



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات  
ARAB CENTER FOR RESEARCH & POLICY STUDIES

CASE ANALYSIS

# The Political Party Experience in Morocco: Obscurity and Obfuscation

Dr. Drisse Jandari | April 2012

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Series: Case Analysis

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**Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies**

PO Box 10277

Street No. 826, Zone 66

Doha, Qatar

Tel.: +974 44199777 | Fax: +974 44831651

[www.dohainstitute.org](http://www.dohainstitute.org)

## Abstract

This study aims to pinpoint the most salient features of the political party experience in Morocco, using the modern liberal/political definitions and conceptions of the term 'political party'. Modern political theories and practices have succeeded in eradicating older understandings of political authority as God-given or absolute. In return, political science has established a new definition of politics that views politics as the manifestation of a purely human phenomenon in which citizens select their elected representatives from a number of individuals who have been chosen by political parties to represent their political platforms and political agendas.

In light of this definition, in my analysis of the Moroccan political scene, I argue that Morocco still has far to go before this modern conception of political parties can be achieved. I argue that the presence of a political party infrastructure and ideological outlook are both insufficient for a modern political praxis to emerge. The essence of modern political practice demands that political power be tied to the will of the people. Moreover, political parties should be real political actors that are capable of creating policy based on their electoral platforms and the will of the electorate.

Unlike some others, I do not believe that there is an opposition between modern political practice and the monarchical system since there are successful examples of monarchical democracies in the world, such as Britain or Spain, which have retained monarchical traditions in rule while simultaneously and successfully creating party institutions capable of representing the popular will, through ascending to power, and being in the legislative and executive branches of government.

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## Political Parties from a Liberal Perspective

In modern political theory, political parties are considered to be some of the most salient features of democracy since they are considered to be the representatives of the popular will, which is manifested through internal party elections, whether national, partisan, regional, or local, as well as through participation in the party's conferences and the selection of a party's candidates. Political parties take part in external elections by presenting their electoral programs and agendas, and by mounting electoral campaigns in order to persuade voters, with the aim of reaching power and implementing these platforms.

Political parties represent the existing intellectual and political currents in society that are in competition to impose their programs by convincing voters who represent large segments of society. Thus, they perform the important role of managing the differences between the intellectual, political, and religious currents within society. Electoral competition, rather than tribal, ethnic, or sectarian conflict or struggle, should be the only way to impose a party's electoral program. For this reason, political parties have become the cornerstones of modern political theory. One cannot imagine a democratic state without political parties, electoral competition, and a peaceful struggle for power. Political parties, even within monarchies, have played a central role in developing the modern definition of politics, which ties power to popular will.

The modern understanding of political parties has historically been linked to the definition of a modern, liberal system that has succeeded in cutting off ties with older definitions of power as divine or absolute. Consequently, this system has established a new conceptualization of power as a human matter that is practiced by the populace through its representatives, who have been elected by voters and who represent political parties and their electoral platforms. This liberal conception of political parties is not found in socialist thought, despite its modern/Western nature, because socialist systems depend upon the one-party system and the monopolization of power, in which the party is considered to represent the ideology of the state and protect its interests. Thus, in the social system, there is no room for political pluralism or electoral competition, and the peaceful devolution of power is then out of the question. The single leader not only represents the single party, but also transcends this to represent the entire state.

Political parties have entered into contemporary jurisprudence as permanent organizations on the national and local levels. They seek to get popular support, to access and exercise power in order to implement specific policies.<sup>1</sup> Based on this definition, there are three central elements of political parties to focus on:

### 1. Exercising power

The desire to accede to and wield power is considered to be the most important focus of a political party. This distinguishes the political party from lobby groups; if the role of the latter is to influence and pressure those who wield power in order to achieve their particular interests, then the role of a political party is to reach power and implement its own electoral platform that provided it with the parliamentary majority. This majority loses its legitimacy if it is not translated into an autonomous government, and does not have both legislative and executive powers that allow it to implement its electoral program, while being subject to the people's monitoring. In this sense, the political party loses its reason for being, as well as its political value as a representative of popular will if it does not have the requisite conditions for being in executive and legislative power.

### 2. Gaining Popular Support

If the modern democratic definition of the practice of power is based on the party representing the popular will, then a political party is a modern political organization that aims to mobilize popular will through elections first, and political decisions once brought to power. By this definition, it represents legitimate authority since it has obtained political support, as embodied in the ballot boxes. Therefore, if it does not have popular support, political power loses its legitimacy and becomes tyrannical; the people must force it to bend to popular will.

### 3. Implementing Specific Policies

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<sup>1</sup> al-Sharqawi, 13.

These policies are necessarily linked to the electoral platform that the political party has presented to its electorate, and pledged to implement if it wins elections and ascends to power. In order for a political party to apply its electoral program after obtaining a parliamentary majority, it must be afforded the necessary political conditions, and the ability to engage in all the legislative and executive authorities, for which it has received a legitimate popular mandate through elections.

These above-mentioned elements are the foundations of the modern conceptions of a political party, which emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and were developed during the twentieth. The political party is now considered to be one of the foundations of democracy across the world. One cannot imagine republican systems of government, for example the American political system, outside of the context of the Democratic and Republican parties. Similarly, one cannot imagine the French political system outside of the context of the right-wing Union for a Popular Movement and the left-wing Socialist party. Even in monarchical systems, the same applies; one cannot imagine the British political system outside the context of the Conservative and Labour parties, or the Spanish political system without the Socialist and People's parties.

Whether in republics or in constitutional monarchies, political parties as democratic institutions wield power and implement their political programs through popular electoral support. As the representatives of the popular will, they should be in charge of all the legislative and electoral powers, and should exist as autonomous authorities. In liberal Western countries, opinions suggest that the electorate should be a fourth column of society in addition to the three known pillars of state. Maurice Houriou described this electoral group as the "electoral power".<sup>2</sup> Because of their importance in modern democratic systems, political parties play a number of necessary and vital roles within the state, including:

### **Mobilization**

In modern political systems, the role of a political party, because of its inherently ideological nature, is linked to its ability to mobilize the population. An open, democratic dialogue should exist between the state and its citizens over a number of issues of

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 8.

social relevance. Political parties play an important role in mediating this dialogue because they have direct, established relations with citizens: internally, through a party's organizational structures and conventions, and externally, through the ties that link the political party to the electorate.

Political parties undertake an organizational and managerial role through these direct mobilization contacts. As a result, they contribute to the dissemination of civic values based on participation, initiative, and responsibility. These values have become necessary in any democratic political system that is based on a widespread popular participation in political decision-making and accountability. In order for political parties to effectively play this persuasive role, they must derive legitimacy from the people and be able to have real legislative and executive power. Therefore, this ability will naturally differ between a democratic and a totalitarian regime: in the former, the political parties promote specific platforms and programs that are specific to the party or the state. In the latter, the party becomes nothing but an ideological megaphone for the ruling regime.

The role of mobilization that political parties play cannot become institutionalized except within a democratic system based on political pluralism and the peaceful devolution of power. In totalitarian systems, the role of mobilization becomes empty of its content, transforming political parties into nothing more than an ideological circus that sings the praises of the ruling regime.

### **The Function of Supporting Legitimacy**

In modern democratic systems, political legitimacy is linked to the extent to which the individual citizens accept the political regime and voluntarily submit to it because they believe that the political regime aims to achieve communal goals. If old regimes considered religion, personal charisma, traditions, and ideologies to be some of the main components of legitimacy, new political regimes believe that legitimacy mainly derives from democracy. Political parties play an important role in this because they are people's institutions that derive legitimacy from the people through elections. Any talk of the relationship between political parties and democratic legitimacy presumes that parties are formed of elected members within their organizations, ruling parties derive their legitimacy from elections, and power is shared within internal party structures.

In this way, political parties play an extremely important role: they ensure that the current political regime has popular legitimacy since most of political parties' decisions come from the people and reflect back upon the people. This lends a political system its power, and reinforces its legitimacy. This legitimacy is precisely what closed, totalitarian, and one-party regimes lack; their political decisions do not express popular will, but are made in closed political meetings and imposed upon the people through the use of symbolic and actual force. In spite of all of their force, these systems do not have popular legitimacy, but are always vulnerable, especially at moments when the popular will is freely and loudly expressed.

### **The Role of Mobilization**

Political mobilization relates to the assignation of political roles to the cadres most capable of steering and captivating the public interest. Different political regimes mobilize their political elites in different ways. In traditional and autocratic systems, mobilization depends on clientelism, loyalty, or inheritance. In democratic, plural regimes, mobilization is based on the specific ability to adequately communicate agendas, cultures, and strategies. In this context, political parties are tools of political mobilization. Within the internal party system, debates and internal elections force individuals to be trained on political interaction; through involvement in committees and party conventions, different leadership roles are assigned to party members; this is an indirect form of political mobilization. In this sense, the role of mobilization is to form a political elite within democratic regimes. Political parties are allocated this function because many consider them qualified to undertake this role. In autocratic or totalitarian regimes, this function is absolutely degraded because the political elite is normally formed from an extremely primitive outlook based on kinship ties, tribal or ethnic identity, clientelism, and string-pulling.<sup>3</sup>

### **Development Role**

The definition of development transcends the purely economic realm, and is tied to politics, culture, society, and the environment. Political parties play a large role in development because they invigorate political life in a given society, which supports the democratic process and gives various social groups the opportunity to participate in

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<sup>3</sup> al-Utri, 2006.

development. It is easier to understand the developmental role played by political parties by taking the example of democracies, as political parties play a significant role in making politics an everyday concern for all social groups, without discriminating among them. Conversely, in closed authoritarian regimes, the absence of political action forces the political process to stagnate, which directly impacts all social levels, and completely paralyzes the state and society.

In this context, much of the specialized literature on the role of political parties has studied the existence of political parties and the significant role they have played in the peaceful transfer of power through elections. Political parties also play a role in stimulating civil society organizations, including syndicates and trade and labor unions, as well as in the direct provision of services and problem solving for citizens. Moreover, political parties play an important role in the political interaction within parliament, particularly in the legislative and oversight processes.

Mature political party action of the sort that could contribute to producing effective political development can only exist in democratic political systems that feature political parties as an extension of the popular will expressed through elections. Political parties that participate in elections may then arrive in power and implement their platforms. In autocratic political regimes, political party action could become an obstacle for any political development because it contributes to creating political values that run counter to the democratic nature of political parties: it transforms parties into supporters of absolute power, or legislators of undemocratic policies.

Since the latter half of the nineteenth century, political parties have been inextricably tied to liberal democratic systems. This experiment has succeeded despite some of the challenges it has encountered. Today, a party system has become one of the central components of democratic practice, where it represents the popular will expressed through the electoral mechanism. Whether systems are republican or monarchical, political parties are now a key source for giving legitimacy to political regimes. Today, it is difficult to find a political regime that does not derive its legitimacy from a political party system. When I speak of political parties here, I am speaking of liberal ones, not the one-party systems entrenched within socialist regimes. This is because the political party experience can only truly emerge in an environment of political pluralism and a peaceful contest over power.

## Political Parties in Morocco: Labor Pains and Developmental Obstacles

The political party phenomenon in Morocco is recent when compared to Europe, and was initially tied to the struggle for independence from the French and Spanish colonial powers. Despite the fact that, after independence, political parties became associated with the new political framework and joined the ranks of those calling for democracy, the political regime remains tied to its primary roots. This affects the relationship between political parties and the monarchy, where the language of political consensus reigns. It has also inflected the Moroccan political vocabulary, which has been dominated by the binaries loyalty/betrayal, authenticity/modernity, unity/division, and consensus/disagreement. This has been an obstacle to the emergence of modern political thinking that could contribute to building a political party experience in a modern-democratic and political meaning manner. From a historical perspective, the political party experience in Morocco can be understood through two central trajectories:<sup>4</sup>

### First Trajectory

Political party practice opposed colonial Spanish and French policies, and the embryonic formation of political parties became organizationally linked to the national independence movement, which entered into an open confrontation with the colonial power(s). This confrontation took two major forms:

1. The reform trajectory: this trajectory is related to the embryonic political formation of the "National Labour Alliance," the first Moroccan political party. The latter was founded in 1934 as a national response to the policy of the protectorate and in order to confront the colonial maneuvers included in the Berber Dahir decree of 1930, which manages the course of justice in the regions of Berber customs, as well as a reaction to the law that subsumed Morocco under the Ministry of Colonial Affairs. The establishment of the National Labour Alliance was the call to arms of a part of the cultured elite, who realized the necessity of political rather than military action, particularly after the 1925 defeat

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<sup>4</sup> Mohammad Darif, *Moroccan Political Parties, Vol. 1* (Casablanca: Dar al-Ittisam, 2001).

of Mohammad Bin AbdulKarim al-Khattabi at the hands of an alliance between the two colonial powers France and Spain.<sup>5</sup>

2. The independence trajectory: this trajectory deals with the need to break free from the bonds of colonialism, and was embodied by the Nationalist Party, which made the leap to an organized internal structure, transitioning from irritating the protectorate forces with a few demands for reform to presenting a petition demanding independence and democracy in January 1944 to Mohammad V, the Resident General, the British and US consuls, and the ambassador of the former Soviet Union in Algiers. Since then, the National Party has been called the Independence Party.<sup>6</sup>

## Second Trajectory

In this trajectory the practices of political parties were linked to the aspirations of the Moroccan political elite to overcome the reformist/independence status. These practices aimed at founding a new political practice based on the yearning to share power with the monarchical institutions. This trajectory was formed along many periods which can be defined as follows:

1. A period of struggles: This lasted from 1956 until 1973, and consists of two phases:
  - The first phase (1956-1959) was characterized by a struggle over defining the terms of the party system. The conflict during this period emerged between the palace and the Independence Party.
  - The second phase (1960-1973) has been linked to two different wagers. Between 1960-1965, a wager on democracy dominated the Moroccan political scene. With the declaration of the state of emergency in June 1963, a new scenario arose, which lasted until 1973, based on the ideological wager that led to the birth of the new left.
2. The consensus period: During 1973, a crucial year in the trajectory of the Moroccan political scene, the country's internal political affairs underwent a rearrangement, the results of which emerged in 1974 with the permanent enshrinement of the reform paradigm within the opposition parties. The Marxist-

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<sup>5</sup> Hamiddin, p. 89

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 91.

Leninist movement was dealt a brutal blow, and many of its activists were arrested. This period also included the historical alliance between the monarchy and reformist parties, an alliance that helped to create a new paradigm that refused confrontation and adopted the logic of “consensus” by mobilizing a national consensus over land issues (Morocco’s attempt to reclaim the Western Sahara).

3. The phase of exploding contradictions: If the period between 1974 and 1980 was characterized by a consensus in the Moroccan political party scene, the period between 1981 and 1990 shuffled this political deck. The contradictions within the components of this political situation had a breaking point, fueling the events of June 1981, January 1984, and, finally, the events of December 1990. The contradictions erupted within each political party, whether majority or opposition. In the majority parties, the National Rally of Independents broke up, and the National Democratic Party emerged from the ashes in June 1981. The opposition parties were no less troubled during this time period. The Socialist Alliance endured developments and resignations, unions began to rise-up, and the Party of Progress and Socialism saw violent ruptures. Additionally, new left-wing alliances emerged, including the Marxist-Leninist Democratic Workers Organization.
4. The party alliance phase: This lasted from 1992 to 1998 when the Moroccan political scene saw a period of self-rule and an ease in political transfer; the prime ministership rotated between the opposition parties in an environment characterized by a consensus between the various components of the Moroccan political scene, a consensus desired by the ruling authority for regional and international reasons. This period also saw the creation of alliances between political parties and the consolidation of political positions within each party. The Democratic Alliance emerged out of such an alliance between five parties: the Socialist Union of Popular Forces, the Independence Party, the Party of Progress and Socialism, the National Union of Popular Forces, and the Popular Democratic Labour Organization. Meanwhile, the Constitutional Union Party, the Popular Movement, and the National Democratic Party formed the “National Consensus” alliance. In order to maintain a balance, a third party emerged, the Centrist party, which joined the center-right and center-left parties, and brought together the National Alliance of the Free and the National Popular Movement.
5. Clampdown and Control on Political Parties:

Following the period of party alliances that led to the rotation of power in government, Moroccan politics entered a phase in which they returned to a

situation similar to before, and the state attempted to ignore the democratic agenda that had brought the Socialist Union of Popular Forces and the government of Abdurrahman Yusufi to power in the 1997 elections.

The appointment of Sayyid Driss Jitto to the head of a technocratic government in 2002 represented the end of one phase and the beginning of a new one. One of the events of this period was the internal combustion of the Democratic Alliance, with the accompanying breakup of the large nationalist parties, which once more returned to the pre-rotation of power era, with the conflict between the nationalist movement parties on one hand, and the monarchy on the other. The parties' new situation made them no longer capable of standing up to the monarchy, particularly since they had undergone ideological changes with unintended consequences, which had a negative impact on both the organizational structures of these parties and on the Moroccan street, which had invested a large amount of hope in the political struggle.

During this period, which was marked by the weakening of the parties of the Nationalist Movement, things turned chaotic and the monarchy began to demand that the parties reform after many years during which the parties had demanded the reform of the political system, as well as essential reforms that had to do with the structure and logic of power, as a basic condition of their participation in any government.

On February 14, 2006, declaration 1.06.18, which decreed the execution of law number 36-04 in relation to political parties, brought about a new reformulation of the idea and the role of the political party. This renewal, however, is a continuation of the 1996 constitution, as the third chapter of the constitution, which dealt with the subject of political parties, framed this law. From thereon, political parties were to be understood as organizations, which would be tied to labor organizations, local groups, and trade organizations. There is no text about any political identity that would qualify Moroccan political parties to be a part of any international definitions of democracy, since the role of parties in democracies is to execute power, and is not solely confined to organizing and representing citizens.

## The Political Experience in Morocco and the Question of Democracy

We are often exposed to political analyses and value judgments that are frequently made by academics, researchers and technocrats, alike, which confirm Moroccan political parties are empty, useless shells ridden with corruption and nepotism, unworthy of participating in governance. Such groups chorus a condemnation of political parties and politics in general, describing them as rotten, stagnant, and opportunistic, but what these people fail to see is that the political space in which parties in Morocco emerged and developed is an undemocratic space. The political party experience, on the other hand, was designed for democracy. This lack of democracy has negatively impacted the political party experience in Morocco, and has given it this distorted image in the eyes of society, researchers, and concerned observers.

In short, the fault lies not with the political parties alone, but in the Moroccan political system, which is constructed upon a ruling monarchy that holds on to all legislative, executive, and judicial powers, as a whole. Political parties are purely decorative ornaments on the political scene. Maurice Duverger defined the role of the political party within a modern democracy as the "attempt to reach power, or at least, a desire to practice it";<sup>7</sup> defined as such, this definition excludes Morocco's political parties. The Moroccan political system is constructed upon the notion of an executive monarchy that does not allow parties to reach power in the executive or legislative branches, relegating them to the role of representing and organizing citizens, though this role does not carry political weight, and is more akin to the limited definitions of social organizations. This seems to be confirmed by the Public Liberties royal decree, issued on November 15, 1985, which deals with the right to form organizations, as well as, in its fourth part, parties and organizations of a political nature. The fifteenth chapter states that:

- Groups consisting of political parties, or those who engage in any form of political activity, fall under the purview of this decree.

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<sup>7</sup> Duverger, 1951.

- Political activity, according to this decree, is any activity that the organization could directly or indirectly use to steer or arrange public affairs according to its principles, which the representatives of this organization aim to implement.

A close reading of this passage gives a clear impression of how the Moroccan political regime defines political party. It is both obscure and confusing, and disconnected from modern political science's philosophy of the political party system in global democracies. Based on the above definition as mentioned in the above decree, the contours of the Moroccan political system's understanding of the political party emerge:

1. Organizations, including political parties or those with any sort of political activity, are the structuring framework. This means that political parties are viewed merely as organizations, having more to do with civil society than with political society. By this standard, the role of the political party is no different from the role of civil society organizations.
2. Political activity is any activity that either directly or indirectly promotes a group's principles in order to manage or arrange public affairs. This confirms that this is an attempt to empty political parties of any political content since they are political organizations aiming to reach power with the will of the people. However, this goal does not adhere to the political logic of the Moroccan regime; for this reason, according to the latter, the political activity of parties should be, in essence, a civil activity, which contains citizens within a group, without thought of coming to power, though this is the true role of parties in modern democratic systems.

How can we possibly, then, speak of a political party system when we are dealing with political parties-as-organizations that are unable to play the role they are meant to play in modern democratic systems?

It is clear that this functioning logic is applied to political parties' aims to produce a superficial party plurality empty of all the real meanings of party pluralism – the essence of modern democratic practice. This is what works with the nature of the Moroccan political regime, which is based on a ruling monarchy that does not accept the peaceful competition over power, whether executive or legislative. The powers of the state are monopolized by the monarchy, with few powers bequeathed to the political parties in parliament or government. This is why political parties are organizations that "... do not seek to apply their political agendas or change society

based on their agendas, but complete for influence over power and to serve it, not to achieve it.”<sup>8</sup>

The 2006 political party law was a replacement for a 1958 decree on public liberties that dealt with the formation of organizations. This new law maintained the spirit of the former decree despite some renovations. In the first article of the first chapter of the law, political parties were defined as “permanent organizations that have a corporate character and are founded on the basis of an agreement between natural individuals with civil and political rights sharing the same principles, with the aim of participating in arranging public affairs in a democratic manner and without seeking profit.” The role of political parties within the political system, according to the second article, is that “political parties play a role in organizing citizens and representing them. In this context, they participate in spreading political education and involving citizens in public life, as well as preparing select individuals to take on public responsibilities and revitalize the political field.”

From this definition emerges the affirmation that political parties participate in arranging public affairs, a phrase which must be highlighted. Tacitly, this is a denial of the political presence of political parties within democracies, at least in a capacity that would allow them to reach power and practice legislative and executive authority through representing the popular will for the implementation of the political party’s electoral platform. This is confirmed from the primary role that the law attributes to political parties – the role of participating in organizing and representing civilians. This – in truth – is in line with the logic of the 1996 constitution, in which the third chapter says: “Political parties, trade unions, local organizations, and professional syndicates participate in organizing civilians and representing them.”

The role of organizing civilians and representing them reappears verbatim in the third chapter of 2011 constitution, and in the second article of the first chapter of the 2006 law on organizing political parties. However, what the earlier law suppresses and the third chapter of the constitution states, is the explicit link between political parties, trade unions, local organizations, and professional syndicates, which all share the role of organizing civilians and representing them. This means that the old understanding of political parties stated in the royal public liberties decree dealing with the founding of

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<sup>8</sup> Mohammad, p. 144.

organizations still endures, despite the apparent changes in form and definition. All of this is logical because it pertains to the continuity of the monarchical Moroccan political regime, a regime that cannot stand alongside a modern democratic understanding of political parties, since the latter would aim to receive popular support for the execution of their electoral platforms, and fulfill specific roles within modern democracies: persuasion, supporting legitimacy, mobilization, and development.

Researcher Mohammad Shuqair<sup>9</sup> connects this state with a number of issues, which he summarizes as follows:

- The Moroccan authorities incompatibility with any political practice that aims to reach power;
- the monarchy's constant attempt to take the prime position within the Moroccan political system, which places all other political forces, including political parties, behind it; and
- the authorities' constant attempts to limit any other form of political emergence.

This situation contradicts the liberal/democratic definition of political parties within any modern political system, whether republican or monarchic. The practice of political power, legislative or executive, is the fulcrum of any political party's activity. The role of parties in the Moroccan political context are distinguished by their transformation from activity that aims to reach political power as a strategic pathway within democratic organizations to the support of the regime in confronting economic and social backwardness.<sup>10</sup>

This is all deeply connected to how the monarchy perceives itself as the sole repository of the requisite historical and religious legitimacy to practice power. Meanwhile, the monarchy gives political parties limited legislative or executive powers that bear no relation to their representation of the popular will as revealed in elections. This situation is apparent through the omnipresence of the monarchy in all the areas having to do with political power, as well as in the vast powers that the monarchy is given constitutionally and politically, and its insistence on imposing some form of widespread

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<sup>9</sup> Shuqair, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> Barada, p. 64.

dominance. This means that political parties cannot balance things when it comes to the ability to share power, or truly or directly participate in arranging it.<sup>11</sup>

Within this closed political arrangement, one cannot imagine that any political parties, in the modern democratic sense, could emerge. This situation directly impacts the image of political parties in society, resulting in a distortion of citizens' view of politics in general. In turn, this threatens the image of the state in its relations with people, and encourages the belief that the authorities do not represent popular will; subsequently, citizens are disengaged from public affairs. The entire political infrastructure would need to be changed in order for this situation to change. There is an agreement over the necessity to move to a democratic political system in which political parties assume their rightful positions, as political actors and partners in power, and not as organizations equivalent to labor unions, local organizations and trade associations.

Any thoughts of democratic transition that do not take into account the central role of political parties as the backbone of democratic political systems, cannot take the Moroccan democratic experiment very far. Political parties alone are capable of revealing the popular will through the mechanism of elections, and they are the only bodies capable of producing political elites that can competently and responsibly practice parliamentary and executive authority with the requisite political maturity. They are the only bodies capable of achieving and promoting the success of the state's political, economic, social, and cultural projects. Most importantly, they are the only bodies capable of buttressing the political legitimacy of the political regime by executing the popular will in the legislative and executive branches after reaching power.

These roles are all extremely vital, in fact crucial, in any political regime aiming to achieve political development, which are no less important these days than economic development. Political decisions now affect the economic numbers game. In modern democracies, political parties participate to the fullest in achieving political development through creating a healthy political life in which citizens feel comfortable and become true participants in the decision-making process.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 10.

## Political Party Plurality as a Substitute for Political Pluralism

A plurality of political parties has existed in Morocco since the early days of its modern political history. The third chapter of the 1962 constitution states, "the one-party system is banned in Morocco," and the ban on the one-party system has persevered into the four following constitutional amendments (1970, 1972, 1992, 1996), albeit in different terms, but with the same meaning: "The one-party system is an illegitimate one."

This counts as a point in favor of the democratic balance of the Moroccan political system; the era in which Morocco decreed this pluralistic political party system was revolutionary, dominated by a socialist ideology based on a one-party political model, particularly in nearby third-world Arab states in the independence period. In the Maghreb and the greater Arab world, the one party system dominated, in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq in the East, and in Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria in the west. At the time, Morocco was the one exception to this rule in the region, having chosen to adopt the modern, liberal model.

While admitting that the Moroccan political establishment had the political courage necessary to decree political party pluralism, my scientific duty obliges me to practice some methodological skepticism and ask: can the pluralism established in Morocco reach the level of political pluralism based on multiple projects and ideologies within the context of an open political climate that permits electoral competition? In order to reach power and execute legislative and executive power, whose legitimacy is given by popular mandate? Or does the matter not go beyond a political party system empty of its political content within a closed political context in which power is derived from religious and historical legitimacy? In the shadow of an unclassifiable ideological obscurity, political parties exist merely to strengthen this legitimacy without having any electoral projects. These are pressing questions that must be asked, and many assumptions, usually stated in dry legalese that is often ignored, must be examined. Any proper scientific analysis mandates a revision of these assumptions, as well as their testing and analysis.

The 1962 constitution banned the single-party system within a political context characterized by a strong presence of the National Movement as a potential rival to the monarchy for power. Earlier, the Independence Party had represented this, as the

representative of a wide tranche of Moroccan society, which included the former members of the National Party, and the heads and members of the boards of the student alumni associations of Rabat, Meknes, Fez, Sale, Marrakesh, Azrou, Wajda, and Asfi. It was also joined by influential figures from the Nationalist movement, as well as several muftis, judges of the religious and civilian courts, major Mekhzen employees, University of al-Karaouine (the first university in the world), professors, and secondary school teachers.<sup>12</sup>

Due to the popular strength of the Independence Party, and its political positions, which were developed in a petition, published on January 11, 1944, demanding independence and democracy, the political regime dealt with the Independence Party as a strong competitor in power; particularly because, across the world, independence movements were the only ones qualified to reach power. The Independence Party was clearly demanding democracy, which was affirmed by its petition demanding independence. While the presentation to the protectorate powers and the Western consuls in the Maghreb demonstrated clear motives for independence, the presentation of the petition to King Mohammad V was also a clear message containing democratic demands that should not be waylaid by the king and the people's independence revolutions.

In light of these clear demands for democracy, the monarchy, which aimed to monopolize power while delegating some parts of it to the national movement, attempted to keep the Independence Party from power at any cost because its popular force and demands for democracy were invading the political scene and would have placed it on the same level as the monarchy, which the palace would never agree to. For this reason, after the announcement of Moroccan independence, the Independence Party was weakened, marginalized as a national freedom movement, and distanced from running the country's affairs, which is what would have happened in most other newly-independent nations. The Independence Party only participated in the first few governments for a period no longer than five years.<sup>13</sup>

### **Political Party Plurality and Party Disintegration**

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<sup>12</sup> al-Fasi, p. 246.

<sup>13</sup> Hassan Abdul Khaliq, "The Independence Party or the Battles over Unity, Democracy and Development," *Nawafid Magazine*, Issue 8-9, 2000, 57.

The monarchy's wager on political party plurality as a constant constitutional principle was in reality a way to confront the strength of the National Movement as a potential power-sharing partner. The monarchy, in its attempt to mandate political party plurality that would work well with the nature of the authoritarian ruling monarchic establishment, focused on a number of basic principles that would allow it to help establish a superficial political party plurality, in the absence of any political pluralism linked to a democratic context. Moroccan researcher Dr. Younes Barada focuses on some of these principles:<sup>14</sup>

- Supporting the central authority by giving it wide ruling powers, which would allow it to rule over and control political parties by imposing rules on parties that seemed to be about to break away from the chains of obedience.
- Actual marginalizing of political partners, particularly the opposition parties formed from the remnants of the National Movement, by transforming them into political numbers with no political capital (related to their struggle and their popularity).
- Reorganizing the traditional structures of the deserts and revitalizing the political capital of rural areas making it loyal to the throne by using local elites in the urban and rural areas to control the bureaucracy.
- Promoting the pastoral (or bucolic, rural) culture that could represent the Mekhzen system in its relation between society and the political classes, making it a buttress for the monarchy rather than giving it significant heft in the political decision-making process; once achieved, political decisions are almost closed.

From this perspective, and based on these principles, a façade of political party pluralism was created<sup>15</sup> without any political content; this was exacerbated by the increase of administrative parties whose establishment was tied to the state's agenda, rather than to an ideological expression or social project. Thus, political party plurality

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<sup>14</sup> Younes Barada, "Political Party Action and the Democratic Question in Morocco," *Al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddin*, Issue 1594, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Moroccan researcher Ahmad Buz's article mentions that the National Rally of Independents was created inside the palace, and that the late Hassan II had chosen the name of the party and its leader. See: Ahmad Buz, "Moroccan Political Parties and the Wager of Transitioning to Democracy," *The Moroccan Journal of Political and Social Science*, 1(1), 52.

in Morocco lost its political significance and became a political splintering without any political content. There are currently over thirty political parties in Morocco, but most are no more than “political shops” opening for business during election season, shuttering their doors until the next time. This leads one to wonder what would have happened if this number of parties represented an equal number of political programs and social projects?

The pluralism necessary for democracy-building, and which would be useful for development and progress, is based on a real pluralism of political visions and reasoning, the goal of which would be the formation of a new party that would offer new proposals different from the current crop, or, in other words, healthy, constructive competition that produces new ideas, encourages innovation, and creates dynamics that open the way to development.<sup>16</sup>

### **Party Plurality and Party Schisms**

In addition to the monarchy’s caesarian birthing of political parties over the past decades, it has also left behind crumbs of political parties without any content, yet another form of emptying out the political content of parties in order to create a false party plurality. In practice, this took the form of schisms within parties that infiltrated into political parties, and aimed to tear them apart from the inside. These splits were either self-inflicted, resulting from undemocratic internal politics and the unbridled ambitions of party members, or external, relating to the reality of politics and political parties in Morocco, and certainly with the nature of the political regime, based on absolute monarchy.

As a direct result of these conditions, whether internal or external, the phenomenon of party breakups became one of the most salient features of Moroccan politics. This exacerbated the already-negative image the Moroccan people had of political parties, and negatively affected politics in general. Moroccan researcher Mohammad al-Tuzi describes three different modes of party schisms within the Moroccan political scene:

- splits arising from divisions,
- splits arising from separatist motivations, and

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<sup>16</sup> Abdulqadir al-Ilmi, “On a New Political Culture,” *Mansurat al-Zaman*, Issue 47, 2005, 21.

- arranged splits.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the varied kinds splits, the outcome is the same, ruled by the same self-inflected or external elements: political immaturity and the absence of a clear theoretical vision, which resulted in amorphous projects that did not differentiate one party from the other, or the nature of the Moroccan political system which rejects any form of power-sharing, even if the latter were confined by the democratic binds set out by the monarchy. Thus, the party splits, controlled from a distance, eventually played two roles:

1. They helped to create a political pluralism empty of all political content, with the aim of forming (or filling) a political scene that it could market to the outside world, as a sign of the healthy practice of democracy in the country; this state is expressed by true popular participation which the small political enterprises magnify into astronomical numbers that sometimes exceed Morocco's actual population.
2. They aborted any attempts of actual, serious political action that could represent the populace in its relationship to the political regime. Since the National Movement, which was represented by the Independence Party, represented the voice of the Moroccan people, and was a strong mediator with the regime, the Mekhzen eventually brought the party down, and the regime has been extremely wary of any serious political action by a party, considering it the primary danger to the unipolar monopolization of political power within the monarchy. This regime can accept nothing other than minimal involvement in the legislative and executive bodies, without allowing them to actually share in the political decision-making process.

The political regime – through instigating political schisms – has succeeded in undermining the political foundations of the major parties that had until recently been effective partners in power, but which have now become small, splintered parties with no genuine popular spread. This has obviously affected their ability to negotiate and their capacity to make proposals. In turn, this has allowed the monarchy to monopolize the political decisions and to shape them according to its own vision and its own interests. Finally, this has led to the transformation of national parties into administrative parties that compete for favor from the monarchy in order to implement

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<sup>17</sup> Mohammad al-Tuzi, "Reformers: Between Unity and Schism," translated by Mohammad Bin Sheikh, *Wajhat Nazar*, Issue 2, 1999, p. 4-5.

projects planned by technocrats and executed under ministerial auspices that are distributed according to perceived loyalty, flexibility and nepotism.

## Back to the Start

The experience of political parties in Morocco will remain hobbled as long as there is no true democratic outlook which links the practice of power to popular will. Neither will it achieve popular representation, which is one of the standards of political legitimacy in any political system. No one believes that Morocco will develop an advanced democratic project in light of its apathetic, hobbled political reality. Across the world, democracy is inextricably tied to the presence of strong political parties capable of achieving widespread popular support and developing this support in legislative and executive decisions once the parties have been brought to power.

The apathetic political situation in Morocco threatens the country's democratic trajectory because nature abhors a vacuum. In the absence of a real political pluralism that represents social currents and has clear political and social programs, it is likely that extremist religious or ethnic groups that invest in mobilizing citizens in order to serve specific – and not necessarily nationalist – agendas will fill the void. I do not intend to curtail any political choice, but am merely calling for the creation of an open political playing field. In a modern definition of political parties, all groups and movements may aim to reach power and implement their platforms, deriving their legitimacy from the popular vote.

Perhaps it is now time for the political regime to revise the issue of political parties, which are considered to be the key to any democratic progress. Naturally, this would occur through allowing certain legislative and executive authorities an actual voice in the political decision-making process, since this is the true function of a political party. When not allowed to play this role, the party loses its political perspective as well as its political value. In the absence of an effective legislative and executive power that enables political parties to participate in the political, economic, and cultural decision-making processes, political parties will remain nothing but useless shells.

The wager on the transition from delegating power to participating in power, which is at the heart of the transition towards democracy, is fraught with dangers. It will fail in light of a political reality in which parties are birthed and forcibly split by a mechanism

which succeeds merely to create a multiplicity of political parties empty of any political content. It will fail to produce a healthy political climate based on political pluralism represented by strong political parties with their own visions and social projects.

This situation may be dangerous for a political regime increasingly lacking in popular support over time. The historical and religious components from which the regime derives its legitimacy in Morocco will not last long in this rapidly evolving world that is daily heading towards the globalization of the liberal political model. This model is based on a system of popular support, garnered by political action through democratic mechanisms, in which elections identify the political majority, which later becomes a ministerial majority that has significant and clear legislative and executive powers.

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