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## Morocco: Modelling Stability in Turbulent Waters

Tim Milosch<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Morocco and Egypt both experienced similar socioeconomic challenges in the last decade, but the Moroccan monarchy has been able to address those challenges without prompting civil conflict or anti-government rebellions. This presents an interpretive problem for the political science literature that views socioeconomic trends as being primary indicators of political instability. This case study proposes a more nuanced, multidisciplinary approach to the analysis of Morocco's political culture by mapping findings in historical and anthropological research on to a political process framework in order to explain the Moroccan regime's stability in terms of its religious legitimacy. It concludes with an assessment of how this knowledge can be used by countries outside the Middle East North Africa region (MENA) to better partner with MENA countries in developing stable political cultures.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Islam, Middle East, Morocco, North Africa.

JEL code: H8, I2, N9, N4, Z0.

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### 1.0 Introduction

Post Arab Spring analyses of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region largely focus on the causes of the many uprisings and civil conflicts that have dominated the region since 2011 (Gause, 2011; Bellin, 2012). This literature has sought the causes of conflict and instability in the hopes of preventing future outbreaks, or of remedying current conflicts by evaluating economic, demographic and other quantitative markers within unstable political societies (Joffe, 2011; Campante & Chor, 2012; Chalard, 2015). However, little has been said of those countries that have avoided the regional instability altogether, and, in the case of Morocco, remain critical (Molina, 2011). This is especially surprising when considering a country like Morocco that experiences many of the challenges that have proven too difficult to manage for other regimes in the region, yet has thus far been able to survive the turmoil (Buehler, 2015).

This essay reviews the literature on the role of religious legitimacy within Moroccan political culture and considers how it may serve as a useful explanation for the survivability of the Moroccan regime in a region characterized by unstable regimes.

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<sup>1</sup> Political Science, Claremont Graduate University, Email: tmilosch@gmail.com.

This case study, therefore, takes the form of a literature survey within the political science field, identifying shortcomings within the explanatory power of that literature before branching out into literature in cultural anthropology and history to suggest ways in which those analytical gaps can be filled.

I argue that the Moroccan monarchy's high levels of religious legitimacy provide the necessary capital for a judicious mix of reform and coercion, which in turn allow it to escape high levels of unrest even when experiencing internal and external pressures similar to other countries in the region. As such, Morocco presents several helpful insights on cultural influences and political stability. Among those lessons are defining the contextualized role of religion in shaping political values within a country; understanding how regime responses to opposition influence the nature of opposition; and properly assessing a country's history in analyzing its political development.

This study first provides a brief explanation of methodology before presenting an overview of relevant political science literature on Morocco in order to develop a field-specific picture of the country's regime and politics. It then introduces a theoretical framework of political processes as a set of criteria by which to analyze religious legitimacy and its effects, which are discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections before concluding with policy recommendations.

## 2.0 Methodology

The main thrust of this paper's argument is that explanations for Moroccan political stability require attention be given to elements of Moroccan culture not commonly treated in political literature. It argues that literature from other academic fields can, and should, be merged with the political literature to better understand the nuances of Moroccan political culture within a theoretical framework derived from political analyses. In order to justify such a crossover, the methodology of this paper relies on analyzing the intersection of two groupings of academic literature on Morocco - the political and the cultural.

The first grouping draws on a sampling of political science literature ranging from 1977 to 2015 that assesses (generally and specifically) Moroccan politics. From this grouping, I draw a representative theoretical framework from Hafez (2004) that can be used to assess the stability of regimes. Hafez's political process framework provides a set of three criteria for assessing regime stability: political environment, mobilization structures and ideological frames. Onto this theoretical framework, I map a specific aspect of the Moroccan monarchy's legitimacy - its religious legitimacy.

The second sampling of literature draws on historical and anthropological research to define and analyze the elements of religious legitimacy that are so crucial to the survival of the Moroccan monarchy: The development of religious legitimacy, the promulgation of that legitimacy, and how that legitimacy influences current Moroccan politics with special attention given to regime responses to opposition groups.

## 3.0 Literature review

If one were to approach the average American and ask him or her to characterize the politics of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), they would likely be presented with a list of conflicts and violent groups: Yemen, Syria, Iraq, ISIS, Hezbollah, etc. It is a generalization rooted in a generation-old perception of the region as being antithetical to enlightened progress and governance (Said, 1997). Michael Hudson provides the classically pessimistic perspective on politics in the region:

*When I look across the Arab world today, I can only conclude that the basic problems of identity, authority, and equality remain unresolved. Because they are unresolved, Arab politics appear to be going neither forward nor backward: the radical future seems unreachable and the traditional past unrecoverable. Politics thus is largely the art of manipulating appealing ideological symbols and trying to generate personal popularity (Hudson, 1977).*

Hudson's basic conclusion of unresolved conflicts in Arab political culture of the late 1970s forged the basic framework around which successive cadres of academics continue, to view the MENA region: Authoritarian, unstable and prone to conflict (Blunden, 1994; Mednicoff, 1998; Cavatorta, 2001). To be fair to Hudson, his predictions about future conflict in the region seemed accurate as the 1980s and 1990s saw flare-ups of civil violence in countries as diverse as Algeria, Egypt, and Lebanon (Hafez, 2004). These conflicts not only continued into the twenty-first century, but have intensified as the Islamic State (IS or ISIS) and its imitators take advantage of political upheaval in the wake of the 2011 Arab Spring to carve out their own fiefdoms of radicalism. With rich empirical proof to justify Hudson's pessimism, academics flock to study the causes of instability with the mindset that social, political, and cultural characteristics of instability are endemic to the region (Waterbury, 2001; Joffe 2011; Campante and Chor, 2012). This is not to say that the literature on North African regimes is monolithic. Interpretive frameworks vary from the geopolitical (Cavatorta, 2001) to democratization (Den Hartog, 1998), and debate exists on the efficacy of authoritarian stability (Bellin, 2012 and Gause, 2011). Rarely are cultural institutions like religion and education considered in this literature, and, if they are, their role is heavily generalized (Tessler, 2002), or downplayed (Den Hartog 1998). By and large, the literature on North African politics largely maintains the pessimistic view of regime stability articulated by Hudson in 1977.

Unfortunately, countries that manage to maintain stability and peaceful transitions of power during the last thirty years of tumult are either overlooked as aberrations, or given doubtful outlooks of continued stability. One such country is Morocco (Chalard, 2015). Characterized by Hudson forty years ago as having weak institutions and chronic instability under King Hassan II in the wake of an abortive coup attempt, little thought was given to Morocco's potential stability (Hudson, 1977). Over the period of time between Hudson's prediction and the present day, Morocco has not been immune to the social and political unrest of the region (Molina, 2011). Indeed, the current socio-political situation in Morocco would seem to justify such a view as the nation struggles with chronic unemployment, limited voter turnout in elections, and a general disdain for politics (Wittes, 2008 and Chalard, 2015).

Though characterized by some as a "success" in political liberalization in recent times, Morocco seems to have made few believers among academics as a stable political society (Ulph, 2001; Maghraoui, 2002; Laskier, 2003; Feur, 2015). However, despite sharing regional characteristics of instability and conflict, Morocco has managed peaceful transfers of power between kings, few (and unsuccessful) coup attempts, and a continued program of political liberalization (Willis, 1999). This begs the question, what is Morocco's "secret" to stability?

The question takes on even greater relevance in a post Arab Spring MENA when contrasted with other countries that have experienced greater upheaval. Egypt, for example, has experienced uprisings and coups in the last four years due to political conflicts that were fed by some of the very same socioeconomic factors Morocco suffered from (Sadiki, 2004). However, Morocco escaped the levels of conflict Egypt experienced. Indeed, Egypt can be considered as a contrasting case study regarding stability in the region. As Hafez points, out the country has similar socio-economic conditions to Morocco, as well as the presence of radical Islamist groups (Hafez, 2004). Though a comparative study between Egypt and Morocco would be useful, for purposes of time and space this essay will refer only briefly to Egypt as a contrast to Morocco in terms of evaluating three key variables in stability and regime legitimacy: religion, education, and the government's tight control policies in stopping militant groups. Morocco's unique religious and educational social infrastructure, coupled with a targeted approach of engaging opposition forces, allows the kingdom to defy predictions of political instability. It is not this essay's purpose to prove Morocco's current system of maintaining stability is correct, sustainable, or having the potential to lead to full democracy.

Others work to develop those projections (Feuer, 2015). Rather, the goal of this essay is to endeavor to explain Morocco, as it now presently exists, suspended in an uneasy balance between peace and calamity; walking a fine line between faith and power.

#### 4.0 Theoretical framework

Prior to evaluating the political MENA, attention must be given to the framework around which the evaluation will take place. This paper will rely primarily on utilizing Mohammed Hafez's political process framework and Michael Hudson's analysis of the problems of legitimacy in endeavoring to unpack some of the multifaceted aspects of Morocco's unique political culture. Both writers contribute key thoughts on the issues this paper evaluates.

Hafez's political process framework attempts to make sense of political action and conflict by evaluating the political culture in which a party finds itself:

In sum, the precepts of the political approach suggest at least three dimensions to the study of social movement strategies: political environment, mobilization structures, and ideological frames.... These are distinct aspects of a dynamic process that both channels movement strategies toward moderation or rebellion over time and determines the scope and duration of political violence (Hafez, 2004).

Unlike some thinkers who attempt to explain political upheaval from economic or demographic perspectives (Chalard, 2015), Hafez's approach seeks to explain political cultures that have deviated from the more mechanistic economic interpretations of a society's development and stability. This works admirably in the case of Morocco as it has been noted above that Morocco shares many similar socio-economic traits with less stable nations in the region (Hafez, 2004). In addition, Hafez's approach utilizes characteristics of a political culture that have deeper roots than current economic circumstances (Hafez, 2004).

Of paramount importance to understanding the role a political culture plays in establishing the stability of a nation, it is important to not only look at what creates situations of instability as Hafez does, but also to understand how governments are perceived. This raises the question of legitimacy that Hudson addresses. His analysis of the sources of legitimacy within the Arab world provides a broader context within which to view the interactions between a government and its citizenry. While Hafez focuses on the causes of rebellion, Hudson focuses on the elements of legitimacy and their correlation to a nation's stability (Hudson, 1977). Analysis of a government's legitimacy claims allows for establishing a reading on a political culture's values, and serves as a litmus test of the case country, in this case, Morocco. Having done his seminal work on legitimacy in the 1970s, Hudson's predictions on future stability issues can be tested against the backdrop of Hafez's framework to account for Morocco's ongoing stability.

In that Hudson and Hafez both use Egypt as a case of instability for their respective theses it would be only right to include Egypt's unstable recent history as a counterbalance to Morocco's apparent success. Economically and socially, Egypt has experienced similar trends as Morocco: large demographic shifts from rural to urban population centers, economic recession, high youth unemployment, vocal radical opposition, etc. (Yildirim, 2013 and Traub, 2012). Additionally, Egypt has more or less fulfilled Hudson's earlier predictions of instability and civil unrest in recent times with its stalled democratic reforms. This instability is largely driven by a political dynamic that sees ostracized opposition groups rise up to challenge a ruling regime. The Free Officers, representing the military establishment, in the 1950s and the Muslim Brotherhood both occupied these roles in the late twentieth century, culminating in the back and forth of the two sides following the Arab Spring (Lapidus, 2002 and Wittes, 2008).

Such a shared profile with a country that has a significantly different experience in its recent political past forces us to dig deeper for better explanations of the differing outcomes Morocco and Egypt have experienced in the wake of the Arab Spring.

Such explanations can be found in the role of religion and religious education in establishing legitimacy and the government's use that legitimacy in controlling the more radical elements of opposition groups in Morocco. These elements offer some of the most intriguing contrasts with a country like Egypt. Egypt's proximity to the old centers of Islamic power not only kept its religious development largely orthodox (and susceptible to fundamentalism), but also ensured that political upheaval would be the

norm as sultans and their impostors strove to compete with the power of the earlier empires (Lapidus, 2002). Morocco, on the other hand, took advantage of its location on the periphery of the Islamic world to not only maintain a marginal independence, but also become a haven for more unorthodox religious beliefs and persons that contributed to a unique perspective on Islam and political power, resulting in a strongly legitimized, though oftentimes politically weak, monarchy (Lapidus, 2002). In order to expand on these unique differences, we take a brief look at Morocco's rich history and the political environment that grew out of it.

## 5.0 Morocco's political environment: Roots of religious legitimacy

Evaluating Morocco's religious development amounts to surveying the history of the nation itself as Peter Mandaville notes that with the birth of Islam came the birth of a political system (Mandaville, 2009). The early years of Islam were years of struggle and warfare that gained an empire in the century following the Prophet's death. By 732, the Islamic empire spread from Iraq to Spain and tied vast amounts of land and people together with the common bond of faith. Morocco's experience with Islam thus began, not with the cultural penetration of a religious gospel like that of Christianity in Europe, but with military conquest that placed Islam at the top of the political order.

Islam's preeminent position in this new order became wrapped around the person of the sultan as the twin threads of history and religion were spun together at the end of the eighth century. With the collapse of Umayyad dynasty in 750, the Abbasids moved the capital of the empire from Damascus to Baghdad, further alienating the periphery of the empire, and losing the ability to effectively control the lands of the Maghreb (Lewis, 1995). Into this region came Idris Ibn Abdalla, a Shiite heretic fleeing the authorities. Taking refuge with the Christian Berber people, Ibn Abdalla converted them to Islam, and then used them to establish a sultanate that has more or less maintained its place down to the present day (Hudson, 1977). Not only did Ibn Abdalla successfully establish a dynasty, but as a Sufi and a *sharif* (direct descendent of the Prophet), Ibn Abdalla established a conservative order of government that tightly knit together the practice of faith in Morocco to loyalty to the sultan, which is embodied today in the respect that is given to the current king (Traub, 2012 and Hudson, 1977). Thus, in the first half century of Morocco's conversion to Islam, the country had paradoxically established itself as a refuge for unorthodox Muslims and as a conservative Islamic regime where the legitimacy of the monarch was closely tied to his personal holiness, Sufi practice, and *sharifan* lineage (Lapidus, 2002).

This early affinity for unorthodox practices in Islam, and peaceful interaction between different faiths (note Ibn Abdalla's peaceful conversion of Christian tribes) contributed to developing a fairly open and tolerant religious culture in the Middle Ages and into the Ottoman period. This came at a time of persecution for most Sufi brotherhoods throughout the Muslim world, including Egypt. Suspicious of their mystical ways and general opposition to the Ottoman Empire, most Muslim regimes rejected Sufism (though some Sufis retained offices in the Ottoman bureaucracy) (Lewis, 1995). Thus, as countries forming the Islamic core resisted Sufi influence and were increasingly affected by European expansion, even as they fought amongst themselves, Morocco's Sufis gained great influence by their connection to ruling dynasties and their positions among the intellectual elite. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Sufis thus presented themselves as a strong opposition bloc to the monarchy and Lapidus notes that such interplay between the Sufis, the monarchy, and the complex web of tribal alliances that made up the Moroccan political scene at the time made Sufism a key element of political legitimacy (Lapidus, 2002). Such legitimacy would have been enhanced by the perceived saintly qualities of the Sufi masters and their descent from the line of the Prophet (Lindholm, 1992).

Though Morocco maintained its independence for many years in the face of European encroachment, Spanish and French regimes eventually established a protectorate in 1912. During the years of European rule (1912-1956), the unique properties of Morocco's Islamic tradition and its ties to the monarchy had an indelible impact on the Moroccan response to colonization and the eventual resistance movement. Most of the religious intelligentsia in Morocco did not openly resist European influence, choosing "instead to maintain their religious integrity" until that integrity was threatened (Eickelman, 1992). Armed resistance

did not come until the French attempted to exile Muhammad V in 1953, at which point Moroccan's sense of national pride and religious loyalty to the main Sufi leader asserted itself. As such, Morocco's independence movement was uniquely tied to the person of the king in a way that other independence movements in the region were not (Lapidus, 2002). The independence movement thus gained strong support not only because there was no popular regime colluding with the French, but also because French cultural values had not taken very strong root in Morocco. Moroccan education continued in its traditional forms that strongly emphasized religious learning and Sufi qualities of submission to spiritual authorities, which will be discussed later (Lapidus, 2002 and Salame, 2001). Unlike Egypt, which emerged from its struggle for independence with politics divided between European-educated elites and growing Islamist opposition groups (Al-Anani, 2013), Morocco came into independence with a popular monarchy that possessed the doubly strong legitimacy of religious authority and nationalist credibility (Razi, 1990). Thus, as core states like Egypt began to experience civil tensions and conflicts resulting from experiments in secular nationalism, Morocco maintained itself as a uniquely Islamic state, closely connected to its traditional Islamic practices (Lapidus, 2002).

From this brief survey of Moroccan history, we can draw the following conclusions: First, Morocco developed on a largely independent trajectory in both religion and politics when compared with the rest of the Islamic domain. Second, though affected in appearance by European rule, Morocco maintained its unique values via a strong infrastructure of religious education that helped maintain national loyalty to the person of the king. Thirdly, the independence movement rallied the nation behind a common authority figure, giving the monarchy strong legitimacy claims at the nationalist and religious levels. Finally, this unique trajectory emphasized the Sufi qualities of spiritual authority and discipleship that developed a political culture that emphasized religious legitimacy and muted opposition in the face of such legitimacy.

These observations are in stark contrast to the Egyptian experience. During the nineteenth century, the consolidation of religious education under Al-Azhar led to a religious establishment largely disconnected from the center of power, while British colonial rule elevated a business elite that filled the ranks of the modern, post-colonial military (Lapidus, 2002). That military, heavily influenced by American and European models, developed a more secular-nationalist ethos that ultimately rebelled against the liberal ruling elite in the form of the Free Officers of the 1950s (Hudson, 1977).

Thus, in a post-World War II Egypt, three power blocs emerged: "... the liberal, secularized older generation, the Islamic and lower-class reformers, and the new generation of technically educated army intelligentsia..." (Lapidus, 2002)." For its part, the bourgeois business class in Egypt was roughly divided among the three groups, making the middle class (so often a stabilizing factor in political societies) a non-entity (Waterbury, 2001).

Thus, in contrast to Morocco, the last two hundred years of Egyptian history have seen the emergence of competing power blocs, the cooptation of the middle class by those blocs, and a certain consolidation and marginalization of religious education. While rebellion against colonialism seems to have unified the political culture of Morocco, it appears to have fractured that of Egypt.

## 6.0 Mobilization structures: Religious education and civic values

The broad contours of the development of Moroccan religious and political development being outlined; it becomes necessary to investigate what allows such a culture to continue even in the midst of recent upheaval. A clue can be found within the development of the religious education system of Morocco, which was heavily influenced by the Sufi mystics. Eickelman's in depth study on the development of Moroccan religious education over the centuries draws a strong distinction between the Western model of education that emphasizes critical thinking and initiative, and the Moroccan religious model that emphasizes rote memorization and obedience to authority (Eickelman, 1992). Though most Moroccan children do attend schools heavily influenced by the secular Western model, religious studies continue to play a large role in Moroccan public education, particularly in preschool and primary grades. In these

lower grades, religious education emphasizes the memorization of the Quran and the practice of being a good Muslim. It is important here to recall the connection between Islam in Morocco and fealty to the king. In Morocco, being a good Muslim entails respecting and supporting the monarchy. As Eickelman points out, such an education influences not just the Moroccan religious mindset, but it's political nuances as well (Eickelman, 1992).

Among the values that find their way into religious education in formative years (and in public education later on) is the emphasis on the power of the carrier of knowledge, a holdover from the days of the Sufi masters (Spadola, 2014). Lindholm notes that the disciplined relationship between a Sufi master and his disciple was so strict that the student was to essentially die to himself and give blind obedience to the master (Lindholm, 1992).

This strict philosophy of disciplined obedience had two effects on learning in the Moroccan context specifically. First, it infuses the knowledge possessed and promulgated by the Sufi masters with a great deal of authority, which has the secondary effect of limiting the body of available knowledge and its lawful application (Eickelman, 1992). Thus, the action a student takes in relation to his master has strict religious limits placed on it that the student would not violate for fear of affecting his eternal state.

The application to political culture is readily made when one is reminded of Razi's discussion on the sources of legitimacy. If, as Razi contends, political legitimacy is most clearly gained and maintained via appeals to nationalism and religion, the power of the master-student demand of obedience and rote memorization would suggest the foundations of a largely cooperative citizenry (Razi, 1990). Just how cooperative is this citizenry? Lapidus notes that unlike many Middle Eastern countries that ascribed to either secular socialism or revolutionary fundamentalism in the post-colonial years, Morocco is the only state besides Saudi Arabia that continues to characterize itself as a conservative and "traditional Islamic state" (Lapidus, 2002). This is not to say that the Moroccan populace is naïve, or unshakeable in its support for the political status quo. Hudson suggested latent instability in the 1970s, which Larbi Sadiki in part confirmed in the 2007 bread riots, and which once again reared its head in the Arab Spring and the February 20 Movement (Sadiki, 2004, Hudson, 1977 and Sakthivel, 2015). However, it is crucial to note a couple points here. First, one cannot help but notice the somewhat passive aggressive nature that popular frustration takes in Morocco as demonstrated by record low voter turnout in 2007 elections, which rose in the September 2015 election, but still hover at around fifty percent participations (Feuer, 2015 and "Local Election Results", 2015). These elections saw not only low numbers at the polls, but, also thousands of spoiled ballots with anti-government messages on them (Wittes, 2008). The second thing that ought to be noted is that despite such signs of discontent as public demonstrations, revolutionary Islamist forces have failed to win over a segment of the population capable of having an influential oppositional voice in politics (Lapidus, 2002 and Sakthivel, 2015). Indeed, young Moroccans are developing a fresh interest in the country's Sufi heritage (Bekkaoui & Laremont, 2011).

By contrast, popular disapproval and opposition in Egypt often finds its base of support in educational institutions. Islamists and socialists of the postcolonial society diligently worked, and still work, to gather recruits on Egyptian university campuses (Burgat, 2003). Not only did institutions of learning in Egypt become the primary channels through which opposition forces distilled their message, but it was also highly propagandized by the state as demonstrated by Nasser's drive to secularize education during his rule (Burgat, 2003). As the secular Egyptian government moved to control education, Islamist parties like the Muslim Brotherhood moved to continue spreading their message through religious schools that they established alongside local mosques (Lapidus, 2002). When granted limited freedom by Sadat, the Brotherhood returned to their campus groups and again made universities a major part of their outreach (Norton, 2013). Thus it is notable that Egyptian education has been permeated with propaganda by both religious and secular forces giving little sense of being grounded in any one tradition. Taken together with the tumultuous political history of Egypt, both leading up to and after colonial rule, the unsettled nature of both religious and secular education in Egypt should come as no surprise.

Though Waterbury notes the conflict over education between government and opposition forces in the more secular Muslim countries like Turkey and Algeria (and Egypt could be added to this list), he does not consider such a conflict to be of the greatest political ramifications because the extent to which education establishes social values is debatable (Waterbury, 2001). However, the debate over education appears to have real relevance to the question of political stability, and there also seems to be certain cultural norms and values that are passed on via an educational system (Lindholm, 1992). In the case of Morocco, close ties between religious education and political values have contributed to a generally less aggressive pattern of political opposition while the more politicized trajectory of Egyptian higher education has had the opposite effect.

## 7.0 Ideological frames: Religious legitimacy and responding to opposition

When looking at how stability is built and maintained in a political society, particularly one with all the socioeconomic pressures Morocco faces, it is important to understand the position of opposition forces. Though much analysis in Middle Eastern politics and history is given to the tension and conflict between nations of the Middle East and those of the West, growing amounts of scholarship are evaluating the internal tensions and conflicts that seem to keep the region in a constant state of flux (Selim, 2014, Khalil and Malik, 2013). Of particular note is the development over the last 20-30 years of Islamic fundamentalism as a growing voice of dissent and opposition. Concurrent with the analysis of these groups has been scholarly work evaluating regime response to such opposition and the role such a response has in either integrating these groups into the political system or fomenting their rebellion. Hafez demonstrates that while socioeconomic, and even ideological, issues may create conditions of rebellion, they are by no means sufficient conditions (Hafez, 2004). Rather, Hafez and others point out that more often than not, situations of rebellion can be created by a regime preventing opposition groups from meaningful access to institutions of power while being indiscriminate in their targeting and persecution of such groups (Hafez, 2004 and Wiktorowicz, 2003).

Using Hafez's dichotomy of access and constraint, very different pictures emerge of political relations between regimes and opposition groups in Egypt and Morocco. At the time of Moroccan independence, little opposition faced the monarchy as the French attempt to exile the king made him a national hero. At least initially, the king's position greatly reduced any sense of dissent. However, as time went on and the socioeconomic woes of the country deepened, it became apparent that more than just charisma would be necessary to maintain the nation's political stability, especially as the force of Islamic fundamentalism began to make itself felt in Iran and Egypt and the monarchy transitioned from Muhammad V to his son Hassan II. Opposition to Hassan II in the 1970s took many forms as abortive coup and assassination attempts threatened the position and life of the king. However, despite the dramatic attacks on the monarchy, they failed to achieve any kind of popular support, and indeed the general population appeared to be somewhat "apathetic" (Hudson, 1977). Previous analysis on the unity of religious and nationalist sentiment, coupled with the consistent values that have been taught in the educational arena on faith and obedience suggest that this perceived apathy may be more out of loyalty as Hudson himself notes the presence of "a large constituency of the pious, led by the ulama, with their special veneration for the office and the family [of the king]" (Hudson, 1977). As such, Hassan utilized these ties to pass many key "reforms" in the aftermath of the coup attempts that allowed for a general form of political opposition though real power remained in the person of the king (Sadiki, 2004).

Despite what some commentators would consider being limited liberalization at best and a sham at worst, the reforms of the 1970s and 1980s led to more reforms in the 1990s with the ascension to the throne of Muhammad VI. This is indeed a curious model for stability maintenance - reform instead of suppression - but it seems to fit with Morocco's unique past that Wittes characterizes as "peaceful pluralism" (Wittes, 2008). The system that has emerged is an electoral system that institutionalizes public debate and discourse while the ever-wary monarchy retains most of the real power in the system (Maghraoui, 2003). Though Wittes argues that this is unsustainable as Moroccan voters grow increasingly disaffected with a parliament generally perceived as impotent, it is important to note that the reforms



and institutions that have been established have produced a generally moderate Islamist opposition as opposed to some of the more violent varieties found elsewhere in the region (Bouyahya, 2015).

Additionally, Ibrahim points out that the credibility of electoral politics in allowing opposition to have access to the institutions of government gained a huge boost in the early elections as opposition parties won large numbers of seats (Ibrahim, 1995). This point goes a long way in demonstrating Hafez's second condition for peaceful opposition: limited regime coercion of opposition groups. Though Hassan II cracked down on his would be assassins and initiated political purges that contributed to a general fear of discussing politics in Morocco, he also allowed the formation of opposition parties in parliament. Though these parties are still limited in their power and capabilities, the fact that they are allowed to operate at all is more than can be said for opposition groups in countries like Egypt that are often harassed by ruling parties. The Moroccan monarchy has wisely chosen to be selective in its targeting of opposition groups, and discriminating in its use of coercive power (Buehler, 2015). In response to protests in the Arab Spring, Muhammed VI quickly suppressed the riots, then followed them up with a pledge to make constitutional changes to give localities a greater say in national policy. Elections based on this new constitution were held in 2015 and saw mixed results for Islamist and liberal parties in terms of electoral gains, which signaled a lack of any unified opposition along fundamentalist lines (Feuer, 2015 and "Local Election Results", 2015).

Though Moroccan democracy leaves much to be desired, and the monarchy routinely manipulates it to achieve political ends, the monarchy's handling of opposition groups and its sagacious use (in the manner and type) of coercion to control said groups is instructive in explaining its continued survival.

Egypt, however, has had a different experience in terms of its electoral politics. In comparing Egypt and Morocco's responses to opposition in the wake of the Arab Spring several contrasts stand out. First, protests against the Moroccan governments were limited and quickly responded to with a balance of coercion and reform. The timeline for Egypt, however, is both well-known and frustrating: The overthrow of the Mubarak regime, followed by the election of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was in turn overthrown by the army (Selim, 2014). As a result, reform has been slow in coming and is often subjected to government and military interference in the name of regime preservation rather than real reform (Selim, 2014). Second, opposition parties, while limited in Morocco are allowed to form and represent a broad range of popular feeling (Sakthivel, 2015). In Egypt, opposition parties continue to be harassed and limited in their formation, and the Muslim Brotherhood, after its brief rule, is an illegal party in all but name, thus prevented from full access to the institutions of power (Selim, 2014). Third, coercion of opposition parties in Egypt has been anything but delicate. Sweeping crackdowns, arrests, executions, and banning of whole groups and parties over the years has contributed to the general feeling in Egypt that the government, regardless of who holds power, is not interested in democracy, but only in control (Hafez, 2004 and Wiktorowicz, 2003). This feeds the revolutionary rhetoric of Islamist groups in particular as they can point to specific and known abuses of power, and it furthermore provides a sense of alienation from the general political process, the combination of which Hafez believes creates the conditions of violent rebellion and severe instability that have characterized Egyptian politics in recent times (Hafez, 2004).

Essentially, the success of the Moroccan monarchy's survival can best be explained here by its creation of an illusion of access wherein opposition parties are allowed limited and localized influence within a context of strict rules and guidelines. As long as these guidelines are followed, there is little to fear of government crackdown and abuse. Furthermore, the monarchy's untiring pursuit and persecution of active radical groups and terrorists has demonstrated that it is capable of swift and ruthless coercion should the rules be broken. This gives added incentives to Islamist parties to moderate their tone and keep their distance from radicals, further alienating them from politics and the public. By wisely differentiating between types of Islamists in its coercion and control of them, the monarchy has also divided the opposition bloc most likely to create rebellion and greater degrees of instability.

It is a delicate balancing act between reform and maintenance of royal power, but the monarchy of Morocco has been in the business of such delicate maneuvering for some time. Using his powerful legitimacy as a religious and national figure, the king has been able to maintain popular support while also allowing for opposition, limited though it may be. However, it stands to reason that with continuing unemployment and a growing population, more changes are in the offing, and the question of Moroccan stability then becomes one of duration. Identifying sources of stability is one thing, but identifying the potential for sustaining that stability is quite another.

## 8.0 Conclusion and policy implications

This essay has endeavored to provide a clear explanation of Morocco's unique experience of stability in post-colonial MENA as being the legitimacy of the government (grounded in religious authority and education) and its handling of opposition and dissent. The former, I noted as being built primarily on Morocco's strong institution of the monarchy and the image it enjoys as being a source of both religious and national leadership, the two strongest aspects of legitimacy (Razi, 1990). I have also shown that the civic values that enable this perception of the monarchy to continue stem in a large part from a history of consistent religious education that permeates Moroccan life. Furthermore, Morocco has sought to steer a middle and cautious course in handling opposition; choosing to work with those more moderate groups, while suppressing the more radical (Traub, 2012 and Buehler, 2015). This approach, combined with cautious reform and general public goodwill towards the king, has kept the forces of opposition and instability at bay. The question, however, remains: How long can it last?

Some analysts certainly feel that sustaining such a condition is untenable; particularly given the exploding population and stagnant economy that produces a range of social and economic stresses (Chalard, 2015). Given the upheaval of the Arab Spring, observers like Traub believe that liberalization of the political process must continue at a faster pace if Morocco is to preserve its fragile sense of peace (Traub, 2012). Certainly this can be an uphill battle as there seems to be different levels of governmental legitimacy in Morocco. While the king is generally looked up to and thought well of, parliament is largely viewed with pessimism as demonstrated in broad voter apathy noted earlier (Feuer, 2015). This lack of support for parliament is cause for concern among most observers and many still accept Hudson's forty-year-old assessment of Morocco as being less than stable (Traub, 2012).

However, while many commentators are busy suggesting what Morocco *should* do, they generally miss what Morocco *has* done. While regional power Egypt was in the throes of civil unrest and rebellion following the 2011 Arab Spring, Morocco not only maintained its stability, but continued its fitful press towards reform and liberalization of its political process. Despite sharing many of the difficult social and economic conditions with its regional neighbors, Morocco chose a different path, and has largely succeeded in the maintenance of internal stability.

Such success should be analyzed for its potential contributions at the policy level. Several helpful principles can be garnered from the Moroccan experience that can assist policy makers in working towards a more stable region. First, a country's practice of Islam must be recognized as being uniquely tied to its stability. How Islam is understood and applied within a particular culture is of utmost importance in comprehending the intricacies of its political behavior. Osman has noted that the idea of democracy is not mutually exclusive to Islam, but that Islamic values and Quranic instructions must inform a Muslim country's understanding of democracy (Osman, 2006). The unique political values that Islam contributes to a culture must be considered in building a stable political order. Secondly, regimes must be willing to accept the results of granting opposition parties a greater degree of access to the political process. Not only does such action grant a greater degree of legitimacy to political institutions, but it also makes it easier to distinguish targets for more forceful coercion (Wittes, 2008). Morocco has successfully ostracized radical Islamist elements in its society by granting a degree of freedom to more moderate Islamist parties, which helps in maintaining law and order without making the regime appear to be a bully (Buehler, 2015). Thirdly, the civic values that are instilled at the educational level cannot be ignored. Though some may doubt the role of education in establishing any key link with political culture

and ideology, the case of Morocco clearly differs with such an assessment, and the targeting of schools and universities for concerted recruitment efforts by opposing groups in Egypt indicates that great value is placed on shaping the minds of the young. Stability can be established with direct political policies, but it is sustained at the generational level by educating the young in civic virtues, which Morocco's religious education patterns have historically done very well. Finally, consistency in reform is absolutely essential. While reforms have been few and halting in Morocco since the 1970s, the regime has generally been consistent in its path to reform, but in its own unique way: slowly, trusting in time to have its effect. Though this may not be what results-driven policy makers want in the electoral polities of the West, it is what seems to be working in Morocco. By taking a gradual approach to reform, admittedly more out of concern for regime survival than anything else, the monarchy has not upset any key social institutions and provided space for opposition to lawfully engage the regime.

The question as to how long Morocco's stability can be sustained is left unanswered because at the end of the day, no one can know for sure just what creates the unique situation(s) that lead to the collapse of a political society. We can only observe the past and its effect on the present to discover clues on building and maintaining a stable status quo. In the case of Morocco, such stability is not garnered through specific policies with rigid timetables, but through the slow changes of time that come in the moments of peace to be found in a country where a leader is respected, children are taught to continue traditions, and the voices of opposition are allowed to cautiously build rapport and trust with the ruling regime.

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