded	09/26/2019	Rabat
Mohamad Wafi	Civil society activist and union worker	Recorded	09/07/2019	Casablanca
Abdellatif Wahbi	Leader of the current Mustaqbal	Recorded	09/16/2019	Rabat

Source: Authors

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