

Morocco's Elections

THE LIMITS OF LIMITED REFORMS

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Can the Arab world overcome its democratic deficit? Can democratization in the Arab world produce greater stability in the Middle East? Earlier this decade, a spurt of intellectual attention and policy action nurtured cautious optimism. Some even identified regional political trends and emerging prodemocracy voices as signs that a political renaissance might sweep the Arab world. Today, however, the pendulum has swung toward pessimism. The failure (so far) of the democratic experiment in Iraq has been a major reason, though the security situation there never gave democracy a real chance. Hamas's victory in the January 2006 Palestinian Authority parliamentary elections may have done even more to dampen enthusiasm about Arab democracy, particularly in Western eyes.

The Palestinian election, said some, was proof that if Arabs were allowed to vote freely and effectually, they would bring antidemocratic, destabilizing Islamist radicals to power. For the Middle East's many autocrats, the Hamas win was a rhetorical godsend—a cautionary tale at which they could gesture as they stomped energetically on whatever democratic embers might threaten to stir to life in their own countries. In parallel with Arab autocrats, even those Western analysts and officials who had once been favorably inclined began to doubt the wisdom of promoting democratic change in the region. As regimes such as Egypt's began to pull back on their latest rounds of modest liberalization, the U.S. government in turn seemed to all but abandon President George W. Bush's "freedom agenda" in the Middle East.

On 7 September 2007, the people of the Kingdom of Morocco gave

reason to question the new conventional wisdom about Arab democracy, while also raising fresh issues concerning the preferred paths by which democracy might emerge. September 7 was the date that Moroccans went to the polls to fill the 325 seats in the House of Representatives, the lower chamber of their country's bicameral Parliament. The slow, partial democratization that appears to be underway in monarchical Morocco—a process that these latest elections have jolted in ways both good and bad—stands as a unique experiment, one that so far has been yielding results notably different from those seen in other parts of the Arab world. Three results are most interesting.

First, when given the chance to vote in free and fair elections, Moroccans did not sweep Islamists into power, even though polls and analysts had predicted such an outcome. Most of those dissatisfied with the status quo chose other options—including not voting or spoiling their ballots—to express their displeasure. The generalization that open elections in the Arab world will inevitably produce Islamist victories did not prove true. The 2007 Moroccan vote showed that autocrats can structure the political rules of the game to limit the power of *all* political parties, including those with questionable commitments to democracy. Specifically, King Mohamed VI and his advisors have limited the arena of democratic competition to Parliament—effectively “walling off” the executive branch in such a way that no act of the legislature can transform the system. The palace also has devised an electoral system (based on proportional representation [PR]) which virtually ensures that no party, including the Islamist Party of Justice and Development (PJD), can win a majority of seats.

Unfair? Yes. Good for evolutionary change? Maybe. If liberalizing reform in Morocco continues to enhance the authority of democratic institutions while nurturing the growth of a pluralistic party system, then perhaps these controls are worth the temporary price in democratic credibility that they exact. But if the king fails to continue down the path of political liberalization, the constraints on parliamentary power could eventually spell liberalization's doom.

Second, all Islamist parties are not the same. The PJD's increasingly strong showing over the last three elections should not be interpreted as a threat to democracy, but rather as a positive step toward democratic development. The PJD's true intentions will only be revealed if it succeeds in sharing genuine power. Such an outcome is hard to conceive within the bounds of the current system, where the king calls all the important shots. At the same time, the PJD's participation in elections and Parliament seems to have had a moderating effect on the party's orientation, and has spurred important intraparty debates over how to balance Islamist political principles, opposition tactics, and democratic values. The Moroccan case raises the prospect that Islamist participation in politics need not cause a clash between democracy and stability,

and may even promote their congruence. That is all the more reason to examine this case closely for its possible application to the rest of the Arab world. Is Morocco an outlier, or might it be a bellwether?

Third, limited reform has a limited shelf life. By opening up the parliamentary election to real competition on a relatively level playing field, the palace made one political institution accountable to the people while leaving all others insulated from popular influence. That one accountable institution, moreover, has few of the core powers of governance. Seeing this, the voters have registered their discontent by not voting (only 37 percent of registered voters cast ballots) or by spoiling a significant share (about a fifth) of the ballots that were cast in the 2007 election.

The good news for Moroccan democratic development is that Moroccans—unlike citizens in more oppressive regimes—can choose not to vote and can choose to register their preferences by spoiling their ballots. The latter, after all, may demonstrate high levels of political awareness and effort.¹ The bad news is that the current system is unsustainable and is likely to fuel more intense forms of protest (including support for radical, extrasystemic forces) unless changes are made. The central question, then, is how the king will react to these election results. Will he enact more and deeper reforms, or will he seek to place fresh limits on democratic development? His choices will strongly condition Morocco's future political path.

The Whimper of the “Arab Street”

The terror attacks of September 11 and the forceful U.S.-led intervention in Iraq eighteen months later helped to launch a reinvigorated debate about Arab regimes, Arab societies, and their potential for reform.² At one end of the spectrum in this debate, analysts who focus on societal attitudes see cause for optimism about democratic prospects in the Arab world.³ If repressive regimes ever relax constraints on political freedom and allow citizens to organize and express their preferences through democratic processes, the thinking goes, then Arab societies will at last be able to push Arab states in a democratic direction.

At the other end, pessimists focus on historical, religious, and cultural factors that have reinforced Arab societies' lack of democratic development. If allowed to express their preferences in meaningful elections, these analysts worry, Arab voters will raise to power radical, anti-Western Islamists. As Martin Kramer contends, “the chief beneficiaries of every political opening have been Islamist zealots with fascist tendencies who detest America.”⁴ The Muslim Brotherhood's strong showing in Egypt's 2005 parliamentary elections, Hezbollah's continued electoral strength in Lebanon, and Hamas's already-discussed 2006 victory are often cited as signs of things to come should the rest of the region

have the opportunity to vote in free and fair elections. The preference of Iraqi voters for Islamist parties with associated militias over secular or other party options reinforced this apparent trend.

At this point, however, the Palestinian Authority remains the only place in the Arab world that has voted into office radical Islamists, and that victory was aided by an incessant violent conflict, the abject failures and internal disarray of the ruling Fatah party, and an electoral system that magnified Hamas's parliamentary strength well beyond the narrow plurality of the popular vote that Hamas candidates won. In Lebanon and Iraq, too, the preference for militant Islamists (that is, Islamist organizations which have weapons and which also run candidates for office) was magnified because of weak governance, insecurity, and civil war—all of which are factors created by current political actors, not long-term cultural or religious institutions. The outcome of Morocco's 2007 elections follows the more frequent pattern: Islamists perform well, but not well enough to win a majority of the vote, and electoral and constitutional rules effectively bar them from taking power.

Morocco's PJD is without doubt a major political force. Its initial electoral outing in 1997 (the year of Morocco's first open parliamentary balloting) brought it a mere 9 seats, but that number surged to 42 just five years later. Because the PJD had deliberately run for only a fraction of the seats available in 2002, many expected it to perform even better in 2007, when it ran in nearly all districts.⁵

Like other Islamist parties in the region, the PJD had cultivated a loyal grassroots base by attacking government corruption, trumpeting democracy as a challenge to the autocratic executive, and providing local-constituent services. While three of Morocco's other major parties joined the government when first asked to do so following the 1997 elections, the PJD cultivated its opposition image.⁶ As discontent with the status quo grew, the PJD was supposed to be the main beneficiary. In the spring of 2006, a poll commissioned by the U.S.-based International Republican Institute showed that 47 percent of the electorate planned to support the PJD in the 2007 parliamentary vote—a shockingly high figure given Morocco's fragmented party system.⁷ As election day neared, analysts and PJD officials alike predicted as much as a doubling of seats by the Islamist party.

The high expectations prompted disputes within PJD ranks over whether the party should seek to win and govern, or should maintain its purity by staying in opposition. Weighing heavily in these deliberations was the experience of the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), which had been the main opposition (from the left) in the years prior to the recent liberalization. After the USFP triumphed in 1997, it became the senior partner in all subsequent ruling coalitions. But since both King Hassan II (r. 1961–99) and his son Mohamed VI (b. 1963) retained a great deal of legislative authority, the USFP-led coalitions had

TABLE—RESULTS OF THE 2007 MOROCCO LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

PARTY	NUMBER OF SEATS IN PARLIAMENT	% OF SEATS IN PARLIAMENT	REGIONAL LIST		NATIONAL LIST	
			NUMBER OF SEATS	% OF POPULAR VOTE	NUMBER OF SEATS	% OF POPULAR VOTE
PI	52	16.0	46	10.7	6	11.8
PJD	46	14.2	40	10.9	6	13.4
MP	41	12.6	36	9.3	5	10.0
RNI	39	12.0	34	9.7	5	10.5
USFP	38	11.7	33	8.9	5	9.5
UC	27	8.3	27	7.3	—	—
PPS	17	5.2	14	5.4	3	6.2
FFD	9	2.8	9	4.5	0	4.9
MDS	9	2.8	9	3.7	0	4.0
PND-ALAHAD	8	2.5	8	3.0	0	5.3
PADS-CNI-PSU	5	1.5	5	2.1	0	2.9
PED	5	1.5	5	2.9	0	3.3
PT	5	1.5	5	3.0	0	3.4
PRE	4	1.2	4	1.8	0	2.3
Others	20	6.2	20	16.8	0	12.5

Source: Ministry of Interior, Morocco, www.elections.gov.ma.

to work closely with the palace on major issues, and came to be viewed as royal lapdogs. The PJD's leaders wished to avoid this mistake, yet also felt called by the voters to work for change and not merely to complain. In the end, the PJD decided to run in every constituency in order to maximize its seats, and then worry about whether or not to join the government.

The PJD's dilemma remains unresolved because the largest share of seats (52) went to one of Morocco's oldest parties, the right-of-center Istiqlal Party (or PI—the name means “independence” in Arabic). The PJD won a slightly higher popular-vote percentage but mustered just 46 seats. The USFP dropped from the largest party in Parliament after the 2002 vote to fifth place with 38 seats.

The absence of an Islamist surge is striking. It remains so even after one takes into account the intricacies of Morocco's 2002 electoral law, drafted by the Interior Ministry on behalf of the palace, and endorsed (with minor changes) by Parliament. This law is meant to ensure that the PJD cannot translate a minority of votes into a majority of seats, as did the Turkish AKP in 2002 and Hamas in 2006. In 2002, the king changed

what had been a pure single-member–district system into a system based on PR structured via two lists. Each Moroccan elector now votes for a local party list in one of 95 multimember districts in order to determine between 2 and 5 seats of the 295 that are filled this way. The seat allocations are made through a complicated “remainder system” run by local magistrates who determine the “threshold number” needed to win a seat in a particular district. After the top vote-getting parties have been allocated one seat each, the threshold number is subtracted from their vote totals, and the rest of the seats are allocated to parties according to their remaining vote totals, in descending order.

This system means that the stronger parties typically can have at least a decent chance of winning a seat apiece in almost every district, and makes it possible for smaller parties to win a few seats across a number of districts. At the same time, the remainder rule makes it very difficult for any party to win more than one seat per district—substantial numbers of votes for the most popular parties are “wasted,” in that they do not translate into more seats in Parliament. Voters fill the remaining 30 seats in Parliament by voting for a national party list that is reserved, by agreement of the parties, for women candidates. (The new Parliament actually has 35 female members, as a handful of women won seats in the district races.)

In fact, however, the fractionalizing effects of this complicated electoral system came into play only slightly in the 2007 vote. The PJD did win the highest percentage of votes on both the regional and national lists, but its edge over Istiqlal was slight and nowhere near a majority. The failure of any party to win more than 15 percent is a sign that voters—and not clever designers of electoral laws—produced a Parliament with no clear majority.

Another hypothesis to explain the PJD’s failure to reach its predicted strength is that committed Islamist voters staged a boycott, as recommended by Morocco’s illegal Islamist movement, the Justice and Charity Association, which condemns the monarchy and calls for the imposition of *shari’a*. There are reasons to doubt this boycott theory. First, for Justice and Charity to have arranged for such abysmal turnout would have required a stealth campaign backed by the kind of massive network that most analysts believe the movement lacks.⁸ Second, the PJD does have a massive network and threw it into an extensive get-out-the-vote campaign; if anything, Islamists and their supporters were the most mobilized voters of all. Finally, backers of non-Islamist parties also stayed home.

Beyond Justice and Charity, which remains committed to nonviolence even if opposing elections and the monarchy, other extremist groups espousing Islamic fundamentalism are active in Morocco. For instance, the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group is thought to have carried out the Casablanca terror attacks of 16 May 2003 (which killed 33 people

besides the suicide bombers and injured more than a hundred others) and to have been involved in the March 11 train bombings in Madrid the next year.⁹ In the past year, terrorists also have targeted Morocco's growing tourist industry. Information about these attacks suggests to intelligence officials and security analysts that Morocco's extremists are linking up with al-Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb, the successor to Algeria's Armed Islamic Group. Officials from the PJD report that the backlash against the Casablanca bombings hurt their party's ability to attract supporters. Yet the Casablanca atrocities are now more than four years in the past, extremist options (whether violent or nonviolent) are still out there, and in 2007 most eligible Moroccans rejected voting altogether. Could extreme options be growing more attractive to them? Had turnout been higher, it would have been easier to answer this question with a confident no.

Shades of Islamists

Even had the PJD won the election outright, the result would not have signaled an Arab affirmation of antidemocratic, anti-Western parties. All Islamists are not alike.¹⁰ Within the Arab world, some self-identified Islamists, such as al-Qaeda in Iraq, seek the re-creation of the caliphate as their main goal and use terror as their means. Others, including Hamas and Hezbollah, focus on specific local political grievances while embracing both Islamist tropes and violent means. Still others have embraced democracy (even when their governments have not) and reject any form of violence as a strategy for achieving their ends (even if some in this category still condone violence carried out by the other two types of Islamists against U.S. or Israeli targets). The PJD, which compares itself constantly to Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Europe's Christian Democrats, clearly falls on the more liberal end of this spectrum. Indeed, the party objects to being characterized as "Islamist" at all, calling itself a political party with an "Islamic reference." Other moderating factors may include the PJD's closeness to Sufism (a religious tendency much loathed by salafists) and the horrifying cautionary tale of nearby Algeria, where an internal war between Islamists and the state submerged most of the 1990s in an ocean of bloodshed.

But such generalizations do not signal clearly what the party would do should it come to power. Even if it is committed to nonviolence and procedural democracy, assessing an Islamist movement's compatibility with democratic politics requires determining that movement's attitudes toward pluralism, alternation of power, individual rights, and the equality before the law of women and religious minorities. Here, the PJD's record is murkier, though improving. Its relatively open and democratic internal governance is a key element in both its political success and its political moderation.

The PJD was created only a decade ago, when the monarchist People's Democratic and Constitutional Movement (MPDC) merged with the more radical (some would even say jihadist) Islamic youth group Shabiba Islamiyya. While the MPDC was always considered a political actor playing within the rules of the political game determined by the king, Shabiba Islamiyya did not accept these rules and may have even been involved in several assassinations, including the murder of trade-union leader Omar Ben Jelloul.¹¹ To this day, the PJD comprises several ideological strands.

Evaluating an Islamist party's stance on the key markers cited above requires a basic level of transparency in the party's internal governance—a test that the PJD passes much more easily than most. Indeed, the PJD is by far the most internally democratic of Morocco's major parties and among the most internally democratic in the entire region. Its internal debates over goals and platforms are on open view, and decisions on these questions, when taken, are authoritatively resolved. It is therefore significant that, over time, those most clearly rejecting violence and advocating participation in the existing political system have emerged as the leaders of the party.

In 2004, the younger and more technocratic wing of the PJD won a major victory by electing Saadeddine Othmani as the party's general secretary. In the spring of 2006, when the vision of an Islamist leader courting U.S. opinion might have seemed at its most incongruous, the 50-year-old psychiatrist toured the United States. He welcomed official contacts and underlined the PJD's commitment to peaceful and democratic methods, its affinity with the AKP, its lack of contacts with Hamas, and its distance from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.¹²

In the runup to the 2007 parliamentary elections, the PJD used relatively democratic internal methods to resolve intraparty disagreements.¹³ Several party-leadership positions changed hands; the more pragmatic wing, which favored full participation, was the clear beneficiary. During the campaign, PJD candidates stressed their advanced degrees, competence, and professionalism, not their religious credentials. Fighting corruption, not imposing *shari'a*, was their main theme.

Of course, there is no way to know if PJD leaders are hiding antidemocratic intentions until after they come to power. This raises a dilemma common to democratization across the Arab world: No oppositionists (Islamist or otherwise) can be reliably tested without a political process open enough to put them into positions of authority. The Moroccan Parliament, with its limited duties and powers, offers no such test. Yet the PJD, driven by the demands of electoral pluralism, has already gone farther than many other Islamist parties in clarifying and justifying its political agenda. The party's internal transparency, moreover, has allowed questions of commitment to democratic participation to be debated and settled openly in favor (so far) of pragmatism. These are

all positive signs regarding the prospects for peacefully integrating an Islamist presence into competitive politics. Such a prospect, if realized in Morocco, would be a first for the Arab world.¹⁴

Political Liberalization or Camouflaging Autocracy?

Experts posit several different relationships between types of autocracy and the probability of democratic transition. All autocratic regimes are vulnerable to democratic change at some point, but which kinds of autocracies are more likely to change? Some posit that semi-autocratic or competitive authoritarian regimes better facilitate democratization than full-blown dictatorships.¹⁵ Others argue that semi-autocracies, with their ability to diffuse societal pressures for change, are actually more likely to impede genuine democratization than are rigid dictatorships.¹⁶

In recent years, the kings of Morocco have aspired to the “diffusing the pressure” approach. When Morocco first regained its independence from France in 1956, King Mohamed V focused on reestablishing the sovereignty of the monarchy and not allowing the national-liberation parties, such as Istiqlal and the USFP, to assume power in its place. In doing so, he and his son, Hassan II, were not afraid to use repression, including the arrest or even murder of hundreds of political opponents. At the same time, the monarchy always allowed independent parties to operate and never tried to build a one-party regime. By the harsh standards of Arab politics, then, Morocco was relatively liberal. After the 1997 elections, Hassan II moved in a more democratic direction by inviting the USFP—not the traditional loyalist parties—to form a coalition government in what was called the *alternance*. The king still dominated politics and reserved the right to name the heads of the so-called ministries of sovereignty such as foreign affairs, defense, interior, justice, and Islamic affairs. This led some to interpret the *alternance* as a mere exercise in cooptation.¹⁷ But compared to the rest of the Arab world, Morocco’s Parliament and the government based upon it seemed to be gaining at least a measure of legitimacy and independent authority.

Mohamed VI made some important social reforms and enhanced civil liberties after coming to power upon his father’s death from illness in 1999. The young king established the Independent Arbitration Panel, and later the Equity and Reconciliation Commission, to investigate and compensate for past human rights abuses. He also released many political prisoners, including the head of the Justice and Charity Association. Most impressively, Mohamed VI introduced major reforms of the *mu-dawana* or family code, including limits on polygamy, an increase in the minimum age for legal marriage from 15 to 18, and greater rights for women in divorce proceedings and in passing on Moroccan citizenship to their children regardless of the father’s nationality.

Mohamed VI, however, did *not* extend the 1997 precedent by selecting the prime minister from the victorious parties in the 2002 parliamentary vote. Instead he picked a nonpartisan technocrat. In advance of the 2007 elections, however, the king announced his intention to name a premier who reflected the voters' preferences, giving added meaning to the vote.¹⁸

The 2003 Casablanca terror attacks, followed by others since (though none as large), have tested the royal commitment to political liberalization. Although the king has not reversed course on liberalization, neither has he injected any further substance into the democratic process by, for example, increasing parliamentary authority or even declining to exercise his own considerable legislative powers. Strong political parties, some Moroccan analysts believe, are a crucial bulwark against extremism; they argue that the king needs to strengthen Parliament to further legitimize the party system and boost secular parties, both to balance the PJD and to dampen support for terrorist organizations.¹⁹ In this regard, the 2007 elections may prove to be a turning point.

The 2007 elections were competitive, free, and fair. Opposition and progovernment parties competed on an equal playing field. Public television time was allocated proportionally to all parties based on their past performance, which is the practice in many democracies. The new electoral law placed strict limits on the campaign schedule, the placement of posters, and the location of public rallies. Party officials found these regulations clumsy, but they applied equally to all. The palace did not want to see the PJD finish first, much less win a majority, but the authorities relied on the electoral process, rather than interference in the campaign or the balloting, to stop the Islamists. After the vote, an international election-observer mission organized by the U.S.-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) released an interim report that found no evidence of major electoral fraud. A few losing PJD candidates charged chicanery, but the party as a whole, and the vast majority of participants in the election, accepted its results as legitimate.²⁰

The steps toward democratization taken to date, including the 2007 vote, fall far short of transforming the Moroccan monarchy into a democracy. The most important shortcomings are the imbalance between the executive and legislative branches, and the king's share in legislative authority. First, as codified in the constitution, executive power in Morocco is not accountable to the people. The king is still an absolute monarch, chief of the government, and the country's spiritual leader (as signified by his status as a direct descendant of Mohammed and the royal title "Commander of the Faithful"), making him above the law and unconstrained by any other institution. The king on his own names the premier and key ministers. Legislation can come from Parliament or the coalition government, but can also come by decree from the king. Most major legislation in fact originates from the palace in close coordina-

tion with the elected government ministers, and is then approved by Parliament. Finally, members of Parliament's upper house are chosen by public associations and municipal bodies loyal to the king rather than by public voting.

Along with his legislative power, the king retains vast authority over governance. He appoints the eighteen provincial governors, who wield tremendous authority in their regions as compared to the elected mayors and local councils. Judges also hold royal appointments and rarely deviate from royal expectations. Independent newspapers and radio stations exist, but the two largest television networks are state-owned. The institutional space for democratic politics is confined to a lower legislative house with limited authority whose members, with not much to do and little incentive to invest themselves in the institution, often fail to show up.

The low 2007 turnout suggests that Moroccans realize the limits of parliamentary power. Registering to vote in Morocco is not easy, although the Interior Ministry ran an unprecedented effort that signed up more than a million new voters in advance of the September balloting. That another sizeable chunk of the populace would take the time and trouble to register, go to the polls, and then deliberately spoil their ballots represents a major act of protest. It is also a sign of Morocco's relative liberalism: In many dictatorships, citizens are compelled to vote and face punishment for spoiling a ballot, while in Morocco the state did not even attempt to falsify the turnout. Compared to the repression and apathy in which so many of the region's other countries are drowning, Morocco's low turnout and spoiled ballots are signs of civic activism, but also of an alienation that it would be perilous to ignore.

The explanation that sees the nonvoting and ballot spoilage as signs of anger at parties which are widely blamed for being corrupt, programmatically hazy, and personalistic is partly correct but insufficient. The vote was a referendum on the parties, to be sure, but also on the political system that the palace has devised. The monarchy seems to want genuine democracy for a day—election day, when the world is watching—and managed democracy for all the other days of the year. The voters declined to play along with the charade, and made their dissatisfaction clear. How government leaders respond will shape the future of Morocco's politics.

The Price of Managed Liberalization

Morocco's 2007 vote shows that Islamist participation in elections and other political institutions can be managed, but only at a price. Rather than rigging elections, the incumbent regime can configure the political system to contain the impact of popular Islamist parties. But in doing so, the regime may compromise the democratic legitimacy of the

process by distorting the link between the ballot box and the parliament chamber, making each new government look much the same as the one before. Parties that are always excluded, such as the PJD, never have to make their real intentions known when it comes to respect for human rights and liberal-democratic principles.

At the same time, elections in semi-autocratic regimes sometimes set in motion political dynamics that go well beyond the results which the powerholders anticipate.²¹ The palace clearly wanted a competitive campaign that would include genuine opposition parties, a free and fair electoral process, robust voter participation, and hence international approval.²² The monarchy was relieved by the new balance of parliamentary forces that the election produced, but surprised and dismayed by the low turnout and many spoiled ballots. Voters do not always act according to plan, and the international focus after the election shifted from the status of the PJD to the overall health of a system with such abysmal participation rates.

The regime must now respond, and it cannot delay too long. The danger is clear: If democratic forms lose legitimacy, then tightly managed liberalization, far from ensuring stability in a dangerous environment, may end up pushing Moroccans away from peaceful politics and toward extremists. This would send a negative signal across the region. Autocrats would insist ever more strongly that democracy, however partial, can only end by empowering radicals. Business leaders, religious minorities, and political liberals would cling tightly to the current rulers, seeking protection from radical Islamism. Prospects for peaceful change within Arab states would dim.

The palace could turn up the heat of repression, but this could undermine international support and backfire at home, inflaming still more discontent. Justice and Charity or even more extreme groups would benefit, their claim that the current process is a sham vindicated, and their cry that the monarchy must go gaining new recruits.

A second option is to take further steps toward democracy. To re-engage voters, the king would have to strengthen Parliament and the mainstream parties, reducing his own power in the process. Even without making constitutional changes, the palace could reduce its role in legislative affairs, encourage the new governing coalition to set its own policy agenda, and welcome more vigorous parliamentary inquiries into government performance. Such reforms would send an important signal that the king intends democratic institutions to play a substantive role in governance even if they occasionally challenge the palace. Eventually, however, constitutional changes to address the executive-legislative imbalance will be required, and the king's willingness to bind himself by democratic norms will be tested. He cannot avoid the choice that the 2007 election has foreshadowed. To retain citizens' loyalty and participation, and ensure his government's legitimacy, he will have to

constrain his own authority and strengthen Parliament and the parties as forces independent of palace control.

The Moroccan case also reveals how democratic reforms can help to clarify the true agenda and true strength of Islamist parties and movements.

In its current state, Morocco's political system will remain unstable and exposed to the prospect of more radical challenges initiated from below.

In Morocco, dissatisfied voters found ways to express themselves without throwing all their weight behind an Islamist movement. The pluralist nature of Morocco's party system, which is fostered by low barriers to party formation and electoral rules that give small parties a decent chance at achieving parliamentary representation, has encouraged the PJD to differentiate itself from older, nationalist parties through its internal transparency, and that transparency in turn helps to illuminate the party's ideological and political direction. Since the internal debates of 2007, several unhappy PJD leaders have split off to form their own Islamist-oriented parties. These new parties, if they survive, will present different attitudes toward the monarchy and toward the purpose of political participation than the newly pragmatist leadership of the PJD. This fresh source of competition will likely pressure the PJD to further clarify what it intends to do when and if it does achieve a governing majority.

Morocco's experience suggests that expanded political liberty, especially freedom of association, can facilitate the emergence of multiple versions of political Islam, reducing the salience of a large, undifferentiated Islamist movement as an umbrella for oppositionist sentiment. The contrast between the PJD and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood—as regards both their substantive views and their places in their respective countries' political systems—is striking. The best means for containing potentially destabilizing discontent and promoting moderation among potentially antidemocratic forces are 1) a pluralized political space, and 2) iterative free elections.

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The dilemmas that the king must now resolve in the face of citizen alienation reveal the limits of a strategy of gradual liberalization stage-managed from on high by a pro-Western autocrat. In its current state, Morocco's political system will remain unstable and exposed to the prospect of more radical challenges initiated from below. Whether the more successful challengers will be democrats or advocates of a new form of autocracy remains to be seen.

NOTES

1. While vote spoilage can sometimes be due to ignorance or error, Moroccan ballots reviewed by international observers in Morocco (including one of the authors of this article) showed clear evidence of willful spoilage, including antigovernment messages

scrawled on ballot papers. This type of protest vote requires mobilized and motivated voters.

2. This article focuses on Arab rather than Muslim countries since democracy is prevalent in Muslim-majority countries outside the Arab world. See Vali Nasr, "The Rise of 'Muslim Democracy'?" *Journal of Democracy* 16 (April 2005): 13–27.

3. Mark Tessler, "Gauging Arab Support for Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 16 (July 2005): 83–97.

4. Martin Kramer, "Inside the Middle East: Now I'm a . . . Neorealist!" *Jerusalem Post*, 27 August 2007.

5. On PJD restraint in the 2002 vote, see Michael Willis, "Morocco's Islamists and the Legislative Election of 2002: The Strange Case of the Party That Did Not Want to Win," *Mediterranean Studies* 9 (Spring 2004): 53–81.

6. Some more radical groups, such as the Justice and Charity Association, claim that the PJD actually cooperates closely with the king.

7. Roula Khalaf, "Morocco Sees the Rise of 'Acceptable' Islamist Party," *Financial Times*, 23 May 2006.

8. Wittes interview with local political analyst, Rabat, October 2007.

9. Thomas Omestad, "The Casbah Connection: Why Morocco Is Producing Some of the World's Most Feared Terrorists," *U.S. News and World Report*, 1 May 2005. In the Spanish trial, however, prosecutors did not have sufficient evidence to prove the connections between the Moroccan terrorists involved in the Madrid bombings and the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group. See Victoria Burnett, "Convictions and Key Acquittals End Madrid Bomb Trial," *New York Times*, 1 November 2007, A3.

10. For some typologies and criteria for distinguishing among Islamist movements, see Tamara Cofman Wittes, *Freedom's Unsteady March: America's Role in Building Arab Democracy* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, forthcoming 2008); and Nathan Brown, Amr Hamzawy, and Marina Ottaway, "Islamist Movements and the Democratic Process in the Arab World: Exploring the Gray Zones," *Carnegie Papers*, No. 61 (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 2006).

11. Amel Boubekeur and Samir Amghar, *Islamist Parties in the Maghreb and Their Links with the EU: Mutual Influences and the Dynamics of Democratisation*, EuroMesco working paper, No. 55 (Brussels: CEPS, October 2006), 7.

12. Several senior PJD leaders, however, do have ongoing relations with Brotherhood figures and with Sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi, a major spiritual figure in salafist Sunni Islam who lives in Qatar.

13. Wendy Kristianasen, "Can Morocco's Islamists Check Al-Qaida?" *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August 2007.

14. Other Arab states, such as Bahrain, have parliamentary bodies with a majority of Islamist participants, but these parliaments have even less authority than Morocco's and thus cannot meaningfully be said to represent Islamist participation in governance. The imbalance of executive-legislative power in Morocco today would certainly constrain the capacity of a potential PJD-led governing coalition, but such a coalition would have distinct duties and powers that would qualify it, both symbolically and substantively, as an Islamist-led government under the authority of the king.

15. Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

16. Daniel Brumberg, "Liberalization versus Democracy," in Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, eds., *Uncharted Journey: Promoting Democracy in the Middle East* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), 15–36; and Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East," *Comparative Politics* 36 (January 2004): 139–57.

17. Marina Ottaway and Meredith Riley, "Morocco: From the Top-down Reform to Democratic Transition?" *Carnegie Papers*, No. 71 (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2006), 6.

18. He explicitly avoided saying that he would select the prime minister from *the* winner of the election, as most predicted a PJD victory and the king did not want a PJD prime minister.

19. Wittes interview with a Moroccan political analyst and intellectual, Rabat, August 2007.

20. On PJD complaints, see Othmani's 10 September 2007 interview on Al Jazeera International at <http://fr.youtube.com/watch?v=CsoqfNL51Qw>.

21. Elections in Chile in 1988, Poland in 1989, Serbia in 2000, and Ukraine in 2004 are just a few examples of electoral outcomes producing dramatic, regime-changing results not anticipated by the incumbents who organized the elections.

22. It may have been more than coincidence that a US\$697.5 million loan from the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) was signed with Morocco only a week before the vote. The MCC uses governance and democracy indicators in its criteria for making loans.