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Democratization in Morocco: Political Transition of a North African Kingdom

By Moshe Gershovich

Executive Summary

Since the early 1990s Morocco has embarked on a political process of “democratization,” which involves the integration of hitherto opposition parties and figures in the government and parliamentary system. The process had been initiated by former King Hassan II and continued by his son and successor, Muhammad VI. Having lived in Morocco during the critical period of transition from one monarch to another, the author provides historical background to and an examination of the current unfolding of the process of democratization in Morocco, dotted with anecdotal episodes that illuminate certain aspects of his analysis. While Morocco’s path towards greater political transparency and inclusion has resembled those taken by other countries in the Arabic-speaking world (such as Jordan and some of the Persian Gulf emirates), it is also impacted by the Kingdom’s unique history. Of specific importance in this regard are the three and a half centuries of the ‘Alawi Dynasty’s rule, as well as the multi-party parliamentary system instituted after independence in 1956. Like many other predominantly Muslim countries in the Middle East and beyond, one of the greatest challenges which Morocco faces today concerns the integration of Islamist-oriented forces within the legitimate political process. Having recently emerged from a troubled past of repression and human rights violations, Moroccans continue to look mainly to their monarch to ensure stability and a smooth transition to greater democracy.

About the Author



A native of Israel, Moshe Gershovich earned a BA from Tel Aviv University (1982), and a PhD from Harvard (1995). He has published *French Military Rule over Morocco: Colonialism and its Consequences* (Cass, 2000) as well as numerous scholarly articles in journals such as *Middle Eastern Studies*, *Journal of Military History*, *Maghreb Review*, and *Journal of North African Studies*. Between 1998-2000 he was a Senior Fulbright Scholar in Morocco where he conducted field research on the collective biography of Moroccan veterans of the French Army. Dr. Gershovich began his teaching career at MIT where he served as visiting lecturer between 1995-1998. Thereafter, he taught two and a half years at Al-Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco. In Spring 2001 he started teaching Modern Middle Eastern and European History at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. In 2007-2009 he is serving as the Martin Professor of History at UNO.

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Mounia was in the midst of her PowerPoint presentation, held in the seminar room opposite the office of the Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS) at al-Akhawayn University in Ifrane (AUI). It was the last week of the Spring 2000 semester, the last meeting of the Capstone seminar on “Contemporary Morocco,” that Mounia, like all graduating seniors of the SHSS, had to pass in order to get her B.A. degree. The single largest component of her grade would be determined by the culminating project she was presenting that afternoon. Her topic: “The Democratization of Morocco.”

That was the first time I had ever attended a lecture in which PowerPoint was used as the format of presentation, so I was drawn as much to the manner in which Mounia presented as to the content of her talk. The slides would appear and dissolve one after the other at a click on the remote control in her hand. Then, a new slide came to the screen with the heading “Democratization under King Hassan II.” The slide remained blank. A few seconds passed and the small audience, composed of her four classmates and the five faculty members who were co-teaching the seminar, began to exchange nervous glances. Was the computer stuck? Had the technology failed? Mounia, however, remained stoic. After a few additional seconds she quietly concluded, pointing to the blank slide: “*That* was democratization under Hassan II!”

The impact of that simple, matter-of-fact comment cannot be overstated. Most impressive was the fact that it was uttered less than six months after the death of the King, who had ruled his country for 38 years. Had Mounia, or any other Moroccan, dared to express such views a year earlier they would have risked unfortunate consequences. Even in 2000 it was still a novelty to hear such criticism, albeit understated, of the dead autocrat.

This episode speaks volumes about the profound changes that have taken place in Morocco over the past decade and a half. During this period, Morocco has moved a long way towards improving its record on human rights and free speech. Still, the drive toward democracy can at best be described as incomplete, with occasional wrong turns and detours. This article will provide my personal interpretation of Morocco’s path to greater democracy and openness. It is based in part on the two and a half years I spent in Morocco (1998-2000)¹ as well as on two later visits in the summers of 2004 and 2006, and on the two decades I have devoted to the study of the country’s modern history.

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Unlike most other modern nations in Africa, the Kingdom of Morocco is not the product of Europe’s colonial domination. The foundation of contemporary Morocco can be traced back to the 16th century Sa’dian dynasty and more directly to the ‘Alawi dynasty that succeeded it a century later. Morocco’s current king, Muhammad VI, follows a long chain of imperial rulers whose reign dates back to more than a century be-

1. In addition to teaching at AUI, I conducted field research on the oral history of Moroccan veterans of the French Army. My research was made possible in part through a Fulbright Senior Scholar grant. I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Moroccan American Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchange (MACECE) for its sponsorship and support of my work in Morocco.



fore the United States of America came into being. His legitimacy, however, rests on much more than mere longevity. Presumed to be a *Sharif*, a direct blood descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, he is widely revered as *Amir al-Mu'aminin* (Commander of the Faithful) and possessor of the *Barakah* (special blessing power).² In the mind of most of his subjects, noble ancestry may be a far more valuable political asset than his Western education.

This noble pedigree, however, does not render its holder immune to a violent fate, as several of Muhammad VI's predecessors came to experience. In fact, his father, Hassan II, faced twice within a year a near certain death at the hands of military conspirators. In July 1971 a group of soldiers and cadets stormed his palatial retreat at Skhirat, south of the capital Rabat and killed several guests attending his 42nd birthday party before being silenced by other, loyal guards. Thirteen months later, several Moroccan Air Force jets failed to intercept and shoot down the Royal Boeing as it made its way back from Paris. While his amazing escape on both occasions may have boosted the monarch's popular aura of divine protection, these incidents revealed the extent of discontent his reign had generated among his subjects. Indeed, the second of the failed coup attempts was masterminded by none other than General Mohammed Oufkir, the minister of the interior and the King's once most trusted henchman.³

During my first visit of Morocco, in winter 1996-1997, I got a glimpse of the deep-rooted animosity still felt by the Berber inhabitants of the Middle Atlas Mountains towards the monarchy in general and King Hassan II in particular. After a long day of traveling with a friend who had served in the Peace Corps a decade earlier, we stopped to break the fasting of Ramadan in the modest dwellings of his friend, IO, in a small township on the road from Fez to Marrakech. There, reclining on low sofas and drinking sweet mint tea, we talked into the night and our host recalled, with overt bitterness, the years of oppression and mistreatment by the government and secret police.

In fact, King Hassan's involvement in the suppression of opposition in the countryside had started before his ascendance to the throne. As Crown Prince and Commander-in-Chief of the newly established Royal Armed Forces, he directed in the late 1950s operations to curb separatist revolts in both the Middle Atlas and Rif Mountains.⁴ In fact, the scars left by the troops he commanded in the latter event had been so deep that throughout his long reign never once did he return to visit the

2. The "Sharifian principle" of political legitimacy can be traced back to the Idrisids, Morocco's "first" dynasty, who arrived in North Africa in the late 8th century. It was resumed by the Sa'dians in the 16th century and remained a constant feature of Morocco's political history under the current dynasty. For an overview of Morocco's pre-colonial history see C.R. Pennell, *Morocco: From Empire to Independence* (Oneworld: Oxford, 2003), pp. 30-33 (Idrisids), 78-96 (Sa'dis), 97-114 ('Alawis).

3. On the historical background for the putsch attempts see C.R. Pennell, *Morocco since 1830* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 331-333. Oufkir's daughter, Malika, who had suffered years of imprisonment and humiliation with the rest of her family before staging a daring escape, co-authored (with Michele Fitoussi) her memoirs, *Stolen Lives: Twenty Years in a Desert Jail* (New York: Hyperion, 2000), translated from the French original, *Prisonnière* (Paris: Grasset and Fasquelle, 1999).

4. See David M. Hart, "Rural and Tribal Uprisings in Post-Colonial Morocco, 1957-60: An Overview and a Reappraisal," in *Tribe and Society in Rural Morocco*, special issue of *The Journal of North African Studies*, devoted to the work of Hart, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Summer 1999), pp. 84-102.



Rif. It is interesting to note that soon after succeeding his father in 1999, Muhammad VI chose the Rif to be the first part of the country to visit and honor in an obvious act of reconciliation.⁵

Not everyone, it seems, felt reconciled by this gesture, however, as I learned from an encounter in my Fall 1999 “Contemporary World History” class at AUI. The subject of discussion that morning was “Nationalism.” Striving to engage my students in discussion, I asked them to define what being “Moroccan” meant to them. A few tentative responses were offered when suddenly I heard Karim, a rather flamboyant young man. “I am not a Moroccan” he stated loudly. “What do you mean?” I asked, uncertain about the nature of his statement. “How would you define your identity?” “I’m a Naddori,” he retorted, referring to the Mediterranean resort of Naddor in the northern Rif. Other students now joined the suddenly heated exchange. “If you’re not a Moroccan, then who is your king?” challenged one of them. “I have no king!” bellowed Karim. Utter silence fell on the class.⁶

As the shock and indignation expressed by Karim’s classmates seems to indicate, most Moroccans do not share such radical views about the monarchy and its role in Moroccan politics. Observing the violent turbulence in neighboring Algeria during the 1990s, particularly the random massacres in the countryside brought about by the Islamist insurgence and harsh military reprisals,⁷ Moroccans would often point out to me that their country had been immune to such extremism and anarchy. The conventional wisdom attributed the calm and stable nature of their political system to the central role of the royalty in their nation’s history.

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This is not to say that the preeminence of the monarchy in Morocco’s political life has always been a foregone conclusion. In the early years of the 20th century, as France was inching closer to impose its control over the Moroccan Sultanate, the possibility of introducing a republican form of government, more suitable to the temperament of France’s Third Republic, had been briefly considered in Paris. The nomination of the staunchly royalist General (later Marshal) Lyautey as France’s first Resident-General in Morocco put these ideas to rest, but not before Lyautey had to force the abdication of the reigning Sultan ‘Abd al-Hafiz, who had been overtly hostile towards his country’s new master. Lyautey next handpicked and installed as Sultan ‘Abd al-Hafiz’s mild-mannered and non-ambitious brother, Mawlay Yussuf. The new Sultan proved to be the perfect match for the Resident-General’s “indirect rule” philosophy, allowing Lyautey to maintain the charade of Moroccan sovereignty.⁸

5. Knowing nothing about the King’s visit, I happened to be on my way to Tangier that same day and reached the town of Chefchaouen just moments after the royal entourage had departed from it. The next morning I learned that the visit had been the subject of vivid conversation throughout northern Morocco.

6. In order to place these statements in a more proper context, I should note that while attending another course with me, during a discussion devoted to the future of the Western Sahara that same student (Karim) would express a rather nationalist opinion regarding Morocco’s right to that disputed territory.

7. On the civil war in Algeria, see Michael Willis, *The Islamist Challenge in Algeria: A Political History* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

8. On Lyautey’s method of controlling Morocco, see three volumes of Daniel Rivet, *Lyautey et l’Institution du Protectorat Français au Maroc, 1912-1925* [*Lyautey and the Institution of the French Protectorate in Morocco, 1912-1925*] (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1988); William A. Hoisington Jr., *Lyautey and the French Conquest of Morocco* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995); Moshe Gershovich, *French Military Rule in Morocco: Colonialism and its*



Muhammad V, Morocco's last Sultan and first King succeeded his father in 1927 and at first seemed to be amenable to maintain a similarly subservient role in the partnership with the colonial power. Three years into his reign, in May 1930, he dutifully signed the French inspired "Berber *Dahir*" (Royal decree) that granted tribunal councils judicial autonomy among the Berber tribes of the Middle Atlas. Anger over the perceived violation of the supremacy of the *Shariah* precipitated mass demonstrations and sparked the beginning of a nationalist movement that would eventually seek to end French rule over Morocco.⁹

By the time French domination over Morocco was nearing its end, however, Muhammad V had distanced himself sufficiently from the colonial cause, and irritated the Residency to a degree that his dethroning and physical exile from the country appeared the only viable option to maintain French rule. That act, taken in August 1953, transformed the Sultan from a dubious figurehead, relic of an archaic, pre-colonial polity, to national hero and indispensable actor in any post-independent reality. What chance, after all, did mere political activists of the young *Istiqlal* (Independence) Party have when competing with a monarch whose image common folks swore to have seen in the shinning moon?

Muhammad V's stature as national hero was well complemented by his political skills. He took full advantage of the inherent divisions within the *Istiqlal* and the reluctance of Berbers in the countryside to join its ranks to manipulate the political system and build himself as ultimate arbiter. Unfortunately, his son and successor Hassan II appears to have lacked not only the genuine popular appeal of his father, but also his leadership skills. Having ascended to the throne in 1961, Hassan soon found himself confronted with mounting opposition from the left as urban unrest would occasionally spark violent street clashes with the police. His response was to dissolve parliament and authorize the state's police agencies to crack down on his critics.

The campaign to stifle all dissenting voices culminated in the 1965 assassination in Paris of maverick socialist leader (and King Hassan's former math tutor), Mehdi Ben Barka.¹⁰ Other critics of the regime, such as human rights activist Avraham Sarfati, were imprisoned and/or deported abroad. Thousands of individuals were "disappeared" and detained for years without trial in prisons such as the notorious desert fortress of Tazmamart. Those *Années de Plomb* (Years of Lead), as the period of Hassan II's reign came to be known, particularly among his opponents, were certainly a challenging period to the young-old nation, one that left deep scars on its

Consequences (London: Frank Cass, 2000).

9. The most extensive study of the naissance of Moroccan nationalism remains John P. Halstead, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Origins and Rise of Moroccan Nationalism, 1912-1944* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1969). On the nationalist protest and its suppression by the French see also William A. Hoisington Jr., "Cities in Revolt: The Berber Dahir (1930) and French Urban Strategy in Morocco," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 13 (1978).

10. Ben Barka had moved to Europe to distance himself from his former pupil with whom he differed sharply on the future of Morocco. His elimination was orchestrated by Oufkir in collusion with a number of foreign intelligence agencies. Ben Barka was killed by two French assassins and his body was never recovered. The Ben Barka affair has been the subject of some 15 books and films, including a documentary entitled *Ben Barka: The Moroccan Equasion*, directed in 2002 by Simone Bitton and Partice Barrat and produced by ARTE France and Article Z.



collective identity.

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As the political arena became paralyzed with royal intimidation, and with the military's loyalty to him no longer assured, King Hassan sought a national cause to unify the Moroccan polity behind his leadership. Spain's retreat from the last remnants of its once formidable Empire provided him with the opportunity to do so. He embraced the Moroccan claim for sovereignty over the "Spanish Sahara" (or *Rio del Oro*) — hitherto promoted mainly by the *Istiqlal* Party — and turned it into the defining issue of his reign from the mid-1970s onwards. Capitalizing on the success of the "Green March" he had orchestrated in November 1975, Hassan II sent his army to occupy the territory and push out the armed native resistance forces of the POLISARIO Front (Popular Front for the Liberation of Sagui el-Hamra and Rio de Oro).¹¹

The gambit paid off for the monarch who managed to stabilize the political system without compromising any of his powers. However, as the conflict over the "Western Sahara" lingered into the 1980s, draining considerable material and human resources, it began to take a toll on Morocco's international reputation. New revelations on Morocco's poor human rights records¹² further enhanced the erosion of the kingdom's image. Seeking to improve his regime's standing abroad, Hassan II initiated a political healing process with the opposition parties. He termed his new strategy "Homeopathic Democracy," by which he meant "a process of controlled, well-managed change that maintains social peace while promoting economic development and the general welfare."¹³

The new approach was aimed at incorporating the organized political opposition to the King — notably the *Istiqlal* Party and the Socialist Union of Progressive Forces (USFP) — within the governing structure, in order to create "a 'bipolarized democracy,' in which two parliamentary blocs [would] alternate in power, with the monarch serving as the ultimate arbiter and source of authority."¹⁴ After approving a new constitution in 1992, which provided more powers to the parliament, the country went to the polls in June 1993 to elect a new legislature. However, the intended rapprochement between the palace and the opposition was frustrated due to ballot irregularities and manipulations orchestrated by the King's trusted henchman, Minister of the

11. The conflict over the future of the Western Sahara has been brewing for over three decades now with no end in sight. Morocco has occupied the territory (including the part originally taken by Mauritania) while the POLISARIO has been marginalized, though it maintains an international profile. A UN-brokered solution calling for a referendum among the inhabitants of the territory, though agreed upon by both parties in 1991, has never been implemented due to disagreement as to who would be allowed to vote. Efforts to implement another solution, which would provide the territory with broad autonomy within Moroccan sovereignty, have yet to materialize. For a brief reference to the Western Sahara dispute, and the opposing views about its possible resolution, see Yahia H. Zoubir and Moshe Gershovich, "Should the Western Sahara become an independent state?" in David W. Lesch ed., *History In Dispute: The Middle East Since 1945*, Vol. 14, first series (Farmington Hills, MI: Tomson/Gale, St. James Press, 2004), pp. 276-295.

12. Such as the controversial exposé by French journalist Gilles Perrault, *Notre Ami le Roi [Our Friend the King]* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990). Not surprisingly, that book and others criticizing Hassan II were forbidden for distribution in Morocco until his death.

13. According to Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, "The Islamic Challenge in North Africa," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 1, No 2 (1997), <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1997/issue2/jv1n2a7.html>.

14. Maddy-Weitzman, "The Islamic Challenge."



Interior Driss Basri.¹⁵ The projected partner of the palace's alliance, USFP leader Abderrahman Youssoufi, chose a self-imposed exile in Europe rather than succumbing to the royal embrace.

Four years later the King finally got his wish. The November 1997 elections followed a major constitutional reform the previous year, which split the unicameral Parliament into a lower Chamber of Representatives and an upper Chamber of Counselors. For the first time in Morocco's electoral history, all 325 members of the lower house were elected directly by the public, while the 270 members of the upper chamber were selected by various groups and organizations. Fifteen different parties gained representation in the former and more than 20 in the latter.¹⁶ Since neither the pro-palace parties, nor those that formed the opposition bloc, won a clear majority, a coalition government was formed, composed of several parties from each bloc. Dubbed the government of *Alternance*, it was headed by Youssoufi whose USFP received the plurality of the vote.

In exchange for his appointment to head the new government, Youssoufi was obliged to accommodate four ministers appointed directly by the King, including Basri who retained the Interior portfolio.¹⁷ Focusing his attention on socio-economic reforms, the new PM hoped to redeem his image, tainted by his compromise with the monarch. Instead, he became the focal point of growing frustration on the part of his former supporters and the increasingly independent press, which wondered "why did he change," or called outright for his resignation.¹⁸ In spite of his diminished popularity, however, Youssoufi retained his post through the September 2002 election and only then was he retired.¹⁹

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The ascendance of Muhammad VI to the throne in the summer of 1999 elevated popular expectations. The young king projected a new, dynamic style and appeared

15. An interesting eye-witness account of the 1993 election was offered by University of Maine anthropologist Henry Munson, who served as a member of an international monitoring delegation. In "The Election of 1993 and Democratization in Morocco," in Rahma Bourqia and Susan G. Miller, eds., *In the Shadow of the Sultan: Culture, Power, and Politics in Morocco* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press and the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1999), pp. 259-281, Munson describes manipulation and fraud in a suburb of Casablanca and in a nearby small city where the electoral victory of USFP candidates was overturned.

Another interesting result of the 1993 poll was the election for the first time of two women to the Moroccan Parliament. This outcome led to a public debate about the right of the newly elected female representatives to wear the ceremonial white-robe worn by representatives at the inauguration of a new session. On the symbolic meanings of that act see M. Elaine Combs-Schilling, "Performing Monarchy, Staging Nation," in Rahma Bourqia and Susan G. Miller, eds., *In the Shadow of the Sultan*, pp. 176-214.

16. For specific results of these elections, as well as the elections of 2002 and 2007, see the appendix at the end of this article.

17. The other ministries preserved for royal appointees included Foreign Affairs, Justice, and Religious Endowments.

18. "*Pourquoi a-t-il change*" ["Why did he change?"] was the heading of the French-language weekly *Demain* in its 27th issue of November 2000. The front page carried two pictures of Youssoufi, carrying the red rose symbolizing socialism on the left corner, wearing the traditional Moroccan white robe and cap on the right. Another French-language weekly, *Le Journal*, entitled its 100th issue of December 11, 1999: "*Youssoufi doit partir*," ["Youssoufi must go"].

19. Youssoufi was replaced by the apolitical technocrat Driss Jettou, whose previous experience came mostly from the business world. Jettou served as prime minister until the September 2007 elections, after which he was replaced by the leader of the Istiqlal Party, Abbas el Fassi.



to distance himself from some of the most troubling aspects of his father's legacy. Most notable, perhaps, was his decision to retire Basri from the government, where he had served for two decades as minister of the interior. The King's decision to sack Basri met with universal approval, even though some were disappointed of the former minister's ability to escape personal accountability. Sensing his vulnerability, Basri decided to leave Morocco and moved to Paris where he spent the last eight years of his life, finally dying of cancer in August 2007.²⁰

The emergence of a new type of journalism during the second half of the 1990s was one of the most fascinating indications of the democratization process. Morocco had always enjoyed a lively and diverse press, originating in the 19th century and continuing through the Protectorate era and beyond independence.²¹ The post-independent press reflected the multi-party system, as each political movement published its own daily or weekly organ, in Arabic, French, or both.²² The new era of greater openness of the 1990s, however, gave rise to a different style of journalism, less entrenched in old-fashioned party politics and more daring in constantly probing the limits of official tolerance of scandal-hunting.

Pioneering this new trend was journalist and publisher Aboubakr Jamaï, who in 1997 founded the weekly *Le Journal*, to which he added later an Arabic companion, *As-Sahifa*.²³ A second weekly, *Demain* [*Tomorrow*], formatted in the style of the American magazines *Time* and *Newsweek*, was inaugurated in March 2000 by *Le Journal*'s former editor-in-chief, 'Ali Lmrabet.

Residing in Morocco through this phase of greater freedom of speech in the press, I was privileged to observe this process unfolding, always wondering if, when, and over which issue might the government's toleration expire. It finally came a month before my departure. In its November 25, 2000 issue (No. 145), *Journal* published its greatest scoop to date: a secret letter allegedly sent by Mohammed Basri, a former leader of the USFP, to his party comrades (including Abderrahmane Youssoufi, who in 2000 was still prime minister), implicating them with the 1972 putsch attempt against the King. The explosive allegation was reprinted in *Demain* (No. 31, December 2, 2000). Consequently, the two newspapers were banned after being charged with "undermining the stability of the state."²⁴

20. Note for example the lead story of the 17th issue of *Demain* (July 2000), whose cover page depicted Basri, walking in a Parisian street along with the question: *Que faire de lui?* [*What to do with him?*] In 2004 the Moroccan government revoked the passport of its former minister of the interior, thus making him an illegal alien in France.

21. On the origins of the Moroccan press see Jamaï Baida, *La Presse Marocaine d'Expression Française: Des Origins à 1956* [*Moroccan Press in French: Origins to 1956*] (Rabat: Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines, 1996).

22. Thus, the Arabic *Al-Itihad al-Ishtiraqi* [*The Socialist Union*] and the French *Libération* [*Liberation*] are dailies published by the USFP, while *Al-Alam* is the organ of the *Istiqlal* party. *Al-Bayane*, published in both French and Arabic, is the daily of the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS). Views close to the pro-palace circles are typically represented in *Le Matin du Sahara et du Maghreb* [*The Morning of the Sahara and the Maghreb*].

23. For a brief, rather complimentary profile of Jamaï see the column by *Time* Europe correspondent Scott Macleod, published in May 2006, <http://www.time.com/time/europe/html/060522/jamai.html>.

24. Both *Le Journal* and *Demain* were eventually allowed to resume publication, but their relations with the authorities remained volatile. *Le Journal* managed to survive and is still published today on a weekly basis. *Demain* ceased publication in 2003 after its founder and editor, Lmrabet, was charged and imprisoned. *Demain*'s place has been largely taken by a third magazine, *TelQuel*, which began publication in October 2001.



By the time the fate of Moroccan journalism seemed to be hanging on administrative restrictions and judicial rulings, in early 2001, I had already left Morocco for Omaha, from where it became more difficult to follow Morocco on a permanent basis. Much has happened in Morocco since then, and not necessarily for the better. Most dramatic, perhaps, were the terrorist attacks of May 16, 2003 in Casablanca, deemed “Morocco’s 9/11.”²⁵ The shock and indignation felt throughout Moroccan society along with the growing concerns about the rising power of the “Islamists,”²⁶ as manifested by the electoral gains made by the “Party of Justice and Development” (PJD) in the September 2002 elections,²⁷ led to a renewed government clampdown on potentially violent religiously-inspired opposition.²⁸ While sharing the popular concern about violent disruption of public safety, human rights advocates began to view with growing concern new anti-terror “liberticide” measures that followed the American model of the Patriot Act.

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Morocco’s road towards greater democratization remains a project in the making. On the one hand, the climate of greater freedom of speech and accountability on the part of officials is unmistakable, as is the sobering recognition of the enormity of the task ahead. On the other hand, the lingering notion that any reform, constitutional or otherwise, derives from and depends upon the good will of the monarch is a hindrance to any profound changes to the current system. As he nears his first decade on the throne, Muhammad VI faces the challenge of stirring his nation towards a better future while maintaining the stability and relative tranquility that have made Morocco the envy of other Middle Eastern and North African countries.

Both *Journal* and *TelQuel* are currently available on-line at <http://www.lejournal-hebdo.com/sommaire/index.php>. and <http://telquel-online.com/> respectively.

25. The attacks were carried out by a home-grown group called Salafia Jihadia. Their plan was to hit Western and Jewish targets in Casablanca. The deadliest attack destroyed the “Casa de Espana” restaurant, killing 20 people. In all, 12 bombers died, along with 33 civilians (eight Europeans and 25 Moroccans). More than 100 people were injured. For an excellent study of the bombings, their background, and consequences see Jack Kalpakian, “Building the Human Bomb: The Case of the 16 May 2003 Attacks in Casablanca,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 28, (2005), pp. 113–127. Dr. Kalpakian is a political scientist who teaches at AUI.

26. Insofar as Morocco is concerned, the term “Islamist” can be applied to a vast number of movements, individuals, and views that share little in common beyond, perhaps, a vague notion of an ideal future socio-political structure. A thorough analysis of the “Islamist” phenomenon in Morocco lies beyond the scope of this essay.

27. Participating for the first time in the parliamentary elections in 2002, the PJD won 42 seats in the Chamber of Representatives. In the next elections, held in September 2007, the PJD added four additional seats to become the second largest party. See Appendix below.

28. At the time this essay was originally composed, in the summer of 2006, as many as 2,000 “Islamists” were presumably detained at various Moroccan prisons. A few fatalities of hunger strikes were reported to have occurred among them and complaints of maltreatment were registered.



APPENDIX: RESULTS OF LAST THREE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS TO THE MOROCCAN CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES (Major parties only)

Party	Number of Seats (Total Seats = 325)		
	1997	2002	2007
Istiqlal Party (IP)	32	48	52
Justice and Development Party (PJD)	--	42	46
Popular Movement (MP)	40	27	41
National Rally of Independents (RNI)	46	41	39
Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP)	57	50	38
Constitutional Union (UC)	50	16	27
Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS)	9	11	17
PND-Al Ahd Union (Joint List)	--	--	14
Front of Democratic Forces (FFD)	9	12	9