



مركز برونكس الدوحة  
BROOKINGS DOHA CENTER

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Number 3, January 2011

**POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN NORTH AFRICA:**  
THE PERILS OF INCOMPLETE LIBERALIZATION

**Anouar Boukhars**



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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After the attacks of September 11, 2001, a growing number of analysts and policymakers drew a link between the dramatic rise of terrorism in the Middle East and the region's lack of democracy. The question of whether levels of political rights and freedoms affect the resort to violence continues to be a source of major political debate.

While some scholars insist that democracies are less likely to produce terrorist activity, due to their ability to channel grievance peacefully, others contend that regimes transitioning to democracy are highly vulnerable to destabilization. Periods of liberalization often raise citizens' expectations for freedom that regimes are unwilling or unable to meet. The resulting dissonance can fuel violent opposition.

This study examines whether liberalizing regimes in the Maghreb are more or less vulnerable to the threat of political violence and terrorism than their more repressive counterparts. Do political reform processes, however limited and incomplete, boost regime legitimacy and undercut support for radical opposition forces?

Over the last decade, the Maghreb has become a major producer and exporter of violent extremists to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Europe. This paper investigates whether political liberalization efforts in Algeria and Morocco, including the incorporation of mainstream Islamist groups, have contributed to a rise or decline in the level of political violence. Tunisia, one of the Arab world's most authoritarian states, is also examined to determine whether more exclusionary state policies prevent violence or instead facilitate radicalization. The three cases suggest that the greater the gap between expected change and

actual change, the greater the likelihood of political unrest and violence.

In Morocco, reform efforts seem to have enhanced the monarchy's legitimacy and eased social and economic pressures on the population. However, political reforms have so far lagged behind the country's socio-economic modernization. Algeria and Tunisia face similar problems, but to a greater degree since the regimes there lack the historical and religious legitimacy of the Moroccan monarchy. In all cases, social development tends to weaken traditional structures yet fails to present institutional substitutes capable of meeting people's growing demands. Citizens are left without effective and responsive government institutions through which to address their grievances.

This paper argues that the potential negative impacts of liberalization processes on stability stem not from the depth of political and economic reforms but rather from their limited and inconsistent nature. This unevenness is, in some sense, inevitable. It is extremely difficult for political institutions in authoritarian contexts to keep pace with popular demands. As a result, most Arab societies find themselves torn between what they are and what many expect them to become. This gap cannot be easily erased. But it can be managed.

Several key findings emerge in this study, including:

- **Controlled liberalization efforts, backed by aggressive counterterrorism strategies, have had success in containing political violence.** However, these reforms can backfire if they do not deliver the responsive

government institutions regimes have promised.

- **Bringing mainstream Islamist groups into the political realm has had a positive effect on stability.** These organizations help deflate extremist challenges by keeping their own rank-and-file in check and providing a platform to effect change from within the system. However, current regime strategies of Islamist inclusion have their own risks. When “co-option” renders Islamists incapable of challenging the status quo, then moderates within these groups are discredited and appear weak, while hardliners, who offer a clearer voice of opposition, are empowered.
- **Backtracking on reforms undermines regime legitimacy and threatens radicalization of actors excluded from the political process.** The erosion of legitimacy, in turn, complicates regime efforts to fight violent extremism. Unless governments win public support for counterterrorism measures, dismantling such groups will remain difficult.
- **While extreme repression may eliminate political dissent and help keep terrorism at bay, it is difficult to sustain in the long run and is likely to lose effectiveness.** Moreover, repressive measures may internationalize radicals’ area of activity.

This paper suggests that political systems in the Maghreb are facing a crisis of legitimacy. Although they have been somewhat successful in diffusing discontent through good economic performance, as in Tunisia, and through effective combinations of co-option and repression, as in Morocco, the countries of the Maghreb have come up increasingly short, as demonstrated by rising levels of popular frustration and social unrest. Without clear indicators of progress, the risk that populations will consider disengaging from peaceful political participation only grows.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

While the Obama Administration is understandably hesitant to replicate the Bush Administration’s emphasis on democracy, subordinating the promotion of civil liberties and basic human rights to short-term interests is likely to fail as a long-term strategy to secure stability in the Maghreb and elsewhere.

Where political liberalization efforts are already underway, they must be deepened and made more meaningful. It is imperative for the United States and other Western powers to use their influence and leverage to push for substantive political reforms. Key recommendations include:

- **Refrain from exaggerated praise of superficial democratic reforms.** The United States should publicly praise reforms only when they are significant and should not hesitate to point out where they fall short. A critical part of promoting reform is being honest and realistic about the progress being made. One way to determine whether real change is occurring is to develop a set of concrete criteria for democratization.
- **Promote a governance-oriented approach to development aid.** International donors can play an important role in setting clear benchmarks on governance. The record of past development assistance is clear: unless government is transparent and accountable, no amount of aid can help deliver progress that is broad-based and sustainable.
- **Coordinate efforts with like-minded global development donors.** The United States and other donors should adopt what Joseph Stiglitz calls the “comprehensive aid paradigm,” which emphasizes incentives for countries that prioritize institutional accountability and promote legal and judicial reform. The European Union’s Governance Facility – designed to aid partner nations that have best advanced an agreed-upon reform agenda –

is a good example that must be enhanced in liberalizing partner countries like Morocco.

- **Remove the stigma associated with engaging Islamists.** Despite continuing doubts about Islamists' democratic credentials, a consensus has emerged within Washington policymaking circles recognizing the necessity of dialogue with mainstream Islamists. This trend, however, has not yet moved beyond the level of discourse and into public policy and practice. Engaging nonviolent Islamist movements that have abided by democratic rules can advance the American agenda in the Maghreb by removing violence as a viable option for those disenchanted with the status quo. When Islamists believe they can influence government through nonviolent means, they tend to do so.

## DELIBERALIZATION PROCESSES & VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NORTH AFRICA

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Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, few issues have triggered more debate than the impact of democratization on violent extremism and terrorism in the Middle East. At one end of the spectrum are scholars and policymakers who argue that democratic reform undermines popular support for extremist groups and promotes a decline in political violence. Democracies are thought to be more conducive to social stability and peace.

At the other end are those who warn that transitional regimes are highly vulnerable to destabilization and far more likely to be challenged by an increase in political militancy.<sup>1</sup> Periods of liberalization unleash expectations of change that regimes are either unable or unwilling to meet. The resulting dissonance fuels violent opposition. Critics of democratization in the Middle East not only discount the positive benefits of political reforms but also caution that such reforms may heighten states' divisions and weaken the institutions and rules that deter civil violence.

Numerous studies have looked at how differing levels of political openness affect internal stability and the likelihood of violence. Nearly everyone agrees that institutionalized democracies are

more stable and peaceful than other forms of government. Consolidated autocracies, too, are resilient and somewhat stable, but they are – or seem to be – the main producers of extremist ideologies and exporters of terrorism. A 2007 study by West Point's Combating Terrorism Center, for instance, found that “low levels of civil liberties are a powerful predictor of the national origin of foreign fighters in Iraq.”<sup>2</sup> In the long run, then, promoting democracy is not only a sound policy but a necessary one. The problem, however, is that the transition from autocracy to democracy can be a risky process, particularly in a volatile region facing enormous economic difficulties, political grievances, ethnic factionalism, as well as demographic challenges.

In a statistical analysis of 19 countries from 1972 to 2003, James Piazza finds that “more liberal Middle Eastern political systems are actually more susceptible to the threat of terrorism than are the more dictatorial regimes.”<sup>3</sup> Such countries are usually ill equipped to keep pace with impatient popular expectations and tend to suffer from significant weaknesses of political structures, leaving them more vulnerable to militant encroachment.<sup>4</sup> History abounds with examples of growing expectation gaps leading to the destruction

1 Studies by Jack Snyder, Martha Reynal-Querol, and Demet Mousseau support the argument that periods of political transitions are far more likely to be characterized by an increase in violence and political extremism than are periods of full-scale authoritarian rule. Similar arguments were made by Ellingsen et al., who observed that democratizing regimes “are most prone to civil war, even when they have had time to stabilize from a regime change ... Compared to well-established democracies or autocracies, intermediate regimes have a higher hazard of civil war, as do regimes just emerging from a political transition.” Tanja Ellingsen, Scott Gates, Nils Petter Glenditsch, and Håvard Hegre, “Toward a Democratic Civil Peace? Democracy, Political Change, and Civil War, 1816-1992,” *American Political Science Review* 95, no. 1 (March 2001): 33-48.

2 Lianne Boudali, “The GSPC: Newest Franchise in Al Qaeda's Global Jihad,” West Point Combating Terrorism Center, April 2007, 6.

3 James A. Piazza, “Draining the Swamp: Democracy Promotion, State Failure, and Terrorism in 19 Middle Eastern Countries,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 6 (June 2007): 521- 539.

4 Most regimes, particularly autocratic ones, are faced with opponents with grievances, who are tempted to turn to political radicalism and violence. The escalation from a grievance formation, which is natural and common, into, first, political violence and then protracted domestic conflict, occurs in regimes where the government is weak and ineffective in responding to political challenges. “A united and administratively competent regime can defeat any insurgency.” (Jack A. Goldstone et al., “A Global Model for Forecasting Political Instability,” *American Journal of Political Science* 54, no. 1, January 2010: 191). Meanwhile, Theda Skocpol attributes the eruption of revolutionary crises to the “breakdown of the administrative and coercive powers of an old order.” In her view, the focus should be on the weaknesses of the regime rather than on the power of its challengers. (Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979, 7-8).

of states (the Soviet Union under Gorbachev), collapse of regimes (Shah of Iran), and the outbreak of civil war (Algeria in the 1990s). Put succinctly, revolutions, Crane Brinton notes, are a product of “increasing promises to the common man” while failing to fulfill them.<sup>5</sup> Revolutions almost always occur in societies where “the governments seem to have been relatively inefficient, and the governed relatively impatient.”<sup>6</sup> Brinton’s formulation would seem to be particularly applicable to the Middle East, yet, with the exception of Iran, there have been no popular revolutions in the region. This can be interpreted in one of two ways: that the Middle East is resistant to rapid change or that it is teetering on the brink.

These concerns – straddling the hope, or expectation, of change and the fear it will happen too quickly – have bedeviled scholars and policymakers in a post-9/11 world. The questions remain largely unanswered: Are liberalizing regimes in the Middle East more or less vulnerable to the threat of political violence and terrorism than their more repressive counterparts? Do political transitions, however limited and incomplete, boost regime legitimacy and undercut support for radical opposition forces? Or does the limited inclusiveness of institutional structures and inconsistency of reforms create an intolerable chasm between rising popular expectations and a reality where progress is slow and frustratingly erratic?

The stakes, as it turns out, are high. Rising economic inequality, coupled with the slowness (or, in some cases, reversal) of political reforms in the Arab world has created what Kenneth Pollack calls a “pre-revolutionary” state. “With the right admixture of other factors – a charismatic leader, a rallying event, a significant loss in the regime’s

power or willingness to employ that power – the situation,” explains Pollack, “could produce a true revolution.”<sup>7</sup> Considering the effect that a “true revolution” would almost certainly have on American strategic interests in the region, policymakers should not take such warnings lightly.

Drawing from three cases in the Maghreb, this study will examine the impact of transitional reform processes on levels of political violence and terrorism in different contexts. In so doing, it assesses whether there is a relationship between an increase (or decrease) in political freedom and civil liberties and a drop (or rise) in local and transnational political violence. The region remains understudied, despite a marked rise in terrorist activity after September 11. The overwhelming number of incidents occurred in Algeria (770 as of 2009), where attacks rose from 20 in 2001 to 185 in 2009.<sup>8</sup> Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco registered a lower number of successful attacks, but all three countries, especially Morocco, witnessed a mushrooming of terrorist cells at home and an increase in activity abroad. In Morocco alone, authorities have broken up more than 60 cells since the May 2003 attacks in Casablanca, which took the lives of 45 people. Some of these networks, like the “Belliraj Cell” in Casablanca and Nador, were headed by Moroccans residing in Europe.<sup>9</sup>

Over the last decade, the Maghreb has become a major producer and exporter of violent extremists to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Europe. In fact, according to data from the Sinjar Records compiled by West Point’s Combating Terrorism Center and covering the period between August 2006 and August 2007, 191 out of 595 fighters in Iraq – 32 percent – came from North Africa. Notably, Libya contributed the greatest number of fighters (18.8

5 Crane Brinton, *Anatomy of a Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1938), 262.

6 Ibid, 36,150-1.

7 Kenneth Pollack, *A Path Out of the Desert: A Grand Strategy for America in the Middle East* (New York: Random House, 2008), 146.

8 Libya registered the least number of incidents, with one attack in 2003, compared to Tunisia (three attacks), Morocco (seven attacks), and Mauritania (18 attacks). This diversification in regional reach of terrorist attacks stretches into the neighboring Sahel countries of Chad (57 attacks), Mali (37 attacks), and Niger (32 attacks). The principal perpetrator of these attacks, which took the lives of over 1,500 people, is Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and other loosely affiliated groups. Yonah Alexander, “Maghreb and Sahel Terrorism: Addressing the Rising Threat from Al Qaeda and Other Terrorists in North and West/Central Africa,” International Center for Terrorism Studies at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, January 2010, <[http://www.potomacinstitute.org/attachments/524\\_Maghreb%20Terrorism%20report.pdf](http://www.potomacinstitute.org/attachments/524_Maghreb%20Terrorism%20report.pdf)>

9 Sarah Touahri and Naoufel Cherkaoui, “Morocco dismantles widespread domestic terrorist network,” *Magharebia*, February 21, 2008, <[http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en\\_GB/features/awi/features/2008/02/21/feature-01](http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2008/02/21/feature-01)>

percent of the total) behind only Saudi Arabia.<sup>10</sup> The increasing mobility of extremists and growing interconnectedness between domestic and international terrorists have raised alarm bells across Europe and the United States.<sup>11</sup> As they expand their operations beyond regional borders, Maghreb-based terrorists are becoming a direct threat to the security interests of the United States and the international community. It is therefore critical to understand the effects of limited liberalization processes – and their abandonment – on the incidence of violent extremism, and, crucially, the likelihood that violence shifts from a local focus to a transnational one.

The three cases presented here – Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia – capture a wide variation in levels of political reform and violence. Algeria is a model study in the disastrous consequences that can unfold following a sudden reversal of democratic reforms. It is also an important example of how selective political inclusion and aggressive, sometimes brutal, security measures can temper domestic terrorism, while forcing a change in the direction of local militants and the target of their attacks. The near-total defeat of local militants prompted a globalization of violence, expediting the marriage between local groups and those like Al Qaeda with both a global reach and a global agenda.

In Morocco, top-down managed reforms appear to have spared it the destabilization that Algeria experienced. Since its independence in 1956, Morocco has skillfully built state-controlled institutions, backed by a repressive state apparatus, which have helped contain political dissent. The incidences of terrorism in 2003 and 2007, however, demonstrate the limits of “controlled liberalization.” Having raised popular expectations

for real reform, the regime is under pressure to meet the mounting demands of the economically underprivileged and politically marginalized. The involvement of many Moroccans in international terrorism has raised pressing questions about the efficacy of the Moroccan regime’s strategy in preventing the spread of extremist ideology among the population.

Tunisia, meanwhile, is the most repressive state in the Maghreb.<sup>12</sup> President Zine Al-Abidine Ben Ali subscribes to the school that sees the elimination of political dissent as necessary to contain political violence. In some ways, the regime’s relatively successful economic policies and ruthlessly effective security institutions have neutralized support for the Islamist opposition and maintained social peace, in the process challenging the notion that repressive regimes promote instability. Recent incidences of terrorist attacks within Tunisia, as well as the participation of Tunisians in regional and international terrorist organizations, have, however, cast doubt on the regime’s strategy of absolute repression and political exclusion.

This paper is based on fieldwork in Morocco and interviews with officials, academics, and activists in the Maghreb. It draws heavily on Arabic and French primary sources. The purpose of the study is twofold: the first is to assess how controlled liberalization processes affect levels of political violence in Morocco and Algeria. The second is to determine whether Tunisia’s exclusionary state policies have contained domestic terrorist groups or, rather, contributed to their radicalization and increased collaboration with transnational terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

The paper draws on the Bertlesmann

10 “Al-Qaeda’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records,” Harmony Project, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, January 2008, <<http://www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/CTCForeignFighter.19.Dec07.pdf>>

11 In 2007, the French interior ministry was so concerned about the existence of about 5,000 Franco/Maghrebi radicals who sympathized with AQIM that it tripled the size of the country’s anti-terrorism unit. According to the annual report published by Europol in 2008, the majority of those apprehended for involvement in terrorism in Europe hail from “North African countries, most notably Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.” Jonathan Githens-Mazer, “Islamic Radicalization among North Africans in Britain,” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 10, no. 4 (November 2008): 553; Eric Rosand, “Countering Terrorism and Building Cooperation in North Africa: The Potential Significance of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy,” Real Institute Elcano ARI 169, January 2009, <[http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/ri/elcano\\_eng/Content?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/Elcano\\_in/Zonas\\_in/ARI162-2009](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/ri/elcano_eng/Content?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/Elcano_in/Zonas_in/ARI162-2009)>

12 Eric Gobe and Vincent Geisser, “La question de l’ ‘authenticité tunisienne’: valeur refuge d’un régime à bout de souffle,” *L’Année du Maghreb* 3 (2007): 371–408.

Transformation Index (BTI), which assesses the progress and quality of political and economic development in 128 transitional and developing countries. This will be supplemented by data from the Political Terror Scale (PTS), which measures and evaluates levels of political violence and human rights violations based on a five-level “terror scale,” with 1 representing the most free and 5 the most repressive.<sup>13</sup>

### THE TYRANNY-TERROR LINK

The question of whether low levels of civil and political rights affect violent extremism continues to be a source of major political debate. After the attacks of 9/11, a growing number of analysts and policymakers drew a link, whether direct or indirect, between the dramatic rise in terrorist attacks and the Middle East’s lack of democracy.<sup>14</sup> This view was best articulated in November 2003 by President Bush: “Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe.”<sup>15</sup> This conclusion was not necessarily surprising; the region has long been a major springboard for international terrorism. It has also been one of the most undemocratic. The notion, however, of a relationship between lack of political freedom and the incidence of terrorism – what Shadi Hamid and Steven Brooke term the “tyranny-terror link”<sup>16</sup> – has been quite controversial.

F. Gregory Gause was among the earliest and most prominent critics of the posited relationship between authoritarianism and terror. In a 2005 *Foreign Affairs* article, he challenged “the

security rationale for promoting democracy in the Arab world” as unsound.<sup>17</sup> Democracy promotion, according to Gause, will neither help reduce the terrorist threat to the United States nor will it diminish public support for terrorist groups like Al Qaeda. Regime type cannot be a predictor of terrorism, he argues, as democracies and autocracies alike are plagued by terrorism.<sup>18</sup> Two statistical studies conducted by William Lea Eubank and Leonard Weinberg, for instance, found that more terrorist activities occurred in democracies than non-democracies between World War II and 1987.<sup>19</sup>

Other scholars have validated Eubank and Weinberg’s proposition that democracy can exacerbate terrorism. Democratic governments’ respect for civil liberties and freedom of speech allows terrorists greater space for movement and association<sup>20</sup> and limits the extent of security measures,<sup>21</sup> sheltering terror suspects from “detection” and “prosecution.”<sup>22</sup> By contrast, terrorist movements, as historian Walter Laquer remarks, do “not stand much of a chance against political regimes able to use unrestricted force against them, unhampered by laws, considerations of human rights, and public protests.”<sup>23</sup> The absence of militant activity in totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany and communist North Korea has led a number of historians to conclude that terrorist movements have little chance of success in highly repressive regimes. Quan Li reaches a similar conclusion in his study of the impact of democracy on transnational terrorism, though he acknowledges that aspects of democracy also have a positive impact on reducing terrorism. Political

13 The PTS dataset comes from Amnesty International’s Annual Report and the U.S. Department of State’s Country Reports.

14 See Martin Indyk, “Back to the Bazaar,” *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2002); Morton H. Halperin, Joseph T. Siegle, and Michael M. Weinstein, *The Democracy Advantage: How Democracies Promote Prosperity and Peace* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

15 “President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East,” Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, November 6, 2003, <<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html>>

16 Shadi Hamid and Steven Brooke, “Promoting Democracy to Stop Terror, Revisited,” *Policy Review*, March 2010, <<http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/82978247.html>>

17 F. Gregory Gause III, “Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?” *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2005).

18 Gause writes: “Between 2000 and 2003, according to the State Department’s annual *Global Patterns of Terrorism*, 269 major terrorist incidents occurred in countries classified as ‘free’ in the Freedom House *Freedom in the World* annual report; 119 such incidents occurred in countries classified as ‘partly free;’ and 138 occurred in countries classified as ‘not free’” (Gause, “Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?” 66).

19 William Lee Eubank and Leonard Weinberg, “Does Democracy Encourage Terrorism?” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 6 (1994): 417-443; William Lee Eubank and Leonard Weinberg, “Terrorism and Democracy: Perpetrators and Victims,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 13 (Spring 2001): 155-164.

20 Joe Eyerly, “Terrorism and Democratic States: Soft Targets or Accessible Systems,” *International Interactions* 24, no. 2 (1998): 151-170.

21 Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” *Comparative Politics* 13, no. 4 (July 1981): 379-399.

22 Alex P. Schmid, “Terrorism and Democracy,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 4, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 14-25.

23 Walter Laqueur, *No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 14-15.

participation, he writes, “increases satisfaction and political efficacy of citizens, reduces their grievances, thwarts terrorist recruitment, and raises public tolerance of counterterrorist policies.”<sup>24</sup> While Quan Li recognizes that democracy, by increasing participation, may reduce terrorism, institutional constraints in democratic systems may also weaken these governments’ abilities to combat terrorism.

Democracy skeptics make some important observations. Countries that enjoy high degrees of political freedom, greater protection of civil liberties, and higher economic standards are not immune to domestic terrorism. These scholars rightly warn that promoting democracy will do little to alter Al Qaeda’s goals or address the grievances of its members. Al Qaeda opposes democracy on ideological grounds, and its opposition to the West is fuelled by a desire to end what it perceives as American-led subjugation of Muslims.

Critics of the “tyranny-terror link,” however, fail to distinguish between the targets and perpetrators of terrorism. The most common target countries, such as the United States, India, and the United Kingdom, are, in fact, democracies. But even if democracies are more vulnerable to terrorism—a claim belied by data which show the overwhelming number of terror attacks after 2003 occurring in non-democratic countries—this reveals little about the causes of terrorism and their connection to democracy or its absence.<sup>25</sup> “If we are to understand the absence of democracy as one of the potential underlying causal factors leading to terrorism,” argues a RAND report, “we must examine where the perpetrators of terrorism come from, not just where they decide it is best from a tactical perspective to carry out their terrorist acts.”<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, a different trend emerges when focusing on the sources, rather than the targets, of terrorism. In a 2007 study, Alan Krueger and David Laitin found that “countries with a high degree of civil liberties are unlikely to be origin countries for terrorist acts,” while “the lower – and (especially) middle-level countries in terms of civil liberties are more likely to be origin countries.”<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the most militant ideologies that fuel Islamist radicalism and violent extremism all came out of non-democratic contexts. “Jihadism and takfirism,” writes Omar Ashour, “were both born in Egyptian political prisons where torture ranged from a systematic daily practice in some periods to a selective but widespread practice in others.”<sup>28</sup>

To be sure, terrorism, domestic or otherwise, is not caused by any one single factor but is a byproduct of a combination of political, socio-economic, historical, and international circumstances. The institutional settings of states, however, can transform such factors into collective grievances, which, in turn, can evolve into violence. The Tunisian regime may have crushed political dissent and kept terrorism in check, but those same exclusionary policies, as one Tunisian scholar notes, have been the catalyst for the emergence of a number of transnational terrorist networks.<sup>29</sup> In this case, regime repression has contributed, though inadvertently, to the exportation of violence.

In his work, Mohammed Hafez argues that politically inclusive systems create an environment in which opposition forces become more accommodationist and pragmatic.<sup>30</sup> Drawing primarily from the experiences of Algeria and Egypt, in addition to those of Kashmir, the southern Philippines, Chechnya, and Tajikistan, Hafez

24 Quan Li, “Does Democracy Promote or Reduce Transnational Terrorist Incidents?” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 2 (April 2005): 278-297.

25 Aurel Croissant, “Political Violence, Terrorism, and Transformation to Democracy and Market Economy: Findings of the Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2006,” *Strategic Insights* 4, no. 12 (December 2005).

26 Dalia Dassa Kaye, Frederic Wehrey, Audra K. Grant, and Dale Stahl, “More Freedom, Less Terror? Liberalization and Political Violence in the Arab World,” Rand Corporation (September 2008).

27 Alan B. Krueger and David D. Laitin, “*Kto Kogo?*: A Cross-Country Study of the Origins and Targets of Terrorism,” National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper, January 2007. <[www.krueger.princeton.edu/terrorism4.pdf](http://www.krueger.princeton.edu/terrorism4.pdf)>

28 Omar Ashour, “Votes and Violence: Islamists and the Processes of Transformation,” The International Center for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence, November 2009, <<http://www.icsr.info/publications/papers/1264507559VotesandViolenceIslamistsandtheProcessesofTransformationOmarAshour.pdf>>

29 Author’s interview with University of Sousse Professor of Political Science, May 12, 2010.

persuasively outlines the disastrous effects of state policies of marginalization and repression of opponents.<sup>31</sup> “In all these cases,” he writes in *Why Muslims Rebel*, “Islamic rebellion was a defensive response to brutal and indiscriminate repression that threatened the organizational and physical well being of Islamists and their supporters.”<sup>32</sup> While acknowledging that repression alone cannot bring about mass rebellion, Hafez, nevertheless, shows how “in the context of institutional exclusion, rebellion became a legitimate strategy for countering repressive state policies.”<sup>33</sup>

In his study of 20th century revolutions in Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe during the Cold War, sociologist Jeff Goodwin comes to a similar conclusion: “Revolutionary movements were more consistently a response to severely constricted or even contracting political opportunities, including chronic and even increasing state repression.”<sup>34</sup> Individuals, he adds, “joined or supported revolutionary movements when no other means of political expression were available to them, or when they or their families and friends were the targets of violent repression that was perpetrated or tolerated by relatively weak states.”<sup>35</sup>

To be sure, the link between political exclusion and terrorism is far from straightforward. Government repression in Egypt, for example, fueled the rise of violent opposition in the 1990s but similarly high levels of repression the following decade did not. This variation in outcomes has led Katerina Dalacoura to argue that “although there are cases where exclusion from the political process and repression have led Islamist movements to adopt

terrorist methods and where inclusion of Islamists has ensured a non-violent stance, a wider sample clearly demonstrates that this relationship does not always exist.”<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, dismissing the benefits of democratization in reducing terrorism simply because terrorist attacks occur in democracies misses the point. “The tyranny-terror hypothesis is concerned with which kinds of countries — specifically what regime types — are more likely to *produce* terrorists.”<sup>37</sup> To illuminate the link between lack of democracy and participation in terrorist activities, we must focus our attention on the terrorists’ countries of origin rather than the nations they attack.

Importantly, we must also distinguish between different forms of terrorism. The transnational terrorism of Al Qaeda, with its focus on fighting the West, differs from irredentist terrorism, whose focus is the liberation of occupied territories, and domestic terrorism, whose chief target is Muslim regimes perceived to be repressive, corrupt, and impious. While it is reasonable to doubt the efficacy of democracy promotion in dealing with groups like Al Qaeda, it is less so for other terrorist actors whose goals are domestic or territorial in nature. Paul Pillar, the National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia from 2000 until 2005, states that “the clearest applicability of democratization to defanging or pacifying terrorist groups is with those organizations that have good prospects of winning support or even power through democratic means.”<sup>38</sup>

30 Mohammad Hafez, “A Tragedy of Errors: Thwarted Democratization and Islamist Violence in Algeria,” in *Democratic Development and Political Terrorism*, ed. William Crotty (Holliston, MA: Northeastern, 2005), 301-331. See also Mohammad Hafez and Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Violence as Contention in the Egyptian Islamic Movement,” in *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 61-88.

31 Omar Ashour also finds “strong empirical support” for the terrorism-repression nexus in cases ranging from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (1954-1969) and Syria (1980s) to Algeria’s Islamic Salvation Front (1992-1997) and Tajikistan’s Islamic Renaissance Party (1992-1997). In all of these cases, he writes, “the tendency to work within a democratic framework and/or established state institutions did exist initially, and radicalization has occurred in response to exclusion and political repression.” Ashour, “Votes and Violence,” 11.

32 Mohammed Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 103.

33 Ibid.

34 Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 292.

35 Ibid.

36 Katerina Dalacoura, “Islamist terrorism and the Middle East democratic deficit: Political exclusion, repression and the causes of extremism,” *Democratization* 13, no. 3 (June 2006): 522.

37 Hamid and Brooke, “Promoting Democracy to Stop Terror, Revisited.”

38 Paul Pillar, “The Democratic Deficit: The Need for Liberal Democratization,” in *Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21st Century: International Perspectives*, vol. 2, ed. James J. F. Forest (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008), 48.

In Pillar's view, democracy can have a moderating influence on movements like Hamas, in the same way that it did on the Provisional Irish Republican Army in Ireland, the African National Congress in South Africa, and even Hizballah, "whose relative inactivity in terrorism over the past 10 years (apart from some assistance to Palestinian operations against Israel) contrasts starkly with its record during the previous 15 years."<sup>39</sup>

#### LIBERALIZATION-MILITANCY HYPOTHESES

The literature surveyed thus far suggests that levels of political freedom, regime type, and the nature of transition from one regime type to another, can have important implications for political violence. This study will explore the applicability of these findings to the Maghreb. Indeed, several hypotheses can be inferred from the works cited above.

First, democratic transitions, however limited, can boost regime legitimacy, delegitimize the use of violence, and undercut support for radical opposition.

Second, open forms of political participation allow for the peaceful management of societal tensions and channeling of public grievances through the political process.

Third, governments undergoing incomplete and limited liberalization processes face higher odds of political violence than either consolidated democracies or full autocracies, as they are ill-equipped to meet rising popular expectations and tend to suffer from weak political structures.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 49.

Algeria is a textbook example of the dangers of an attempted democratic transition without a negotiated understanding between the old authoritarian elites and their challengers regarding the prerogatives of the state. In hindsight, the army's intervention in 1991 after the electoral triumph of the Islamist opposition is unsurprising, even if in the process it unleashed a devastating civil war. In contrast, the 1998 pact struck in neighboring Morocco between the monarchy and the historic opposition survived mutual suspicions due to an explicit understanding of the terms.

In the late 1980s, the Algerian elite felt threatened by popular unrest over corruption and unemployment. Responding to the outbreak of riots in major Algerian cities, the government acted as authoritarian governments often do – with a massive show of force that claimed the lives of over 500 people. The brutality shocked Algerians and severely damaged the reputation of the army. Significantly weakened, the ruling National Liberation Front (FLN) calculated that the introduction of political reforms would restore stability and ease public bitterness.

In February 1989, Algeria was, almost overnight, transformed from an authoritarian single-party state into a democratizing one. Algerian authorities legalized opposition groups, including Islamist organizations,<sup>40</sup> thus ending the dominance of the FLN and ushering a new era that put Algeria on the brink of becoming, as William Quandt put it, “the most free, most pluralistic, and most enthusiastic defender of democracy in the Arab world.”<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately, political reforms were ill thought-out and poorly executed, paving the way for a ruthless power struggle between authoritarian incumbents and newly emboldened aspirants. The Algerian regime erred when it insisted on a majoritarian two-round electoral system instead of proportional representation. Had the latter formula been adopted, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) would have ended up with significantly less parliamentary seats and would have been forced to strike alliances with the Socialist Forces Front (FFS) or FLN to form a coalition government defined by compromise and concessions. “We could have ended up with 10 years of government crisis (It is not a big deal. Italy has been in crisis since 1946) and could have avoided 200,000 deaths and loss of confidence in the institutions,” explains noted Algerian political scientist Addi Lahouari.<sup>42</sup>

Reformers within the government not only miscalculated the outcome of the elections but also misread the intentions of the military and underestimated its willingness to use force to maintain its dominant position. The government also misled the Islamist opposition with its liberalization efforts, creating the false impression that the military would not forcefully respond to any threats to its position. As a result, the Islamists of the FIS overplayed their hand and played to win in municipal and legislative elections. The consequences of the confusion over regime interests and opposition motives were disastrous. The military's decision on January 4, 1992 to abort the electoral process and rob the FIS of victory

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40 The legalization of Islamist groups occurred despite the fact that article 42 of the new constitution forbade political parties “founded on religious, linguistic, racial, gender, corporatist or regional bases.” Rachid Tlemçani, “Algeria Under Bouteflika: Civil Strife and National Reconciliation,” Carnegie Endowment, February 2008, 2.

41 William B. Quandt, *Between Ballots and Bullets: Algeria's Transition from Authoritarianism* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), 5.

42 “L'Algérie ressemblera à la Somalie, dans dix ans, si jamais...” *El Khabar*, August 28, 2008.

in the second round of parliamentary elections dragged the country into a tragic cycle of violence. The military's indiscriminate suppression of the FIS fueled Islamist rage and radicalized its members and sympathizers.<sup>43</sup> The return of Algerian veterans of the war in Afghanistan in the 1980s only exacerbated the violence.<sup>44</sup>

In many respects, the Algerian civil war was born of a widening gap between what the opposition wanted and what the regime was willing to give. "The expectations of more freedom and fundamental change in the political and economic systems kept rising," explains Algerian scholar Azzedine Layachi, "but the reality did not correspond."<sup>45</sup> State repression reignited long latent grievances over gross economic inequality and transformed them into strong motivating factors for violent mobilization. Relying on the organizational skills they amassed during the 1989 wave of political freedoms, and sensing the government's weakness, the Islamists became increasingly assertive, capturing the imagination of a significant segment of the population. In mobilizing the masses for change, Algerians came to believe it was possible to alter the nature of their government.

## TERRORISM-REPRESSION NEXUS

The Algerian experience lends strong support to the "tyranny-terror hypothesis." The trends in Figure 1.1 (*see next page*) demonstrate a clear relationship between rapid deliberalization processes, exacerbated by severe state repression, and the incidence of terrorism. The PTS shows that Algeria experienced the freest period in its history during the early 1990s. After the cancelation of the 1991 elections, however, the political and human rights situation changed dramatically.

The regime's tightening of political restrictions had begun in earnest well before the military intervention. The eruption of the 1990 Gulf War, in particular, polarized political space. The Islamists fueled public anger at the government's tacit support for the U.S.-led war on Iraq and escalated their demands for immediate change through the organization of presidential elections.<sup>46</sup> The regime responded by severely cracking down on dissent.

With both sides increasingly entrenched in their positions, growing suspicion and distrust spurred the rush toward total war. The military closed all avenues for Islamist participation, inviting an increasingly violent Islamist response and, in turn, coldblooded reprisals from the security forces. As the civil war intensified, the severity of state repression escalated, with Algeria garnering, in 1994, the worst rating possible (5) in the PTS. The number and lethality of terror attacks rose concurrently.

The regime's move against the legal opposition, namely the FIS, invited the party's implosion, which resulted in the proliferation of splinter groups and the radicalization of thousands of Islamist activists.<sup>47</sup> The Armed Islamic Group (GIA), created in 1993, quickly established itself as the most extreme organization in the country, taking violence to a new level. The GIA branded the regime and its supporters as apostates. In 1994, the movement turned its wrath against any Algerian, secular, Islamist, or otherwise, who questioned its brutal methods. That year, more than 140 Islamist "moderates" were murdered. In 1996, Antar Zouabri, the new emir of the GIA, issued a fatwa legitimizing the killing of anyone who failed to support the organization. Schoolteachers, government officials, and tens of

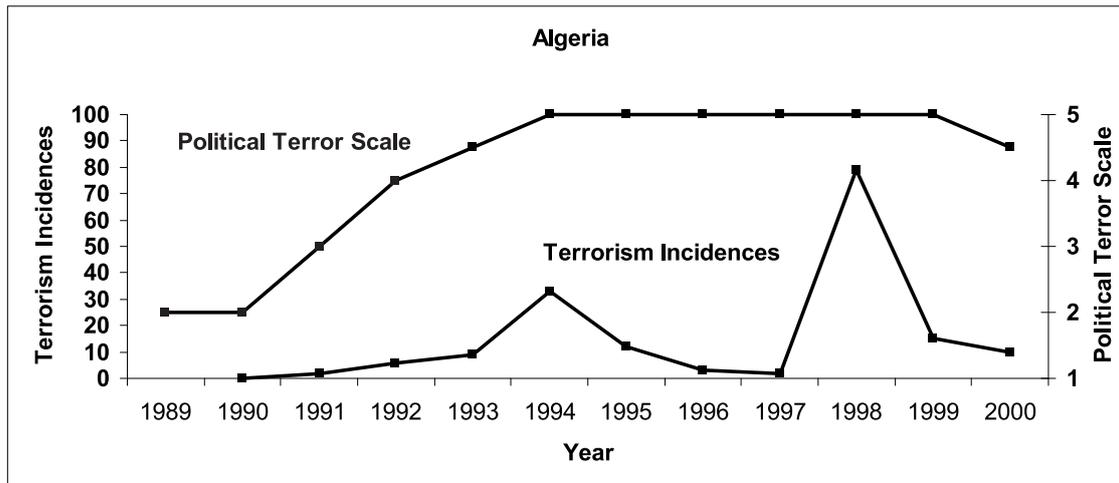
43 According to Algerian analyst Rachid Tlemçani, "some 18,000 people were interned in nine camps in the Sahara, among them elected FIS politicians, activists, and other members of the party." Tlemçani, "Algeria under Bouteflika," 3.

44 Similar fears emerged with the return of Algerians from Iraq's battlefield, which led to a spike in terror attacks. The "Algerian Afghans," who stoked the flames of the civil war that killed over 200,000 Algerians, were more numerous than the "Algerian Iraqis," but the latter may still be dangerous. In Europe, governments are concerned about links between these Algerian Iraqis and French radical Islamists.

45 Author's email correspondence with Azzedine Layachi, April 23, 2010.

46 Kaye, et al., "More Freedom, Less Terror?"

47 The extreme degree of state repression led Francois Burgat, a leading expert on Islamism in North Africa, to famously proclaim that any political party in the West would have been transformed into the GIA if it had endured the same indiscriminate brutality that Algerian Islamists suffered. See Ashour, "Votes and Violence."



thousands of civilians were massacred because of the GIA's claim that "according to the shari'a, one is not allowed to work in establishments which belong to the government or its allies."<sup>48</sup>

The GIA's brutality peaked in 1998, when it killed over 2,000 Algerians. Such methods provoked fierce disagreements within the Salafi-Jihadi camp over the proper conduct of armed struggle, leading to numerous internal splits. As Quintan Wiktorowicz observes, "the jihad at home, which was initially sponsored by a unified assault on the regime, was derailed by the decentralization of takfir, leading to violence against broader publics and within the Salafi jihadi community itself."<sup>49</sup> The GIA's indiscriminate targeting of civilians transformed these disagreements into serious, and at times, violent confrontations.<sup>50</sup>

In this context, GIA commander Hassan Hattab broke off from the group and founded the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) in 1998, promising to target the regime and spare

civilians.<sup>51</sup> By then, however, it was too late; radical movements had lost the public sympathy they enjoyed in the immediate aftermath of the military coup. In addition, said Azzedine Layachi, "the major disruptions caused by the conflict to people's lives (population displacement and economic decline) also contributed to the change in popular attitudes toward the armed groups."<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, the regime's brutal yet effective security measures significantly reduced the militant groups' capabilities.<sup>53</sup> Othmane Touati, known as Abu El-Abbes, confirmed as much upon his surrender to the authorities in May 2010. "Terrorists face difficult living conditions following Algerian army sweeps," explained the former member of AQIM Council of Notables.<sup>54</sup>

By the start of the millennium, the Algerian regime grew increasingly confident in its ability to marginalize extremists. "The danger of Algeria's Talibanization is far removed," declared General Mohamed Touati.<sup>55</sup> This major architect of the military's strategy did acknowledge, however, that

48 See Quintan Wiktorowicz, "The New Global Threat: Transnational Salafis and Jihad," *Middle East Policy* 8, no. 4 (December 2001): 18-38.

49 Ibid.

50 Some of these violent clashes occurred as recently as March 2008 when AQIM militants stormed a mosque in Muqren, Oued Souf and killed Ahmed Harroune and his cousin Abdel Jabar, two Salafi activists known for their opposition to violence. This murder is reminiscent of the assassination in the early years of civil war of religious scholar and spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Sahnoun in Al-Arqaq mosque.

51 In 2003, Hattab severed his links with the GSPC after irreconcilable disagreements with current AQIM chief, Abdelmalek Droukdel, over strategy and the killing of civilians. After his surrender in September 2007, he joined other former leaders of AQIM, such as Amari Saifi and Ben Messaoud Abdelkader, in urging "the category of the waverers inside Al Qaeda" to give themselves in and take advantage of the government's offer of amnesty. Lamine Chikhi, "Algerian ex-militant urges Al Qaeda to surrender," *Reuters*, May 10, 2009. See also Nazim Fethi, "GSPC founder calls for Al-Qaeda surrender in Algeria," *Magharebia*, January 21, 2009.

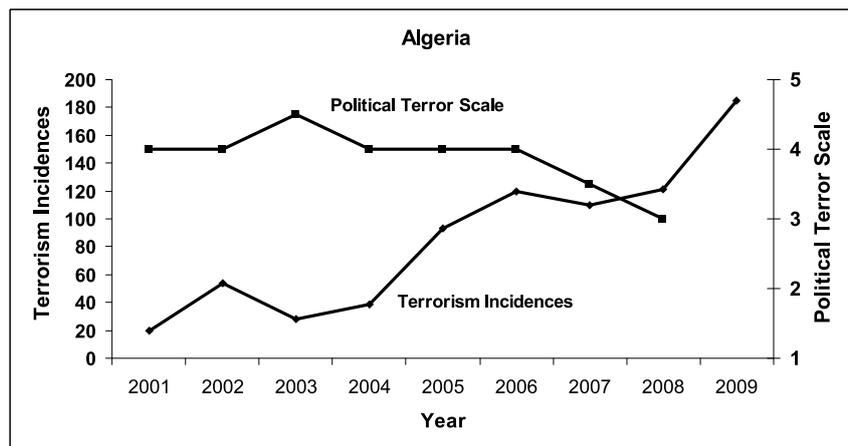
52 Author's email correspondence with Azzedine Layachi, April 23, 2010.

53 Layachi also attributes the consolidation of "the state's gain over the violent Islamist factions to its "security cooperation with other countries-mainly Western Europe and the United States." Author's email correspondence with Azzedine Layachi, April 23, 2010.

54 Nazim Fethi, "Al-Qaeda leader El-Abbes surrenders in Algeria," *Magharebia*, June 2, 2010.

“serious handicaps persist,”<sup>56</sup> as demonstrated by the post-9/11 rise in attacks and kidnappings. The number of radical insurgents may have dwindled from a high of 27,000 fighters in the mid-1990s to no more than a few hundred.<sup>57</sup> Yet violence has escalated since 2006, when suicide terrorism was used for the first time. Figure 1.2 shows this rising trend in terror attacks coinciding with the country’s improving scores in the PTS.

In addition, the group has changed its tactics, adopting suicide bombing, Al Qaeda’s weapon of choice. The most dramatic suicide attack took place in 2007 against the United Nations building in the capital of Algiers. This deadly assault against the “international infidels’ den,” as AQIM labeled it, was preceded days earlier by strikes on Russian workers of Stroytransgaz, a Russian construction company.<sup>61</sup>



This increase in terror attacks is due, in large part, to the alignment of the GSPC with Al Qaeda.<sup>58</sup> The GSPC’s change of strategy began under the leadership of Emir Nabil Sahrawi and accelerated under the reign of his successor Abdelmalek Droukdal, who openly embraced Al Qaeda’s goals and strategies.<sup>59</sup> Since then, “the previously nationally oriented insurgent group,” writes Hanna Rogan, “has paid increasing attention to the ‘Islamic umma,’ to international ‘fronts of the jihad’ from Chechnya to Iraq and Somalia, and to Muslims suffering under ‘apostate regimes’ and ‘infidel intervention’ in the Muslim world.”<sup>60</sup>

Discredited ideologically, weakened organizationally, and popularly shunned, the GSPC calculated that aligning itself with Al Qaeda would shore up its damaged legitimacy and credibility. Embracing causes that many Algerians identify with – Palestinian suffering and anti-Americanism – was seen as a sure way to increase recruitment, even in the midst of limited liberalization.<sup>62</sup> In the end, AQIM, as Dalia Kaye et al. conclude, “has adapted to state imposed constraints and has begun to look beyond Algeria’s borders to expand its mission.”<sup>63</sup>

55 Quoted in Tlemçani, “Algeria under Bouteflika,” 5.

56 Ibid, 5.

57 Tlemçani, 3.

58 The dynamics of internationalization came into sharper focus as early as June 2005, when the GSPC attacked a military outpost in Mauritania, killing 15 soldiers. Anouar Boukhars, “Mauritania’s Vulnerability to Al Qaeda Influence,” *Terrorism Focus* 4, No. 24 (July 25, 2007). Subsequent terrorist activity in Algeria as well as Morocco and Tunisia heightened fears of the prospect of the merger of terrorist groups closely affiliated with Al Qaeda.

59 See Mathieu Guidère “Une filiale algérienne pour Al Qaeda,” *Le Monde Diplomatique* (November 2006).

60 Hanna Rogan, “Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb Strikes Again,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 8 (May 2008): 23-28.

61 “Algiers bomb shatters UN office,” *BBC News*, December 12, 2007. In December 2006, AQIM attacked employees of a subsidiary of Halliburton in Algeria in the “Bouchawi raid.” The group and its affiliates have also claimed responsibility for multiple kidnappings and abductions of Westerners. Through such actions, the organization hoped to raise its profile and to bolster finances. AQIM has also been involved in recruiting the significant number of Algerians fighting in Iraq. According to Associated Press, Algerians constituted about 20 percent of foreign bombers suicide bombers in Iraq in 2005. Moroccans accounted for 5 percent. Isabelle Werenfels, “Between Integration and Repression: Government responses to Islamism in the Maghreb,” *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik Research Paper* (December 2005).

62 Boudali, “The GSPC: Newest Franchise in Al Qaeda’s Global Jihad,” 6.

63 Kaye et al., “More Freedom, Less Terror?”

## CHANGING THE RULES

In Algeria, the transition away from and back to authoritarianism was the critical trigger for the eruption of political violence. But just as the denial of political rights and massive violations of civil liberties contributed to mindless bloodletting and its prolongation, repressive government measures also helped to reduce the terrorist threat. The Algerian regime, however, did not rely solely on repression to combat terrorism. It also engaged in a process of selective liberalization, designed to ease ethnic (Berber) grievances, redress gender inequality, and reduce political discontent.

This process of limited liberalization began in the mid-1990s with a presidential election in 1995, the adoption of a new constitution in 1996, and the organization of legislative elections in 1997, in which Islamist parties like the Movement of Society for Peace (MSP) and Ennahda were allowed to participate.<sup>64</sup> The regime also tried to lure armed Islamist groups away from militancy, successfully doing so with a weakened FIS in 1997, when Madani Mezrag, chief of its armed wing, the Islamic Salvation Army, ordered his combatants to cease hostilities.<sup>65</sup>

Inclusion of nonviolent Islamist movements in the political process has generated some positive results. Legal Islamist parties like MSP, for example, have become increasingly pragmatic, as evidenced by their support for granting women greater rights under the personal status law. “In everyday political life,” Isabelle Werenfels notes, “their actions are determined by the criteria of power politics and they are increasingly prepared to step back from socio-political policies based on religious values when it comes to matters of

national interest or even their own status.”<sup>66</sup>

The Algerian government understood that its destruction of organized political life undermined its authority and complicated its efforts to fight violent extremism. Political liberalization may not have any effect on the calculations of militant groups regarding violence, but it can have a positive effect on regime legitimacy. The latter is critical; if reforms, however modest, are perceived as genuine attempts to improve citizens’ well-being, they can be effective in marginalizing extremist groups and delegitimizing their use of violence.

The election of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in 1999 accelerated efforts to bolster the government’s legitimacy through national reconciliation efforts and offers of amnesty for militants willing to lay down their arms.<sup>67</sup> During Bouteflika’s tenure in office, which continues today, Algerian politics has been gradually demilitarized. Further, electoral politics are more pluralistic and competitive. With the notable exceptions of AQIM and radical Berber movements, most political actors in the country accept the state’s authority, if not its legitimacy.

## POLITICAL IMPACT OF LIBERALIZATION

Controlled liberalization, backed by effective counterterrorism strategies, appears to have reduced political violence in the country, freeing Algerians from the daily terror that characterized the 1990s. Nonetheless, despite improvements, Algerian political observers warn of an upsurge in social and economic discontent, due to ever-increasing economic inequality, rising poverty, severe housing shortages, and endemic corruption.<sup>68</sup> Algerians complain bitterly, even as the country has amassed huge oil revenues and paid

64 The inclusion of some Islamists in the political process and their co-optation in the governing coalition was designed to further fragment the Islamist movement. The government has succeeded in dividing these groups, as the case of Ennahda clearly demonstrates. The party started to fare badly in elections after the removal of its leader Abdallah Djaballah in 1998, after he opposed his party’s incorporation in government. Djaballah later founded another Islamist party, the Movement for National Reform (MRN), which became the third largest force in parliament in 2002.

65 By this time, Madani Mezrag understood that the FIS had lost the battle for public support and sympathy, without which the armed struggle against the regime was doomed. In fact, “an estimated 3,000 militants obeyed the order, including many from the GIA, who were not under Mezrag’s command. But many more armed militants refused to comply, demonstrating that the FIS leadership had little control.” Tlemçani, “Algeria Under Bouteflika,” 5.

66 Isabelle Werenfels, “Taming Islamists by Integrating Them into the Political System,” *Qantara.de*, March 2006, <[http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show\\_article.php/\\_c-651/\\_nr-5/i.html](http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-651/_nr-5/i.html)>

67 A number of prominent AQIM leaders have defected. Most recently, in spring 2010, Ahmed Mansouri, Mokadem Lounis, Abou El-Abbes (Othmane Touati), Samir Moussaab, and Grig Ahsine Abdelhalim left the organization.

68 Author’s interview with Algerian scholar at NATO Defense College, May 13, 2010.

off most of its debt. The growing social unrest has led to riots. In one of the worst public disturbances to engulf the Algerian capital in the last few years, rioters, unhappy with living conditions in the Diar Echams district, clashed in October 2009 with police, who used water cannons and tear gas to restore order. In the same month, angry protests, fuelled by soaring unemployment, erupted in the Eastern city of Annaba. “Unrest is now routine in Algeria,” said Algerian sociologist Nacer Jabi. “It is becoming a national sport simply because people see no improvement in their daily living conditions.”<sup>69</sup> This does not pose an imminent danger to the state, but if social and economic grievances are not sufficiently addressed, instability, as Algerian analyst Rachid Tlemçani has warned, might once again grip the country.<sup>70</sup>

Political discontent is also on the rise.<sup>71</sup> As the 2007 legislative elections demonstrated, the Algerian public evinces a deep distrust of elected institutions. Political participation has declined sharply.<sup>72</sup> With an official rate of 35.5 percent, voter turnout for the 2007 polls was the lowest in Algerian history. The disenchantment with the political system can be attributed, in part, to the weakness and corruption of political parties. Most are personality-based, devoid of any recognizable ideology, and disconnected from a shifting electoral base. “This,” as the 2010 Bertelsmann Stiftung report on Algeria states, “further estranges the population from the institutions that it has elected and which are supposed to represent its interests, and encourages people instead to turn either to non-governmental organizations such as Islamic charities to satisfy their needs, or to turn to violence.”<sup>73</sup>

69 Lamine Chikhi, “Algeria riots reveal anger of a generation,” Reuters, October 22, 2009, <<http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJOE59L0NW20091022>>

70 Author’s interview with Rachid Tlemçani, May 12, 2010.

71 Luis Martinez, “Les enjeux des élections législatives en Algérie et au Maroc,” Institute for Security Studies Occasional Paper 71 (June 2008): 8.

72 Out of the 6.6 million votes cast, 14.5 percent were spoiled or “blank.” The dismally low turnout (35 percent compared to the 46 percent registered in the last polls in 2002) and the spoiled ballots (961,000), Reuters, May 17, 2007.

73 Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2010 - *Algeria Country Report*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung (2009): 15.

Since Mohamed VI assumed power in 1999, Morocco has emerged as one of the more liberal Arab states. With the notable exception of a number of political and religious “red lines,” freedom of expression is generally respected. Few would disagree that the gradual increase in individual liberties and the slow but steady process of economic and social liberalization have made Morocco more open and less repressive.

### THE POLITICS OF LIBERALIZATION

The Moroccan case seems to suggest a relationship between regime type and degree of political liberalization, on one hand, and political stability on the other. Unlike its neighbors, the monarchy has maintained order through the development of a system that is partially inclusive, selectively pluralist, and able to adapt to changing domestic and international circumstances.

In the 1970s, King Hassan, after surviving two coup attempts, recognized the danger of relying too heavily on the military to enforce absolutist rule. Hence began an attempt to lure the opposition into his camp. In exchange for their cooperation and “constructive” engagement in politics, the political parties were rewarded with a relaxation of the monarchy’s repressive controls, the removal of restrictions on political activity, and the restoration of some semblance of elections.<sup>74</sup>

In response to deteriorating economic conditions, the monarchy initiated in the 1990s a number of

reforms that ushered in a new era of liberalization. In 1992, the king revised the constitution and empowered parliament to establish committees of inquiry and vote on the budget.<sup>75</sup> In a symbolic gesture, the king limited his ability to dissolve parliament during states of emergency.<sup>76</sup> In a successful attempt to coax the opposition groups, Istiqlal and the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), into government, the monarch agreed in 1996 to revise the constitution once again and grant the opposition’s long-held demand for a fully elected Chamber of Representatives.

The death of King Hassan in July 1999 brought with it the promise that political liberalization would be expanded and deepened. There was widespread hope Mohamed VI would establish a new ruling bargain that would end the repressive excesses of the past and break down the remaining informal and constitutional barriers. In one of his major initiatives, King Mohamed successfully pressed for the enactment of landmark women’s rights legislation. The new *Moudawana* raised the minimum age of marriage to 18, significantly curtailed the practice of polygamy, granted couples joint custody of children conceived before marriage, and gave women the right to initiate divorce proceedings. Another significant achievement was the establishment of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission to investigate the arbitrary detentions and forced disappearances of thousands of Moroccans between 1956 and 1999.<sup>77</sup>

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74 The composition and structure of parliament were changed to allow for a greater proportion of parliamentarians to be directly elected. The monarchy devolved administrative powers and funds to municipalities. The goal was to motivate the nationalist opposition parties to participate in the 1976 municipal elections after 15 years of boycotting elections. Abdullah Belkiz, *Al solta wal mou'arada: Al majal al siyasi al'arabi almou'aser* (Casablanca: Markaz Takafi Al Arabi, 2007).

75 Guilain Denoex and Abdeslam Mahgraoui, “King Hassan’s Strategy of Political Dualism,” *Middle East Policy* 5, no. 4 (January 1998): 104-130.

76 James P. Ketterer, “From One Chamber to Two: The Case of Morocco,” *Journal of Legislative Studies* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 135-150.

These and other initiatives have made Morocco, to use the words of Ahmed Herzeni, former political prisoner and current president of the Human Rights Advisory Council, “a more stable society and an example of a country marching towards consolidation of its liberalization processes.”<sup>78</sup>

Skeptics, however, point to the continuing concentration of powers in the hands of the monarchy.<sup>79</sup> Despite the monarch’s seemingly progressive inclinations, substantive democratization has yet to occur, with the regime oscillating between liberalization and, increasingly, de-liberalization. The latter began in earnest after the May 2003 terrorist attacks. New anti-terrorism legislation granted authorities extensive powers to imprison anyone suspected of “promulgation and dissemination of propaganda or advertisement” whose “main objective is to disrupt public order by intimidation, force, violence, fear, or terror.”<sup>80</sup> In other words, any act deemed a disturbance of public order became tantamount to terrorism.

The government’s harsh response came after a series of accusations which blamed the country’s liberalization process for weakening the state’s security apparatus. The emergence of radical organizations coincided with the November 1999 dismissal of King Hassan’s long-serving (and notorious) Interior Minister Driss Basri and the removal of many police prefects and security officers from their posts.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, some Moroccan political analysts argue that the purge of the most repressive elements of the old guard weakened the state’s ability to keep violence at bay. The dismantling of the security services and “the regime’s neighborhood surveillance,” writes

scholar of North African Islamic movements Selma Belaala, “cleared the way for proponents of *takfiri* ideology to organize themselves in local armed groups linked to international networks.”<sup>82</sup>

Within regime circles, there has been disagreement over how to move forward. The hardliners, according to a senior official with close access to the main levers of power, believe that a deepening of political reforms and extension of the protection of human rights will only invite further growth of extremist ideologies and violent movements. It is also sure to weaken the aura of fear associated with the regime and, as a result, embolden the dispossessed to demand more rights and, worse, revolt against the established order.<sup>83</sup>

The reformist camp, while far from faithful proponents of democracy, believe that the only way to shield the country from the blight of violent extremism is through social liberalization and economic reforms. The challenge, according to this school of thought, is to lift people out of poverty and manage their rising expectations of what the government is capable of delivering.

## RISE OF VIOLENT MILITANCY

At first glance, Morocco seems to provide support for a link between political liberalization and low levels of political violence and terrorism. Unlike the Algerian regime, the monarchy in Morocco is popular.<sup>84</sup> Extremist groups, meanwhile, are small, disorganized, and relatively unpopular. To date, AQIM has failed to translate its rhetorical threats against Morocco into action. Indeed, an appraisal of violent activity reveals relatively low levels of domestic terrorism.

77 The Instance Équité et Réconciliation (IER) “determined the fate of 742 individuals and established the role of the state in the political violence during the period covered by its mandate” but “did not mention individuals responsible for abuses and hearing participants had to sign an agreement not to identify individuals attributed with responsibility.” The report also recommended “a diminution of executive powers, the strengthening of the legislature, and independence of the judiciary ... reforms in the security sector and changes in criminal law and policies, including the development of laws against sexual violence.” United States Institute of Peace 2004, “Truth Commission: Morocco,” December 2004, <<http://www.usip.org/resources/truth-commission-morocco>>

78 Author’s interview with Ahmed Herzeni, June 22, 2010.

79 See Mohamed Tozy, Rachid Filali Meknassi, and Abdallah Saâf, “Crise des élites et restructuration du champ politique par le haut,” *Les Cahiers Bleus* 13 (2009); Abdelhay El Moudden, Hassan Rachik, and Mohamed Tozy, “La réalité du pluralisme au Maroc,” *Les Cahiers Bleus* 2 (December 2004).

80 *Morocco: Human Rights at a Crossroads* 16, no. 6, Human Rights Watch, October 2004, <<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/morocco1004/>>

81 Selma Belaala, “Morocco: Slums Breed Jihad,” *Le Monde Diplomatique* (English edition), November 2004, <<http://mondediplo.com/2004/11/04/moroccoislamists>>

82 Ibid.

83 Author’s interview with senior government official.

84 A poll conducted in the summer of 2009 jointly by *TelQuel* and *Le Monde* found that 91 percent of Moroccans viewed the performance of the monarch favorably during the first ten years of his reign. Florence Beaugé, “Maroc : le sondage interdit,” *Le Monde*, August 3, 2009.

If we, however, take into account foiled terror attacks and disrupted radical cells, a different picture emerges. Since 2003, when Moroccan terrorists attacked Western targets, internal security has broken up more than 60 cells, including, most recently, a network of 24 members, headed by a Moroccan-born French citizen.<sup>85</sup> According to official sources, the group was “preparing to carry out assassinations and acts of sabotage within the country, notably targeting the security services and foreign interests in Morocco.”<sup>86</sup> The cell was also recruiting people for missions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and the Sahel.

This instance was not the first time a Moroccan-born European national was involved in a terrorist plot. In February 2008, a terrorist cell of 36 people, headed by Moroccan-Belgian Abdelkader Belliraj, was discovered. According to former Interior Minister Chakib Benmoussa, the network was financed by bank robberies, money laundering, petty theft, and other criminal activities.<sup>87</sup> Its goal was to target senior civilian and military officials as well as Moroccan Jews. The membership of the network alarmed intelligence agencies, as it included educated professionals, a police superintendent, and senior political party leaders, including the Secretary-General of the Al-Badil Al-Hadari (Civilised Alternative) party, as well as the leader of the unrecognized Al-Umma party.<sup>88</sup>

In May 2008, an 11-person network, led by a Moroccan living in Brussels, was disrupted in the northern Moroccan cities of Fez and Nador for planning terror attacks against senior Moroccan government officials and party leaders. In July of the same year, 35 people were arrested for

reportedly having “recruited and arranged passage for some 30 would-be suicide bombers to Iraq and three volunteers seeking to fight for the organization’s branch in Algeria.”<sup>89</sup> In August, security services broke up another 15-person cell, called Fath Al-Andalus, in Southern Morocco for allegedly planning to target UN peacekeeping forces in the Western Sahara and a number of tourist sites.<sup>90</sup>

The fact that this rise in the number of foiled terror attacks occurred at a time when the country’s liberalization efforts stalled – and, in some cases, reversed – has led some political observers to see a link between the two. Indeed, many have argued that the growth of terrorist activity was being fuelled by perceived domestic injustices, such as the widespread arrests of Islamists after May 2003 and the regime’s reluctance to deepen reforms. Indeed, “one Islamist thrown behind bars, and that drives his family into marginalization, and into the hands of extremists,” a police source told the French weekly *TelQuel*.<sup>91</sup>

According to Cherkaoui Smouni, former president of the Moroccan Center for Human Rights, the bulk of detainees have been thrown in jail without evidence or due process. Some have been abused and sexually assaulted, prompting a desire for revenge.<sup>92</sup> The infamous case of Abdelfettah Raydi is instructive in this regard. “He beat me until I fainted,” Raydi said of his tormentor in a letter he addressed to a human rights group. One of his former inmates told *The New York Times*, “I remember that he had nightmares and cried during his sleep.”<sup>93</sup> Raydi, like many other detainees, was reportedly raped. After the alleged conspiracy was

85 “Morocco seeks French national after Qaeda arrests,” *Agence France-Presse*, April 28, 2010, <[http://ca.news.yahoo.com/s/afp/100428/world/morocco\\_attacks\\_france](http://ca.news.yahoo.com/s/afp/100428/world/morocco_attacks_france)>

86 Tom Pfeiffer, “Morocco breaks up cell linked to Al Qaeda,” *Reuters*, April 26, 2010, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE63P36B20100426>>

87 See Ali Chamitou, “Le Maroc face à une vraie guérilla terroriste,” *Maroc-Hebdo International*, <[http://www.maroc-hebdo.press.ma/MHinternet/Archives\\_780/html\\_780/lemaroc.html](http://www.maroc-hebdo.press.ma/MHinternet/Archives_780/html_780/lemaroc.html)>

88 Sarah Touahri and Naoufel Cherkaoui, “Morocco dismantles widespread domestic terrorist network,” *Magharebia*, February 21, 2008, <[http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en\\_GB/features/awi/features/2008/02/21/feature-01](http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2008/02/21/feature-01)>

89 Sarah Touahri, “Morocco smashes another sleeper cell,” *Magharebia*, April 7, 2008, <[http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en\\_GB/features/awi/features/2008/07/04/feature-01](http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2008/07/04/feature-01)>

90 “Country Reports: Middle East and North Africa Overview,” *Country Reports on Terrorism 2008*, U.S. Department of State, April 30, 2009, <<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2008/122433.htm>>

91 Abdellatif El Azizi, “Prisons. À l’école du Jihad,” *TelQuel*, 2005, <<http://gees.org/documentos/Documen-941.pdf>>

92 Ibid.

93 Michael Moss and Souad Mekhennet, “Jihadists Jails Win Leverage Over Their Keepers,” *The New York Times*, December 31, 2007, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/31/world/africa/31prison.html?fta=y>>

disrupted, Raydi blew himself up in an internet cafe on March 11, 2007 as police were searching the neighborhood for him.

Other political observers attribute the rise of violent activity to growing public frustration and disenchantment, especially among the young and unemployed. Expectations for economic justice and rule of law have risen since the ascent of King Mohamed VI to the throne in 1999, but the pace of change, slowed by deep rooted corruption and nepotism, has failed to correspond to once high hopes. The monarchy has been relatively successful in delivering economic growth and some improvements in living standards, however. Since 2001, annual economic growth rates have averaged around 5 percent, and the poverty rate declined from 16.2 percent in 2000 to less than 9 percent in 2010, amounting to about 1.7 million Moroccans moving out of poverty.<sup>94</sup> Despite these advances, frustrations with uneven progress are mounting.

To be sure, political violence is not driven primarily by economic deprivation and social inequality. “The mere existence of privations is not enough to cause an insurrection,” Leon Trotsky once noted, “If it were, the masses would be always in revolt.”<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, the role of grievances and thwarted expectations cannot be discounted. “Harsh conditions,” as Graham Fuller explains, “will routinely produce a higher degree of violent individuals than do comfortable societies.”<sup>96</sup> Indeed, the terrorist attacks of May 2003 and those of 2007 were perpetrated by Moroccans who lived in some of the most wretched conditions. It is also revealing that these attacks occurred in

Casablanca, which has seen an unprecedented rise in economic disparities. While abject poverty did not create Morocco’s terrorism problem, social and economic deprivation, coupled with decades of state neglect, has made people increasingly disillusioned with their government. This has provided an opening for anti-system organizations.

It is worth emphasizing again that political violence and terrorism are not caused by any single factor. An examination of the targets of terror attacks, foiled or otherwise, reveals that they are a byproduct of a combination of international, political, and socio-economic factors. The targets of the May 2003 bombings were a Jewish community center and Western interests, demonstrating, as a RAND report observes, that the attacks “had an anti-Western and anti-Israel message ... which suggests that domestic political and economic opportunity as a cause of terrorism provides only a partial explanations.”<sup>97</sup> Two of the multiple suicide bombers who terrorized Casablanca in April 2007 also targeted U.S. diplomatic offices. Moreover, most of the foiled terrorist attacks were aimed at foreign interests, further underscoring the role of international events in driving Moroccan militancy.<sup>98</sup> This rise in transnational terror activity demonstrates the dangerous link between domestic politics and international terrorism.

## REFORMS AND THEIR EFFECTS

Limited political reforms have empowered moderates and influenced the calculations of radicals regarding the utility of political violence. After independence, there had been an abundance of opposition movements – socialists, communists, and Islamists – uncompromising

94 Lahcen Achy, “Morocco’s economic model succeeds where others fail,” *The National*, August 3, 2010, <<http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100804/OPINION/708039954/1080>>

95 Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Monad Press, 1961), 249.

96 During my tour of the infamous slums of Douar Skouila and Thomas in Sidi Moumen, citizens’ anger and frustration was palpable. Despite the dramatic improvements in standards of living and the state’s laudable success in relocating 70 percent of families from the area, residents complained of the slowness of progress and the small accommodations granted to those who relocated. Many were convinced that corrupt local authorities were deliberately depriving them of their right to free housing and jobs, so the authorities could sell the housing for their own profit.

97 Kaye et al., “More Freedom, Less Terror?” 153.

98 The terrorist attacks of 9/11 marked a turning point for local militants, who viewed Morocco’s so-called “war on terror,” or crackdown on terrorist cells and reversal of past liberalization processes, as a betrayal of Muslims. Indeed, several fatwas denounced the regime’s stand. The best known was issued by 16 independent preachers on September 18, 2001 and denounced an ecumenical ceremony organized by the monarch as an act of impiety because it was arranged to support the United States. (Malika Zeghal, *Les Islamistes Marocains, Le défi à la Monarchie*, Paris: La Découverte, 2005, 256.) In February 2003, Bin Laden blasted the monarchy in an audiotape as a “tyrannical and apostate regime, enslaved by America.” Three months later, the May 16 attacks occurred. This violence was considered “the price that Morocco paid for collaborating with the United States,” according to Mohammed Darif, a Moroccan terrorism expert. (Andrea Elliott, “Where Boys Grow Up to Be Jihadis,” *The New York Times*, November 25, 2007.)

in their calls to overturn an absolutist political order. In time, most of these groups moved from a confrontational strategy against the regime toward an accommodationist stance that accepted regime institutions and the religious and political preeminence of the monarchy. The USFP's participation in the 1976-77 elections was the beginning of its transformation from a party of socialist revolution to one that advocated gradual reform.

Political liberalization processes have also contributed to stability in the kingdom. The selective inclusion of Islamists in electoral politics made the Justice and Development Party (PJD), the largest legal Islamist party, a key stakeholder in the system with a shared interest in its stability and security. Once parties become vested in the system, as a senior Moroccan official explained, they are reluctant to endorse policies or activities that threaten their position within that system.<sup>99</sup> Most importantly, party leaders induce their more hardline members to abide by their rules and strategies. After the terrorist attacks of May 2003, for example, when the media and many secular parties launched a vicious smear campaign against it, the Islamist opposition stressed the importance of playing by the rules. The PJD's pragmatic leadership, having watched the demise of the FIS, successfully persuaded the party's lower echelons of the benefits of continuing participation. Given the heterogeneity of Moroccan Islamists,<sup>100</sup> it was easy to envisage a scenario in which the party's leadership, like that of the FIS in 1992, would quickly lose control of its conservative rank-and-file. The result would have been a devastating confrontation between Islamist hardliners and the regime. To avoid such an outcome, the pragmatists within the PJD successfully shaped the party's strategy of "anticipatory obedience"<sup>101</sup> and managed to exert strict control on their base.

The PJD's inclination toward pragmatism, along with its willingness to cooperate with secular groups and embrace pluralist principles, denotes a greater degree of moderation. And while it is true that the PJD was never a radical party – though some of its leadership, like Abdelillah Benkirane, once subscribed to violence – its political inclusion contributed to a deepening of its commitment to democratic principles. This was on clear display during the party's July 2008 political convention where members met to elect their secretary general, National Council (the organization's top decision-making body), and provincial secretaries. In sharp contrast to its secular counterparts, the PJD practiced what it had been preaching: inclusiveness, transparency, and efficiency.

Just as inclusion seems to have had a moderating effect on Moroccan parties, a number of observers argue that exclusion can play a powerful role in radicalizing movements. Former Minister of Religious Affairs Abdelkebir Mdegri acknowledged as much in an interview with the French weekly *TelQuel*: "I was always convinced that the Moroccan Islamist movement deserved to be treated on equal footing as all other ideological and political tendencies," warning that "violence against the Islamists will not achieve anything. Worse, it might precipitate their resort to underground activities and endanger state security."<sup>102</sup>

Fear of violence is the main reason that Mdegri tried to co-opt the banned but tolerated Al-Adl Wal Ihsan, a formidable nonviolent movement that thrives on its uncompromising rejection of the monarchy's legitimacy.<sup>103</sup> "In 1990, I asked Hassan II's permission to begin negotiations with them (Al-Adl)," said Mdegri, "we achieved concrete results ... Al-Adl was on the brink of becoming a political party and participating in

99 Author's interview with senior Moroccan government official, May 28, 2010.

100 The PJD is not a monolithic movement. The party's base is difficult to categorize, which makes it more difficult for the PJD's leadership to control. The fact that its sympathizers and supporters may vote for it but at the same time take part in Al-Adl Wal Ihsan's activities or public protests demonstrates how fluid the party's support is.

101 Holger Albrecht and Eva Wegner, "Autocrats and Islamists: Contenders and Containment in Egypt and Morocco," *Journal of North African Studies* 11, no. 2 (June 2006): 23-141.

102 Driss Ksikes, "Interview-vérité. Abdelkébir Alaoui M'Daghri," *TelQuel*, 2004, <<http://www.telquel-online.com/150/sujet4.shtml>>

the 1992 elections.”<sup>104</sup> The agreement, though, ultimately fell through. The former minister blames the ministry of interior for sabotaging the deal through its insistence that Yassine and other movement leaders address the monarch as *amir al mo'menin* (commander of the faithful) and reaffirm their commitments in writing. Mdeghri recounted that he managed to obtain a letter from Al-Adl addressing Hassan II as “king of the country,” but the interior ministry’s insistence that it be “*amir al mo'menin*” scuttled the deal.

This episode demonstrates that Islamist movements tend to moderate their policies when given the opportunity to enter the political system. Al-Adl’s initial response to Mdeghri is revealing in this regard. “They committed themselves to working within the institutions, condemning violence, and cutting any links with foreign organizations,” said Mdeghri. The debate over political participation intensified within the movement. Thus far, however, Al-Adl, as one of its followers noted, has been steadfast in its refusal to enter a political system that it believes it cannot influence or reform, given the monarchy’s overwhelming dominance.<sup>105</sup>

The key question today is what will happen after Yassine, a visibly frail man in his early eighties, leaves the scene.<sup>106</sup> There is a great deal of speculation that the movement might choose to opt into the political process, as the PJD did. It is no secret that some members within Yassine’s organization, especially those that belong to its political circle, have expressed interest in legal political participation. Mohammed Darif, who has studied the movement for decades, thinks it is possible, even likely, that Al-Adl will split into a political organization and a religious one, similar to what occurred with the PJD and its parent organization, the Movement of Unity and Reform (MUR).

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103 Kristina Kausche, “An Islamist Government in Morocco?” FRIDE (1 September 2007): 1-11. It is important to note that the PJD is critical of this political strategy. According to Mohamed Yatim of the PJD: “Their negative wait-and-see policy and the fact that they criticize and denounce all and everyone does not bring anything. The policies pursued by the political parties and the different governments create a new reality in Morocco at the cultural, juridical, and behavior level. If we remain outside these influences, this might risk surprising us in 20 or more years.” Okacha Ben Elmostafa, *Les mouvements islamistes au Maroc. Leurs modes d'action et d'organisation* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007): 80.

104 Ksikes, “Interview-vérité. Abdelkébir Alaoui M'Daghri.”

105 Author’s interview with a member of the political circle of Al-Adl Wal Ihsan, December 28, 2009.

106 Majdouline El Atouabi, “La guerre d’usure de Yassine,” *Maroc-Hebdo*, October 23-29, 2009.

Tunisia has managed to maintain stability while avoiding the political stresses that often result when political reforms lag behind economic and social development. Thus far, President Ben Ali has reinforced authoritarian one-party rule in the midst of impressive economic growth. Contrary to what existing theory suggests, increased prosperity has not led to the emergence of bottom-up pressure for political change or popular demands for democratic government. The professional middle class and business community – usually seen as the engines of democratic change – have, in the case of Tunisia, become the most reliable supporters of continued autocratic rule. They fear the consequences of a democratizing process in which new actors, namely Islamists, threaten the interests of the private sector and their social gains, primarily in the area of women’s rights.

### AUTOCRATIC TRENDS

Tunisia remains one of the most repressive countries in the Arab world. Opposition forces of all shades are effectively muzzled. “The reality in Tunisia is that political and economic life is under tight government control and only the official discourse of praise of the authorities is tolerated,” says Amnesty International in its July 2010 report on human right abuses in Tunisia, “The government uses aggressive and repressive tactics to extend that control to the few remaining pockets of independent expression.”<sup>107</sup> Peaceful strikes are brutally suppressed, as occurred in Gafsa in 2008, when security services assaulted mine workers who were protesting poor conditions.

It was not this way in the beginning. President Ben Ali came to power promising a new era of openness in Tunisian political life. He granted amnesty to thousands of Islamist prisoners, gave legal status to the Islamist student movement, and solicited the input of the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI) for a new national pact. After the 1989 legislative elections, in which the MTI (renamed Ennahda in 1989) and other Islamists captured as much as 30 percent of the vote in Tunis and 13 percent nationally, Ben Ali abruptly switched from a strategy of Islamist engagement and co-optation to one of near complete exclusion.

The regime used a firebomb attack against an office of the ruling Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) as a pretext to destroy the MTI and its infrastructure, banning its publications and imprisoning and torturing thousands of its members. The government also launched a massive propaganda campaign to smear all Islamists, even the most progressive, as terrorists intending to overthrow the state. “The Bab Souika attack was the turning point,” said Ben Ali’s then Minister of Culture Abdul Bekhi Hermassi, “The Islamists showed they could not succeed in the electoral process and had adopted a policy of violence ... it was a major mistake by the Islamists and the regime exploited it intelligently.”<sup>108</sup> However, Azzam Tamimi, biographer of MTI leader Rachid Ghannouchi, still denies the group’s involvement.<sup>109</sup> This was “an arson attack ... [which] was seized upon by the government as proof of the violent and anti-democratic nature of Ennahda ... although the authorities could not

<sup>107</sup> “Independent Voices Stifled in Tunisia,” Amnesty International, July 2010, <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE30/008/2010/en/844cd767-a21e-4b3e-a643-9a8b1554da52/mde300082010en.pdf>>

<sup>108</sup> Quoted in Robert Newman, “Applying the ‘Forward Strategy of Freedom’ to Tunisia: A Case Study in the Global War on Terrorism,” U.S. Army War College (May 2004): 6.

<sup>109</sup> Azzam Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

prove the movement's involvement."<sup>110</sup>

A policy of total repression was accompanied by a relatively successful social and economic modernization program. Tunisia has outperformed its neighbors in most macroeconomic indicators, maintaining low levels of poverty (7 percent) and respectable economic growth, averaging 5 percent in the last two decades.<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, decades of repression may be starting to take a toll on the country's stability and relative social peace.

### RISE OF VIOLENT MILITANCY

Despite the government's relative success in maintaining order, the social disturbances that erupted in Gafsa in 2008 point to rising social and economic discontent. In recent years, the unemployment rate has increased sharply, especially among the young and university graduates.<sup>112</sup> Income disparities have also soared and social cleavages are becoming more pronounced. According to the BTI 2010 country report, "the basic level of social cohesion – which has been so characteristic of the Tunisian development path in recent decades – seems to be at stake owing to mounting social discrepancies and persistent unemployment."<sup>113</sup>

Another major concern of Tunisian authorities is the growth of domestic extremism and transnational militant activity. "These Islamist militants ... are a very radical sub-phenomenon. They are influenced by radical organizations that operate across borders," said one Tunisian government official.<sup>114</sup> In 2007, security services killed more than 20 militants in clashes in Tunis and near the Algerian border. The militants, part of a group trained in Algeria, were allegedly planning attacks on the United States and other

Western embassies in Tunis.

Government repression and the American occupation of Iraq have contributed to the rise of militancy. "A young man cannot find true Islam in state-sanctioned religion," explained Qabil Nasri, who was jailed in 2003 on terrorism charges and freed in 2005, "Eventually, a young man starts to think that his government is the enemy of Islam."<sup>115</sup>

The story of Nasri, and his two brothers who were arrested in Algeria where they were training, illustrates how young men in the Maghreb have come to join transnational extremist organizations.<sup>116</sup> Unable to voice their grievances at home and angry with the United States, Tunisians like Nasri are finding refuge in internet forums and chat rooms where they can find common cause with like-minded individuals with less fear of detection. "My sons were depressed at Friday prayers and by the sermons they heard from government-controlled preachers. They looked for the true version of Islam on TV, the internet and in banned books," said Jamila Ayed, whose son was killed in Fallouja in 2004. Ayed holds the government responsible for its perceived collusion with the West in its war against Muslims. "Our government doesn't have any sovereignty. It does the work of the Americans and the Zionists," she added.<sup>117</sup> For Ali Larayedh, a member of Ennahda who spent 14 years in prison, the rising phenomena of radicalism in Tunisia is tied to the suppression of moderate Islamism.<sup>118</sup> In Algeria and Morocco, frustrated youth have the option of joining the legal Islamist opposition. In Tunisia, they do not. Craig Smith of *The New York Times* reached a similar conclusion: "Tunisia is among the most vulnerable of the North African countries," he writes, "because its rigid repression

110 Newman, "Applying the 'Forward Strategy of Freedom' to Tunisia," 6.

111 The World Bank "Tunisia: Country Brief," April 2010, <<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/MENAEXT/TUNISIAEXTN/0,,menuPK:310024~pagePK:141132~piPK:141107~theSitePK:310015,00.html>>

112 The unemployment rate, according to Tunisian officials, is 14.1 percent. That number is significantly higher among younger Tunisians. According to the World Bank, "the unemployment rate for individuals between 20 and 24 years of age is more than three times higher than it is for those above 40." Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2010 - Tunisia Country Report* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2009), 13.

113 Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2010 - Tunisia Country Report*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung (2009): 15.

114 Jeffrey Fleishman, "Islam is on the rise in repressed Tunisia," *Los Angeles Times*, November 30, 2007.

115 Ibid.

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid.

of Islamism has created a well of resentment among religious youth.”<sup>119</sup>

In the end, state repression and outrage at Western policies appear to be driving an increasing number of Islamists into the hands of transnational terrorist organizations like the Tunisian Combatant Group (TCG), founded in 2000 and affiliated with AQIM.<sup>120</sup> In 2005, Tunisians constituted about 5 percent of foreign bombers in Iraq.<sup>121</sup> In fact, in his testimony on April 24, 2009 before a subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, General David Petraeus blamed the suicide bombings in Iraq that month on “a militant network based in Tunisia.”<sup>122</sup> According to the Congressional Research Service, in August 2005, 21 suspected Islamist radicals were extradited to Tunisia from Syria, where they had been detained after clashing with security forces in June. In 2007, Tunisians were linked to Fatah al Islam, an organization that supported Al Qaeda’s ideology and fought the Lebanese army in Lebanon’s Nahr Al-Barid Palestinian refugee camp.<sup>123</sup>

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119 Craig S. Smith, “Tunisia is feared to be a new base for Islamists,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 2007.

120 For additional information on the TCG, see Yonah Alexander, “Maghreb and Sahel Terrorism: Addressing the Rising Threat from Al Qaeda and other Terrorists in North and West/Central Africa,” Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, January 2010. <[http://www.potomacinstitute.org/attachments/525\\_Maghreb%20Terrorism%20report.pdf](http://www.potomacinstitute.org/attachments/525_Maghreb%20Terrorism%20report.pdf)>

121 Isabelle Werenfels, “Between Integration and Repression: Government responses to Islamism in the Maghreb,” *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik Research Paper* (December 2005): 21

122 Mark Landler, “Clinton Makes Surprise Visit to Reassure Iraqis,” *The Boston Globe*, April 26, 2009.

123 Carol Migdalovitz, “Tunisia: Current Issues,” Congressional Research Service, June 29, 2009.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

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This study examined whether liberalizing regimes in the Maghreb are more or less vulnerable to the threat of political violence and terrorism than their more repressive counterparts. In so doing, it investigated whether political liberalization boosts regime legitimacy and undercuts support for radical opposition, or instead creates a widening gap between expectations of change and what a regime is actually willing to do. In the Tunisian case, the focus was on whether exclusionary state policies keep violence and terrorism in check or, rather, contribute to a radicalization of domestic Islamist groups and facilitate the export of terrorists and terrorism abroad.

Despite their differences, the three cases suggest that the greater the gap between expected change and actual change, the greater the likelihood of political violence.

Perceptions of the unfairness of the political system and its inability to address socio-economic disparities aggravate social tensions, prompting repressive responses from the state, which, in turn, fuel opposition violence. This is precisely what happened in Algeria. States perceived as illegitimate are more likely to employ repressive measures against popular opposition movements. Legitimacy, of course, is a relative concept that is difficult to measure, except perhaps in hindsight.

Reform efforts in Morocco appear to have enhanced the legitimacy of the monarchy and strengthened its campaign to ease social and economic pressures on the population. The

danger, however, is that political reforms have so far lagged behind the country's socio-economic modernization. Samuel Huntington has warned that violence and instability are "most likely to occur in societies which have experienced some social and economic development and where the processes of political modernization and political development have lagged behind the processes of social and economic change."<sup>124</sup> The kingdom faces the typical dilemma that every modernizing state grapples with: providing "a glimpse of what modernity has to offer," but then failing to deliver on that promise.<sup>125</sup>

Similar problems haunt Algeria and Tunisia, but to a greater degree since the republican regimes there lack the historical and religious legitimacy the Moroccan monarchy has long enjoyed. Social development tends to weaken traditional social structures while failing to provide institutional substitutes capable of meeting people's growing demands. Legitimacy, government effectiveness, and institutions are all intertwined in various ways. "The weaker, less flexible, and less efficient a country's institutions are," writes Sheri Berman, "the greater the state's loss of control and legitimacy, and the larger the potential for disorder and violence."<sup>126</sup>

In other words, the potential negative impacts of reform efforts on the stability of the countries of the Maghreb stem not from the depth of political and socio-economic reforms but rather from their ineffectiveness and inconsistency.

This unevenness is, in some sense, inevitable.

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<sup>124</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 265.

<sup>125</sup> Berman, "Islamism, Revolution, and Civil Society."

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

It is extremely difficult for political institutions in autocratic contexts to keep pace with the demands of the population. After all, autocratic governments, almost by definition, are slow to change. And, as a result, most Arab societies find themselves torn between what they are and what many expect them to become. This gap cannot be easily erased. But it can be managed. Liberalization efforts can stave off violence, rather than provoke it, if countries undertake the necessary reforms to bring accountability, transparency, and credibility to their political institutions.

**Controlled liberalization efforts, combined with strict state controls, have had some success in containing levels of political violence. However, that can change if reforms do not deliver the effective and responsive government institutions regimes have promised.** Bringing moderate Islamists into the political realm has contributed to a more accommodationist and pluralistic political environment. Such inclusion may not lead to ideological or normative shifts – as arguably most participating Islamist groups have never been radicals in the first place – but it may help foster a culture of debate and compromise. Moderate Islamist organizations also help deflate extremist challenges to the system by keeping their own rank-and-file activists in check and providing a platform to effect change from within the system. In Morocco, the monarchy certainly reaped the benefits of its inclusion of Islamists within a tightly controlled space. The PJD’s ability thus far to channel a significant segment of Islamist discontent into a program of gradual change contributes to the country’s stability.

Similarly, in Algeria, the inclusion of mainstream Islamist parties, like the MSP, in addition to amnesty programs for Islamist militants, has had an overall moderating effect. One problem, however, is that the transformation of Algerian Islamists into a “normal political quantity,” and

one dependent on the regime, contributes to growing public disenchantment with the political system.<sup>127</sup> In many ways, the co-optation of Islamists - the MSP has been a member of various government coalitions since 1997 – has become an impediment to political change. Islamist members of parliament have provided cover for President Bouteflika’s agenda of instrumentalizing the judiciary, muzzling the press, and strengthening the powers of the executive at the expense of other branches.

In Morocco, co-opting the PJD is probably good short-term politics but, as the experience of the country’s socialist party (USFP) demonstrates, may have the effect of strengthening the regime while alienating large segments of the electorate. Domesticating one of the few remaining credible political actors runs the risk of backfiring and undermining stability. Within many Islamist parties, there is significant internal division between hardliners and pragmatists. When co-option renders Islamists incapable of challenging the status quo, then moderates are discredited and appear weak, while hardliners, who offer a clearer voice of opposition, are empowered. To date, none of the Islamist parties mentioned has withdrawn from the political process, but continuing attempts by Maghrebi regimes to co-opt and divide legal Islamist groups risks driving their rank-and-file into the hands of radical and potentially violent actors. Already in Algeria, some supporters of Islamist groups have given up on the political system<sup>128</sup> and are finding refuge in Salafi movements, which are quickly growing in strength. “The success of [the apolitical Salafi] movement,” writes Amel Boubekeur in the Algerian context, “signals the growing disinterest among young people toward more moderate Islamist parties and their fake participatory strategies.”<sup>129</sup>

**Limited processes of liberalization and backtracking on reforms undermine regime**

127 Isabelle Werenfels, “Algeria’s Legal Islamists: From ‘Fifth Column’ to a Pillar of the Regime,” in *Moderate Islamists as Reform Actors: Conditions and Programmatic Change*, ed. M. Asseburg, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik Research Paper No. 4 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, April 2007), 41.

128 Khadija Mohsen-Finan and Malika Zeghal, “Opposition Islamiste et Pouvoir Monarchique au Maroc: Le Cas du Parti de la Justice et du Développement,” *Revue Française de Science Politique* 56, no.1 (2006): 79-119.

129 Amel Boubekeur, “Salafism and Radical Politics in Postconflict Algeria,” *Carnegie Papers* (October 2008).

**legitimacy and threaten radicalization of actors excluded from the political process.** Low election turnout reflects high public disenchantment with prevailing political systems in the Maghreb. The Algerian president, like his Moroccan counterpart, hopes to foster competitive multi-party politics and nurture public participation in elections. But this desire is not matched by a similar commitment to shifting power from the executive to the legislative branch, enhancing judicial independence, or reforming electoral laws. This is the dilemma of liberalizing regimes in the Arab world. They want electoral competition and high voter participation to enhance international approval and domestic legitimacy yet are unwilling to give up any meaningful share of power in the process. The problem, as the 2007 parliamentary elections in Morocco and Algeria illustrated, is that unless Maghrebi regimes promote stronger parties and more powerful parliaments, voters will continue losing faith in the utility of electoral politics. In Morocco, the dismally low turnout and high number of spoiled ballots presented a significant setback to the government's strategy of using elections as a legitimizing mechanism rather than a way to distribute power.<sup>130</sup> That the number of spoiled and blank ballots amounted to more than the combined votes for the two most successful parties signals a severe lack of enthusiasm for and faith in the current system.<sup>131</sup>

**The erosion of legitimacy complicates regime efforts to fight violent extremism.** Unless governments win public support for their use of violence, the fight against terrorism will remain difficult. "The lack of legitimacy stemming from undeveloped reform measures and associated rights or, just as often, the reversal of even limited gains," concludes a RAND report, "increases the appeal of extremist groups."<sup>132</sup> To be sure, there is limited appetite for terrorism or civil conflict in

the Maghreb. In the last few years, however, other forms of violence have emerged. Outbreaks of social protest and violent riots against deteriorating living conditions are becoming a regular occurrence in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. Criminal activity, particularly gangsterism, is also on the rise,<sup>133</sup> contributing to widespread feelings of public insecurity.

**While extreme repression may eliminate political dissent and help keep terrorism at bay, it is difficult to sustain in the long run and is likely to lose effectiveness. Moreover, repressive measures may internationalize radicals' area of activity.** Absolutist regimes have proven more resilient at avoiding civil conflict and political violence, thanks to their ability to "exhibit self-enforcing rules and institutions that prevent protest and other activities aimed against the state."<sup>134</sup> The Tunisian government has so far succeeded in preserving political stability despite higher levels of repression than its Moroccan and Algerian counterparts. Nevertheless, decades of repression are starting to take a toll, as evidenced by the growing radical activity there.

In all Maghrebi states, the effectiveness of state security has managed to isolate radical militants and damage their networks, but these successes have also had the effect of driving violent Islamists underground and internationalizing their area of activity. The Algerian GSPC, for example, has struck alliances with fellow extremists in the region, transforming itself into a pan-Maghreb terrorist organization. Ideologically discredited and organizationally weak, the GSPC desperately needs a cause with which to rally support. Broadly targeting American and Western economic interests throughout the Maghreb has a better chance of gaining new recruits and public sympathy.<sup>135</sup>

130 National Democratic Institute, "Final Report on the Moroccan Legislative Elections: September 7, 2007," 2007, <[www.ndi.org/files/2316\\_ma\\_report\\_electionsfinal\\_en\\_051508\\_1.pdf](http://www.ndi.org/files/2316_ma_report_electionsfinal_en_051508_1.pdf)>

131 Ibid.

132 Kaye et al., "More Freedom, Less Terror?" 168.

133 In Morocco, criminal activity has become pervasive in the major cities. Casablanca tops the list with 89,625 cases of crimes and misdemeanors, followed by Oujda (26,682), Marrakech (26,481), Rabat (25,925), Fès (20,495), Meknès (20,024) and Tangier (18,241). Psychologist Hassan Kharouaa attributes the rise of criminality in Morocco to high unemployment levels, the changing structure of the family, rural exodus, poverty, social exclusion, drugs, and prostitution. Ali Kharroubi, "Prolifération de la criminalité dans les milieux urbains," *Aujourd'hui Le Maroc*, June 11, 2010.

134 Ellingsen et al., "Toward a Democratic Civil Peace? Democracy, Political Change, and Civil War, 1816–1992," 34.

**Political violence and terrorism are not caused by any one factor.** An examination of the targets of terror attacks, foiled or otherwise, suggests they are a byproduct of a combination of international, political, and socio-economic factors. Both state repression and outrage at Western policies contribute to the rise in militancy. Domestic grievances and thwarted rising expectations also play an important role. “When a young Arab blows himself up and disregards death, it is in fact disrespect to a life not worth living,” argued the Tunisian academic Iqbal Gharbi.<sup>136</sup> In Morocco, extreme poverty, made worse by decades of state neglect, increased dissatisfaction with the government and provided an opening for extremists. The story of the slums of Sidi Moumen, where most of 2003 and 2007 bombers originated, and that of Jamaa Mezuak in Tetouan, which produced the main architects of the Madrid bombings as well as a significant number of Moroccan fighters in Iraq, is revealing in this regard. It is this pervasive sense of anger and helplessness that foments instability and creates, in the words of Kenneth Pollack, “the most important threat to American interests in the Middle East.”<sup>137</sup>

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135 “At the heart of the ideology of every terrorist movement,” argues Caroline Ziemke, “is the theme that the community the terrorists purport to represent is under mortal attack. The more successful their actions are, especially actions against a broadly resented target such as the United States, the more legitimate they become in the eyes of the disgruntled and alienated.” Ziemke, “Perceived Oppression and Relative Deprivation: Social Factors Contributing to Terrorism.”

136 Walid Ramzi, Nazim Fethi, Mohammed Yahya Ould Abdel Wedoud, and Jamel Afraoui, “Dialogue and tolerance can overcome terrorism, activists say,” *Magharebia*, May 18, 2010.

137 Pollack, *A Path Out of the Desert: A Grand Strategy for America in the Middle East*, 146.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

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The Obama Administration faces daunting challenges in the Arab world. There is a temptation, particularly after the failures of the Bush Administration, to protect and promote a narrow set of traditional interests, rather than attempt to effect democratic change. Such a *realpolitik* approach prioritizes America's alliance with friendly authoritarian regimes while turning a blind eye to the increasingly obvious lack of progress on domestic reform. The findings of this study suggest that this shift, while understandable, is misguided and counterproductive. While dissociation of democracy promotion from the previous administration's actions is necessary, subordinating democratic reforms and basic human rights principles to short-term interests is likely to fail as a long-term strategy to secure stability in the Maghreb and beyond. This study has shown that transitional governments are not necessarily more vulnerable to destabilization than other regime types. In fact, controlled political openings, backed by an effective security apparatus, have in some cases led to decreased levels of violence. The negative effects of liberalization processes stem not from the existence of political reforms and expansion of civil liberties but from their limited and inconsistent nature.

Cosmetic reforms that fail to address the public's thirst for economic and political accountability are bound to diminish both the legitimacy of Arab regimes as well as the credibility of Islamist opposition groups that have opted into the system. Moreover, the erosion of popular trust in a country's political institutions can undercut public support for counterterrorism efforts and strengthen those Islamists arguing that change can

only happen outside the framework of existing political systems. "The lack of meaningful reforms or deliberalization can," a recent RAND report argues, "alienate mainstream domestic groups and bolster hard-line factions within opposition parties, who may no longer see any value in working within the system. Likewise, backtracking may facilitate support for even more radical groups."<sup>138</sup>

The evidence presented here suggests that political systems in the Maghreb are facing a crisis of legitimacy. In some ways, they have been successful in diffusing discontent through good economic performance, in the case of Tunisia, and effective combinations of repression and co-optation, in the case of Morocco. But in other ways, they have come up increasingly short, as demonstrated by rising levels of popular frustration and social unrest. With terrorism and political violence on the rise, this is the time to take stock of the Maghreb. And while widespread civil conflict has not yet broken out, it may in the future. As Azzedine Layachi argued, "the level of popular dissatisfaction is so high that another round of wide-scale violence can be generated in the near future by the right mix of some intervening variables."<sup>139</sup>

It is thus imperative for the United States as well as other Western powers to use their influence to push for substantive reforms and respect for the rule of law. Without clear indicators of progress, the risk that populations will consider disengaging from peaceful participation only grows. "The rule of law must be established by the way of constitutional reforms, efforts to stamp out

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<sup>138</sup> Kaye et al., "More Freedom, Less Terror?"

<sup>139</sup> Author's email correspondence with Azzedine Layachi, April 23, 2010.

corruption, and the legal distribution of wealth,” argues the chief of Morocco’s Unified Socialist Party Mohamed Moujahid, “In countries that have been able to do that, terrorism exists, but only in the form of isolated cases.”<sup>140</sup>

There are obviously limits to what the United States can do in the Arab world. A push for rapid democratization is neither warranted nor possible. Nevertheless, the United States can and should focus on the areas that matter most to Arab populations, such as accountable and transparent governance, without jeopardizing its immediate security interests in the region. There are a number of concrete steps the Obama Administration can take to support the strengthening of liberalization processes and diminish the threat of political violence in the region.

**Refrain from exaggerated praise of superficial democracy reforms.** The Bush Administration heaped praise on regimes that introduced cosmetic reforms and held deeply flawed elections. The United States should publicly praise reforms only when they are significant and should not hesitate to point out where they fall short. A critical part of promoting reform is being honest and realistic about the progress being made. One way to determine whether real change is occurring is to develop a set of concrete criteria for democratization, similar to those outlined in the EU’s European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). The ENP focuses on highlighting governance-related issues and judging the performance of governments based on a number of specific measures. Criteria for democracy include checks and balances among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, transparency and accountability of institutions, administrative reform, fair and regular elections, political party competition, civilian control of the military, and a vibrant civil society.<sup>141</sup> Maintaining such a list of specific

criteria makes liberalization more tangible and attainable. It also provides donors with objective measures of countries’ performance in democratic governance. Measuring democracy by concrete progress is a more promising strategy than haphazardly praising superficial reforms, without any vision of what those reforms should add up to.

**Support civil freedoms and rule of law.** The Obama Administration should increase American support for basic freedoms of speech and assembly. At the very least, the United States needs to criticize its allies when they commit flagrant human rights abuses. Such public castigation has often been directed at Chinese abuse of political prisoners with varying degrees of success without damaging America’s major strategic interests. While not all rights abuses should engender economic sanctions, the United States should clearly, consistently, and publicly condemn the imprisonment of political activists. When such condemnations are backed up by action, they can yield tangible results as the 2002 case of Egyptian pro-democracy activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim suggests. The Bush Administration’s visible public pressure and the U.S. Congress’s rejection of \$134 million in additional aid to Egypt persuaded the regime of the seriousness of America’s request to release Ibrahim, who was freed the following year.<sup>142</sup>

**Promote a governance-oriented approach to development aid.** Countries should no longer be rewarded based on favorable regional standing, nor should development assistance be granted on the basis of vague criteria that lack result-based accountability. This has only encouraged recipient countries to adopt a minimalist approach to democratic reform. President Bush’s Millennium Challenge Account was the first attempt to construct a new governance-oriented framework, closely linking levels of assistance to the quality

<sup>140</sup> Siham Ali, “Calls for transparency follow Morocco terror arrests,” *Magharebia*, May 6, 2010.

<sup>141</sup> The European Union, “Principles for the Implementation of a Governance Facility under ENPI,” <[http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/governance\\_facility\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/governance_facility_en.pdf)>

<sup>142</sup> For fiscal year 2002, the United States agreed to grant \$655 million in economic support funds and \$304 million in funds in foreign aid to help Egypt in a time of economic difficulty. The House Appropriations Committee rejected an amendment to provide \$134 million in economic assistance. This proposed funding would have maintained the traditional three-to-two ratio of aid that the U.S. grants to Israel and Egypt. Jeremy M. Sharp, “Egypt-United States Relations,” Congressional Research Service, June 15, 2005.

of governance, transparency, and institutional reform. Of course, development strategies must be country-specific and country-owned, as they are likely to fail in the absence of local participation. But international donors can play an important role in setting clear benchmarks on governance. The record of past development assistance is clear: unless government is transparent and accountable, no amount of aid can help deliver progress that is broad-based and sustainable.

**Coordinate efforts with like-minded global development donors.** The United States should use its influence to encourage the use of aid not for expedient political gains, but to support better governance. Accordingly, the United States should also consider pressuring affluent allies to adopt what Joseph Stiglitz calls the “comprehensive aid paradigm,” which emphasizes incentives and rewards for countries that prioritize institutional accountability and promote legal and judicial reform.<sup>143</sup> The European Union’s Governance Facility – designed to aid partner nations that have best advanced an agreed-upon reform agenda through the European Neighborhood Policy – is a good example that must be enhanced and implemented in liberalizing partner countries like Morocco.<sup>144</sup> The Moroccan regime prides itself on its reputation as a model of progressive change and has repeatedly stated its desire to promote good governance, institutionalize the rule of law, and fight corruption. This program provides an opportunity to hold Morocco’s leaders to their own rhetoric. Pressuring the Moroccan government to extend and deepen the reforms it has already launched – and generously rewarding it for doing so – would send a strong signal that the United States and its allies are serious about rewarding performance, based on a set of clearly specified indicators.

Policymakers may worry that pushing in such a direction could undermine Arab allies. However, the implementation of judicial reforms that ensure accountability and legal reforms that protect civil liberties would not threaten the power of Arab liberalizing regimes. On the contrary, clarifying lines of accountability and improving responsiveness to citizen demands has the potential to enhance their credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of their own citizens.

**Remove the stigma associated with engaging Islamists.** Despite continuing doubts about Islamists’ democratic credentials, a new trend is emerging within Washington policymaking circles that recognizes the necessity of dialogue with mainstream Islamist groups. This trend, however, has not yet moved beyond the level of discourse and into the levels of both public policy and practice. In the instances where American diplomats have reached out to Islamist actors, the contacts were ad-hoc and not publicized. While important, such contacts will remain of limited value until they are upgraded significantly into formal and systematic ties. The institutionalization of partnerships with nonviolent Islamist movements that have consistently abided by democratic rules can advance the American agenda in the Maghreb by removing violence as a viable option for those disenchanting with the status quo. When Islamists believe that they can influence government policy through nonviolent means, they tend to do so. On the other hand, when these parties are excluded, destabilization and radicalization can result, as occurred in Algeria in the 1990s. Accordingly, the debate should shift from whether to engage Islamist actors to how and when.<sup>145</sup>

Before the United States can effectively support democracy in the Middle East, it must first understand democratization as a long and involved

143 This paradigm is considered a more holistic form of development aid, as it hopes to foster the transformation of the societies, away from their traditional roots and toward sustainable modernization, rather than merely providing economic assistance. For additional information, see Joseph E. Stiglitz, “Participation and Development: Perspectives from the Comprehensive Development Paradigm,” *Review of Development Economics* 6, no. 2 (2002) <[http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPowerment/Resources/14549\\_5869557\\_1\\_061803.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPowerment/Resources/14549_5869557_1_061803.pdf)>

144 The EU Governance Facility provides funding to governments to help them carry out their reform agendas, emphasizing democracy, respect for human rights and civil freedoms, and the rule of law. The first allocations were granted to Morocco and Ukraine in 2007, each of which will receive an allowance of 50 million Euros. The European Union, “Principles for the Implementation of a Governance Facility under ENPI.”

145 For more on U.S. policy toward mainstream Islamist groups, see Shadi Hamid, “The Islamist Response to Repression: Are Mainstream Islamist Groups Radicalizing?” The Brookings Institution, August 9, 2010, <[http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2010/0809\\_islamist\\_groups\\_hamid.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2010/0809_islamist_groups_hamid.aspx)>

process, rather than a straightforward solution to political violence in the region. The United States has gained a reputation for offering support for democracy in theory without providing concrete backing in practice. When successive American administrations fail to follow through with their stated commitments, they mimic the actions of governments in the Maghreb that loudly proclaim their reform credentials but show only limited interest in substantive political reform. This study has demonstrated the danger of a growing gap between popular demands for change – set off in part by liberalizing regimes themselves – and the slow pace and inconsistent nature of liberalization. If half-hearted efforts of individual governments and the international community continue indefinitely, social unrest and political violence are likely to increase further.

### 2011

*Political Violence in North Africa: The Perils of Incomplete Liberalization*, Analysis Paper, Anouar Boukhars

### 2010

*The Islamist Response to Repression: Are Mainstream Islamist Groups Radicalizing?*, Policy Briefing, Shadi Hamid

*Energizing Peace: The Role of Pipelines in Regional Cooperation*, Analysis Paper, Saleem Ali

### 2009

*Fighting the Growth of Terrorist Networks in the Maghreb: Turning Threats into Opportunities*, Policy Briefing, Anouar Boukhars

*The Opportunity of the Obama Era: Can Civil Society Help Bridge Divides between the United States and a Diverse Muslim World?*, Analysis Paper, Hady Amr

*Pakistan's Madrassas: The Need for Internal Reform and the Role of International Assistance*, Policy Briefing, Saleem Ali

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The Brookings Doha Center, a project of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, undertakes independent, policy-oriented research on the socioeconomic and geopolitical issues facing Muslim-majority states and communities, including relations with the United States. Launched through an agreement dated January 1, 2007, the Brookings Doha Center was established through the vision and support of H.H. Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, and reflects the commitment of the Brookings Institution to become a truly global think tank.

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The center was formally inaugurated by H.E. Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, on February 17, 2008, together with Carlos Pascual, then Brookings Vice President for Foreign Policy Studies, Martin Indyk, founding Director of the Saban Center at Brookings and now Brookings Vice President for Foreign Policy Studies, and Hady Amr, the Founding Director of the Brookings Doha Center.

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