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Parliamentary Agenda Priorities and Responsiveness Under Authoritarianism

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Abstract

Former studies have focused on issue prioritization in parliaments and compared the priorities of both political elites and citizens to measure their level of responsiveness to the general public. To date, this topic was examined in more than twenty countries, which are exclusively democratic systems. This paper aims to contribute to the comparative agendas' politics literature by testing issue-congruency under competitive authoritarian regimes. Analyzing more than 10,000 legislative texts, mainly parliamentary draft bills and questions, and matching them with public opinion data on citizen priorities in Morocco, we found a substantial level of issue congruence between the priorities of the elites and citizens. The level of congruency is particularly higher for parliamentary questions compared to draft bills. The results also demonstrate that contrary to the earlier theories on clientelism and citizen-politician linkages in the Middle East, the priorities of the major political parties largely reflect the priorities of the general public rather than the priorities of the party supporters.

Keywords: Middle East Politics, Responsiveness, Clientelism, Legislative Politics, Comparative agendas, Morocco, Justice and Development Party.

Introduction

The prioritization of legislative issues has become an increasingly important topic in recent years. Relying on the content coding of legislative activities, several studies have examined issue prioritization in parliaments and contrasted elites' political priorities to those of ordinary citizens to measure the politicians' level of responsiveness. Up to the present, this topic has been examined in more than 20 countries, which are exclusively democratic systems (see: Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Baumgartner et al. 2009; Walgrave et al. 2008; Pennings, 2005; Bertelli & John, 2013; Eissler et al. 2014). This paper aims to contribute to this vein of comparative politics literature by moving beyond established democracies. Although research has shown that institutions may function differently in authoritarian regimes than democracies (Gandhi & Lust, 2009), parliaments do exist in many authoritarian settings and perform significant and substantive political activities that have remained grossly unexplored.

On the one hand, previous work on legislative politics in the Middle East has either focused on examining the struggle for power between the regime and the political elites or the relationship between the rulers and the masses with little or no attention paid to the relationship between political elites in these legislatures and their responsiveness to the voters. We believe it is rather simplistic to view electoral politics in these contexts as either a stabilizing mechanism for regime longevity and/or a means to resolve the issue of power sharing between the ruling circle and political elites. These perspectives fail to

take into account the role of political elites in the legislative arena, as well as the voters and their policy preferences and priorities.

On the other hand, despite the important role played by these legislatures, the comparative agendas' literature has neglected such contexts, mainly due to the inaccessibility of data and the complexity of these electoral systems. To bridge this gap and to better understand the role of these legislatures in autocratic regimes, this paper presents one of the first and only empirical analyses using an original dataset of legislative bills and questions.

This study addresses these issues by analyzing original parliamentary data, mainly legislative bills and questions, created using the coding scheme of the Comparative Agendas Project first implemented by Baumgartner & Jones (1993). Each legislative text is classified in terms of 25 topic areas such as energy, transportation, or health. Legislative data is supplemented by the most important problem (MIP) question measured using public opinion surveys in order to explore the level of issue congruency between the elites and the citizens.

Although this paper primarily contributes to the broader legislative behavior literature, it also aims to further our understanding of politics in the Middle East—a region that has experienced tremendous social and political transformations over the past few years. Despite the fact that only a few countries experienced a regime change in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, several countries have introduced major legislative reforms in order to mitigate the possible outcomes of the uprisings, including Morocco. This is why it is imperative now more than ever to understand the impact of these events on shaping policymakers' legislative behavior in Arab parliaments.

Our results show that contrary to conventional wisdom, there is a substantial level of issue congruency between the Moroccan legislators and citizens in the country's post-Arab Spring parliament, especially in regard to elites' priorities using legislative questions. Additionally, the legislative issue attention of the legislators reflect the priorities of the general public priorities more than they mimic the issue priorities of their own party support base.

The first section of this paper highlights the most recent research on competitive authoritarianism and its relevance to electoral politics in the MENA region. The second section outlines the history of political liberalization in the MENA and its outcomes, especially in regard to legislative politics in the region. Finally, we present our findings based on our original dataset of parliamentary bills and questions after explicating the political and electoral context in Morocco—our main case study.

Competitive Authoritarianism: A Comparative Perspective

Non-democratic regimes can be classified into three main types: military, civilian dictatorships, and monarchic regimes (Cheibub et al. 2010). According to the political regimes dataset created by Hadenius & Teorell, multi-party monarchies, multi-party

military systems and limited multi-party regimes currently constitute the second-largest category after democracy, at 24 percent versus 42 percent democratic systems (2016).[1] Hence, the past two decades have witnessed a surge in scholarship to not only investigate the *wide and foggy* zone that exists between liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes, but also to better understand variations across authoritarian systems (Schedler 2002). As maintained by Geddes, "Different kinds of authoritarianism differ from each other as much as they differ from democracy" (1999, p. 121). Scholars concur that it is imperative to understand variations among these regimes to assess the likelihood of their transition to democracy (Linz & Stepan, 1996) and their political survival (Geddes, 1999), as well as to have a clear understanding of their internal dynamics of power (Svolik, 2012).

Scholars have suggested different ways to classify these regimes, such as electoral authoritarian regimes (Schedler, 2006), hybrid regimes (Diamond, 2002), and competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky & Way, 2002). While the operation and structure of electoral institutions vary substantially in these regimes, what is common among them is their tendency to practice authoritarianism under the facade of representative democracy (Schedler, 2013, p. 1). Most of these regimes allow a certain degree of political competition and provide a viable space for the opposition to play a role in the political arena. Particularly, Levitsky and Way define competitive authoritarianism as "civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist and widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents' abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-à-vis their opponents " (2010, p. 5).

Electoral authoritarian regimes can be further classified as either "competitive" or "hegemonic" (Schedler, 2002). While the former is analogous to Levitsky and Way's conceptualization of competitive authoritarianism, where opposition groups still have lower chances of winning elections but are given a relatively fair chance to compete in elections, the latter is distinct in that opposition groups are not allowed to compete for elections and fail to get access to the decision-making arena in the country.

Adhering to a facade of representative democracy and multi-party elections is not only desirable for the longevity of autocratic regimes (Gandhi, 2008), but it also has a positive impact on the country's economic growth and levels of foreign investments (Wright, 2008) and promotes its image in international and domestic circles (Levitsky and Way 2002). Additionally, these electoral institutions play a major role in "alleviating the monitoring problems in authoritarian regimes and show the ruler's willingness to share power with his political opponents" (Svolik, 2012, p. 7). However, we have to put into consideration that these regimes vary significantly not only in the way they manage negotiations for policy concessions between opposition groups, ruling elites and the

[1] https://sites.google.com/site/authoritarianregimedataset/data

masses, but also in the resulting policy outcomes of such negotiations (Yadav & Mukherjee, 2016, p. 14).

But what about the nature of electoral institutions in places like the MENA region? While most of the aforementioned studies have paid much attention to electoral politics in developing democracies across different parts of the world, very few studies have focused on studying elections in the MENA region. This can be mainly attributed to the fact that scholars still struggle with the idea of meaningful elections in such autocratic settings and question the significance of elections on producing important policy outcomes. This problem is exacerbated by the scarcity of legislative data as well as the opacity and volatility of electoral laws in such countries. There still exists a significant gap in our understanding in regard to the significance of elections under authoritarian rule, the policy priorities of political elites and their responsiveness to mass public opinion.

Political liberalization and Electoral Politics in the Middle East and North Africa

While the MENA region has witnessed unprecedented scholarly and media attention in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and the recent surge in religious radicalism, scholars have attempted over the past few decades to explain why there is not a single country in the Arab world that has ever been classified as "free'" while the number of countries ranked as "free" has doubled in the Americas and the Asia-Pacific region, increased tenfold in Africa, and risen exponentially in central and eastern Europe during that same period. This issue becomes even more evident when we compare the internal power structures in these countries to other autocratic regimes across the globe. As maintained by Makdisi & Elbadawi, "Even if we consider only authoritarian regimes, Arab dictatorships are the most oppressive, with a mean polity score of -7.8 compared to -5.2 for non-Arab regimes" (2007, pp. 8-9).

To solve this puzzle, previous studies on Middle East politics have focused their attention on the impact of the structural, institutional, and cultural factors shaping the region's persistent power structures. One group of studies has focused on structural factors such as oil and economic patronage (Ross, 2001; King, 2009). Alternatively, other scholars highlighted the effect of institutional factors, such as the use of coercive measures to intimidate citizens and abort any prospects for change (Lust, 2006; Bellin, 2004; Brumberg, 2002; Lust & Jamal, 2002), and the introduction of electoral reforms with limited pluralism (Ottaway & Hamzawy, 2010) on the longevity of these regimes. Particularly, the cautious introduction of multi-party systems has led to the creation of several new parties that are mainly reproducing the regime's autocratic and nepotistic practices rather than promoting more liberal, democratic ones (AbuKhalil, 1997; Sater, 2007).

In addition to focusing on institutional and structural factors, scholars also have attributed the democracy lag in the Middle East to an array of cultural factors**.** On the one hand, former studies have shed light on the difficulty associated with establishing a liberal democracy under Islamic laws and doctrines widely viewed as fundamentally illiberal (Fukuyama, 1995; Huntington, 1991). On the other hand, the absence of a vibrant civil society in most parts of the region—deemed essential for a healthy democracy—has further contributed to a substantial democratic deficit in the region. Finally, the existence of patriarchy and patrimonialism (Bill & Springborg, 1994), ethnic traditions (Volpi, 2004), linguistic characteristics (Pryce-Jones, 1989), the rapid rise of political Islam (Lakoff, 2004) and gender inequality throughout the region (Elbadawi & Makdisi, 2011) have significantly impeded the region's transition to more democratic and inclusive political systems.

Finally, *external factors* such as Western aid (Yom, 2009), the Arab-Israeli conflict (Diamond, 2010), as well as the lack of democratic diffusion effect, coupled with the absence of a single Arab democracy (Choucair, 2006), have also been blamed for the persistence of democracy deficit in the region.

While the MENA region has suffered—and continues to suffer—from an ever-widening democracy lag, the past few decades have witnessed a sweeping wave of political liberalization that has significantly transformed the dynamics of power across the region. Since the 1980s, many Arab countries introduced significant electoral reforms and "competitive" elections, mainly in response to severe economic and political crises along with international and domestic pressure. However, as maintained by Korany et al., we have to make a clear distinction between liberalization and democratization in the context of the Middle East, whereas "liberalization involves the institutionalization of civil and political freedoms, democratization is more concerned with the degree of citizen participation as well as the accountability and turnover of governing elites to the masses" (1995, p. 1).

As previous research has focused on the dynamics of authoritarianism in the MENA (Posusney, 2002; Carothers, 2002; Brownlee, 2002), research on legislative politics has been scarce and yielded mixed results. On the one hand, the overwhelming focus of most of these studies on the link between elections and prospects for democratization has led to a considerable gap in our understanding of the micro-level dynamics and outcomes of these elections (Gandhi & Lust, 2009). Then again, the view of elections in these settings as merely channels for distributing rents or the circulation of elites in order to strengthen the existing regimes has drawn scholars' attention away from analyzing these elections and exploring their outcomes.

Brownlee, for instance, argues that elections in the MENA are mainly geared toward gauging the popularity of the regime and its allies (2007a). Elections are merely recurrent political phenomena that provide leaders with effective "legitimizing" tools for regimes to tighten their authoritarian grip (Albrecht, 2008) and reinstate their legitimacy

(Sater, 2009). Brown describes Arab parliaments as "a political sphere" without any sort of accountability (2014). Lust views elections as significant political events for both political elites and voters; however, the electoral competition is not about policymaking per se (2006). Elections in such autocratic settings are mostly about access to state resources and clientalistic networks. Elections are also important to send signals to both elites and voters about the acceptable venues for political participation and garner international and domestic support (Lust & Jamal, 2002). Finally, elections can also play a significant role in identifying the most loyal party cadres to be rewarded by the ruling regime once in office (Blaydes, 2008).

When it comes to the relationship between voters and political elites in authoritarian regimes, we have very few studies addressing this issue. Despite the fact that almost all MENA countries currently hold elections that citizens and voters take quite seriously, we are aware of a handful of studies that have investigated the relationship between voters and political elites or legislators. Focusing on the case of Egypt, Blaydes argues that elections are simply an arena for patronage and for the distribution of material benefits, especially among less financially privileged groups (2008). Blaydes & El Tarouty argue that while less privileged female voters in Egypt may sell their votes in exchange for material benefits, women casting their votes for the Islamists in Egypt are more likely to vote to promote the political agenda of their party (2009). In a similar vein, de Miguel et al. have shown that policy outcomes are important for voters' choice of representatives (2015). Nevertheless, there is not a single study that has examined the issue of policy congruence in Arab parliaments between voters and political elites and how it varies in different contexts in the region.

While we are in agreement with previous literature that elections in the MENA should not be viewed as an arena for struggles for democracy (Lust, 2008), we believe that scholars have overlooked a very important notion in the study of politics while looking at elections in the MENA: representation. We continue to know very little about the responsiveness of political elites or actors to the policy priorities and preferences of their constituents across the region. The fact that these elections are administered under the umbrella of authoritarianism does not justify our lack of understanding of policy congruency between political elites and the citizens.

Policymaking and Legislators' Responsiveness in the MENA Region: The Case of Morocco

The Political Context in Morocco

Morocco was a French colony that gained its independence in 1956. Since then, Morocco has been a constitutional hereditary monarchy, currently ruled by King Mohammed VI who came to power in July 1999. Morocco was one of the first countries in the region that granted political parties the right to form and compete in elections on both national and local levels according to Article 3 of the country's post-independence

constitution. The regime has held multi-party elections since 1963 (Sater, 2012) and granted suffrage to all segments of the Moroccan society. Similar to most other monarchies in the MENA region, the king enjoys a wide array of prerogatives enshrined in the constitution with unquestioned royal power. Prior to the constitutional amendments in the 1990s, the king had the sole right to appoint the prime minister, approve the prime minister's selection of Cabinet members, sign and ratify major treaties, dissolve the parliament, order new elections, and initiate reforms to the electoral laws. Since 1992, a series of constitutional amendments have incrementally enhanced the role of legislative bodies in the policymaking arena and produced more transparent and inclusive assemblies. The parliament, including the opposition, has complete freedom to propose bills, discuss or criticize draft bills, approve the budget, and question ministers including the prime minister, as long as these policies are not against the interests or the will of the monarchy.

Unlike any other country in the MENA region, the ruling family in Morocco relies on its descent from the Prophet Mohammad to bolster the king's political legitimacy with religion, as being the "Commander of the faithful." Through building consensus and performing the role of the ultimate "arbiter" for the most controversial issues facing the country, such as women's rights, legislative gridlocks, etc., the three Moroccan kings who have governed since the country's independence have managed to create an atmosphere of "political dualism." As maintained by Deneoux & Maghroui, political dualism in Morocco is mainly characterized by long periods of political freedom accompanied by more direct (or even indirect) resort to more traditional ways of governing mainly in the form of "arbitration" (1998).

Currently, the legislative arena in Morocco is comprised of two legislative chambers: the Assembly of Councilors (Upper House) and the elected House of Representatives (Lower House). The main functions of the Moroccan lower house are to approve laws proposed by the government, the monarchy, and/or members of the House of Representatives or the Assembly of Councilors, and to monitor the government's performance via directing questions to government officials and forming fact-finding committees to investigate specific issues. These committees are temporary and are expected to end once they submit their findings to the head of the parliament and/or the government. In addition, there are a number of permanent committees to study draft laws and discuss matters related to their jurisprudence.

In order to ensure a peaceful transfer of power to his son King Mohammad VI, the last decade of King Hassan II' s reign (1990-1999) witnessed major constitutional and electoral reforms that led to a more harmonious relationship between the king, the opposition leaders, and the leftist parties. As part of the regime's strategy to keep potential enemies closer to the circles of power, political parties were given more freedom to compete for elections, and the opposition groups (mainly the socialists and the Islamists) were allowed to play a more substantive role in the legislative process

(Maghraoui & Zerhouni, 2015). In contrast to the country's post-independence parliaments, the past two decades have witnessed the revival of electoral life, especially following the 2002 election that regional and international observers deemed the most transparent election in Morocco's history.

In 2011, Morocco witnessed considerable levels of instability in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. Waves of protests swept the country orchestrated by the "February 20th Movement," calling for the establishment of a parliamentary monarchy. To stifle the protests, the king dissolved the 8th legislature and called for new elections[2] and introduced a number of constitutional amendments to be discussed in further detail in the following section. The constitution was approved by 98.5 percent of registered voters[3] in July 2011 with approximately 70 percent voter turnout, and the king ratified the new constitution in September 2011. Elections were held two months later with 40 percent voter turnout, which is remarkably higher than many previous elections.[4]

According to the most recent constitutional amendments, the lower house is comprised of 395 members, compared to 325 in 2007. The 395 seats are distributed as follows: 305 seats are allocated for local districts and 90 seats are allocated to women and youth to be elected through one national district in an attempt to promote the representativeness of the elected assembly. Voters cast two votes—one "local" vote for their multi-member constituency and one "national" vote for the reserved seats.

Political Parties in Morocco: The 2011 Lower House Elections

Prior to discussing electoral politics in Morocco, it should be emphasized that despite the long history of competitive elections and the multiplicity of political forces in the Moroccan electoral arena, the king's authority or legitimacy has never been subject to public or political debate that led to the rise of the "politics of consensus" (Maghraoui, 2011). This reality has led many regional scholars to view elections in the country as futile, and as merely a competition arena for access to inner circles of power—a domain that is mainly controlled by the king (Sater, 2009)—or as a channel to resolve conflicts between the monarchy and the opposition (Zerhouni, 2008, 2012).

Morocco is indeed one of the few countries in the MENA region with powerful political party systems that have existed since its independence from France in 1956. Political parties in Morocco are one of the most established and organized party structures in the entire region. Therefore, we believe that the politics in Morocco provide a considerable degree of party competition; hence, it is worth examining the legislative behavior of the MPs and their responsiveness to the public's priorities.

Moreover, the participation of the Justice and Development Party (PJD) in elections since 1997 and its most recent victory in gaining the plurality of votes in the

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[2] Elections were scheduled to take place in September 2012, but they were held earlier in response to the mass protests.

[3] http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/africa/07/01/morocco.vote.reforms/

[4] Voter turnout was 37 percent in the 2007 elections of the lower house.

November 2011 elections have invigorated the electoral landscape and drastically altered the dynamics of power in the country. The PJD represents one of the strongest Islamist opposition forces against the regime along with the Istiqlal party, and to some extent the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USPF).[5] There are also a number of pro-regime parties that were created by the king's inner circles to promote the regime's policies and initiatives in the parliament. This group includes the Popular Movement, the Party of Authenticity and Modernity (PAM), National Rally of Independents (RNI)[6], and the Constitutional Union–an offshoot of RNI–that was established in 1983 (Pellicer and Wegner 2015).

Major constitutional reforms took place prior to the elections to appease the opposition and to partially meet the demands of the revolutionary "February 20th Movement." With these reforms, the current political system is a step forward toward establishing a "parliamentary" system of government.[7] According to the new amendments, the king has no capacity to appoint the head of the government unilaterally. The prime minister is to be appointed from the party that acquires the plurality of seats in the House of Representatives. Furthermore, the head of the government is responsible for appointing cabinet members, appoint senior civil servants, and diplomats, and for dissolving the parliament. The king may no longer dissolve the parliament without the consent of the prime minister. However, the king still has the final say in issues related to defense, religion and security. Moreover, the new constitution has established the independence of the Judiciary from the legislative as well as the executive power. Finally, the new amendments included the launching of the Human Rights Council, which is charged with the protection of freedom of speech, assembly, association, and the press.[8]

Parliamentary elections took place in 2011 based on the closed-list proportional system.[9] Thirty political parties competed representing 92 electoral districts, eighteen of which have actually won seats.[10] The Justice and Development Party won the plurality of seats (107 seats out of 395) and the leader of the party, Abdelilah Benkirane, became the

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[5] The USPF has adopted less radical policy positions in the last few decades and loosened its calls for genuine democratic reforms after being co-opted by the regime (Wegner & Pellicer, 2011), which has drastically impacted their support base. The party was the fourth largest parliamentary group in 2007 and won most of the seats in 2002. In 2011, the party failed to gain enough seats to be in the national government.

[6] The RNI was established in 1977 by Ahmed Uthman, the brother-in-law of king Hassan II.

[7] Categorizing dictatorships as parliamentary, presidential, or semi-presidential is difficult and sometimes highly problematic. However, what we argue here is that the current systems of electing the chief executive Morocco looks more like parliamentary system rather than presidential or semi-presidential one.

[8] https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Morocco_2011.pdf?lang=en

[9] There is a 6 percent threshold using the largest remainder method.

[10] Since none of the parties has gained an absolute majority of the seats in the lower house, they have to work in coalitions to form a government.

new prime minister. The second largest party in the current parliament is the Istiqlal Party (Independence)—one of Morocco's oldest parties that played a major role in the country's long struggle for independence against the French occupation. The Istiqlal Party (IP)—led by the former Prime Minister "Abbas El Fassi"—won 60 seats followed by the National Rally of Independents (RNI), which won 38 seats. The fourth largest party in the parliament is the Authenticity and the Modernity Party (PAM) with 33 seats. The winning of the PJD came as no surprise, given the sweeping victory of the Islamist parties in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and the demise of many Western-backed authoritarian regimes in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya. The Islamist parties, mainly the Ennahda party in Tunisia, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and the IAF in Jordan, were the absolute winners who reaped the fruits of the massive uprisings that swept the region.

A few weeks following the 2011 elections, the PJD created a coalition government on January 2012[11] along with the Istiqlal Party, the Popular Movement, and the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS). Almost a year after the formation of this government, disagreements arose between the IP and the PJD on the issue of subsidy reforms resulting in the withdrawal of IP from the coalition government.[12] In October 2013, a new government coalition was formed where the National Rally of Independents (RNI) has replaced the Istiqlal Party under the leadership of the PJD.

Public Opinion to Policy Nexus in Morocco

Former studies focusing on electoral politics in the MENA in general, and Morocco in particular, emphasize that political elites in non-democracies participate in elections to serve their own interests and ambitions, with little or no responsiveness to the general public (Zerhouni, 2008). In essence, parliaments in these contexts are about access to state resources (Lust, 2008) and being the link between the regime and the public to provide basic services for their support base, such as housing, education, or health services (Sater, 2009). Accordingly, one should expect no or minimal congruence between the priorities of the general public and political elites. However, we argue in this paper that the overly narrow focus on the relationship between democratization and elections in Morocco, coupled with a scarcity of legislative data, have contributed to a significant lack of attention to the micro-dynamics and/or the outcomes of such elections, especially in contexts with vibrant multiparty competition such as the Moroccan case. In contrast to that dominant view, we expect to observe some degree of the elites' responsiveness to the issue priorities of the public—a hypothesis that we aim to test in the following section using our original dataset.

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[11] For the first time in Morocco's history, the Islamists were able to head the government and win the plurality of seats in the lower house.

[12] http://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2013/07/130709_morocco_ministers_resign

In terms of policy congruence in the Moroccan House of Representatives, we focus in this paper on two main areas of legislative behavior: questions and bills. As previously noted, the Moroccan parliament plays two main roles, legislative and monitoring. To perform its legislative role, the lower house is responsible for discussing and approving draft bills proposed by its members, members of the upper house, as well as the bills proposed by the government. While any member(s) of the parliament can propose a bill, it has to be presented and cleared by the government twenty days prior to its referral to the respective committee. Then, bills must be sent to the respective committees to be studied before being referred to the House of Councilors for discussion and approval. However, bills must be sent back to the House of Representatives for final approval and ratification, or further examination and deliberation. After bills pass the floors, the king has a power to approve, reject, or send it for a referendum.[13] Given the complexity of the process and the veto power of the king, we expect to observe lower levels of issue congruency between the proposed bills and the priorities of the public. In other words, we argue that the topics of the bills may reflect the will of the monarch more than they may reflect the will of the public in general.

To perform its monitoring role, the members of the lower house may propose either oral or written questions to the members or the head of the government.[14] Mondays are dedicated for answering the members' questions and the Cabinet members should respond within twenty days according to the constitution (30 days if the question is directed to the head of the government) and these sessions are broadcasted live on national television. Therefore, highly controversial, timely topics are often discussed during these sessions, and the debates receive significant amount of public attention (Baaklini et al., 1999). From this perspective, we expect to observe higher levels of issue congruency between the citizens' priorities and the topics of the parliamentary question.

In addition to analyzing issue congruency on the aggregate level, we are also interested to better understand variations across different parties in regard to their responsiveness to the mass public. Previous studies on legislative politics have compared parties from this perspective (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2009). In this regard, we will compare the issue responsiveness of the governing Justice and Development Party to that of the Istiqlal Party, the second largest party in the lower House.

Another related question is whether or not the issue priorities of the parties in non-democracies reflect the priorities of only party supporters or the mass public as well. Distributive politics literature argues that political parties in more structured party systems tend to focus more on the priorities of the mass public (Epstein, 2009; Kitschelt, 2011; Kitschelt & Singer, 2011). In contrast, parties in clientelistic settings tend to pay

[13] For more information on the King's veto power, see: http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Morocco_APS.doc

[14] http://www.chambredesrepresentants.ma/sites/default/files/loi/reglement.interieur2012_1.pdf

more attention to the priorities of their support base, a finding that is also consistent with the democratization literature that emphasizes how political parties and elections in dictatorial regimes mostly function to establish clientelistic networks that facilitate patron-client relations (Blaydes, 2011; Lust, 2009). Hence, one would expect political parties in Morocco to pay particular attention to the priorities of the their own support base rather than the mass public. We test this argument in the following section of the paper.

Data and Methodology

The Comparative Agenda Project (CAP)

Responsiveness of political elites to citizens' issue priorities is a key element of democratic governance (Hobolt & Klemmemsen, 2008; Jennings & John, 2009; Lindeboom, 2012). Therefore, a voluminous literature attempted to explain the level of congruence between the issue priorities of the public and politicians across the world. Scholars of Comparative Agendas Project (CAP), originally initiated by Bryan Jones and Frank Baumgartner in 1993, made an important contribution to this body of literature by introducing a systemized procedure for measuring the issue attention of both political elites and citizens. CAP offers a collection of system-level data based on hand coded legislative texts (bills, questions, laws, speeches, etc.), media attention, court decisions, and public opinion data on various issue areas such as education, health, energy, macroeconomics, etc.

Using the CAP framework, Jones & Baumgartner compared the issue congruency between the public and the U.S. Congress since 1945, and found that while the congressional agenda is much more diverse than citizens' issue attention, there is a substantive overlap between their policy priorities (2004). Other scholars have employed similar methodology in different countries. For example, Bonafont & Palau Roque examined the issue responsiveness of Spanish lawmakers from 1994 to 2007 (2011). They found that Spanish lawmakers' priorities are largely congruent with their citizens; however, such alignment peaks after elections and under minority governments. Employing a similar approach, John et al. examined the dynamics of issue responsiveness in British politics. Their findings showed that the British parliament was more responsive to the public' priorities before the creation of a quasi-federal system in 1999 (2011). Lindeboom also found significant support for the issue congruence theory in his study of agenda setting in the Netherlands from 1971 to 2008 (2012). Using annual correlation scores across issue areas, the analysis demonstrated high correlation between public opinion and governmental issue priorities. In a recent study, Bulut analyzed political parties' responsiveness to the priorities of the public since 2003 in Turkey (2016). This study demonstrated that the governing party (AKP) shows a medium level of responsiveness to the median voter, while rightist opposition party (MHP) has the highest

and the leftist opposition party (BDP) has the lowest level of responsiveness to public priorities.

One common feature among these studies is their exclusive focus on democratic states. While this research has improved our understanding of the broader question of representation in these contexts, our knowledge is still lacking when it comes to authoritarian political systems, especially those with significant multi-party competition. Building on qualitative research and scattered case studies, especially in the MENA region, previous work emphasized that political institutions in such regimes function for clientelistic and patronage purposes rather than real policymaking. Thus, we should observe minimal congruence between the priorities of politicians and citizens in such settings; yet, this assumption has not been empirically tested.

Moroccan Policy Agenda Dataset

To better understand the dynamics of citizen-politician linkages in Morocco, we collected a dataset on the issue prioritization using the Comparative Agendas Project's coding scheme (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005). Table 1 lists the 25 topic areas that we used in this study. Our dataset includes coding of 10362 parliamentary oral questions[15] and 196 draft bills from January 2012 to January 2016. Each question and bill is coded to one of these topic areas.[16] Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the frequencies of each topic within the questions and the bills, respectively. In regard to legislative questions, Moroccan MPs mostly focused on education and health. The lowest number of questions was on defense and immigration/citizenship. In terms of bills, law/crime and government operations/budget issue areas received most attention, whereas foreign trade received the least attention from the MPs.

Table 1 here

We measured the priorities of the mass public using the "most important problem" (MIP) question from the fifth wave of the Afrobarometer, which was conducted in Morocco in May 2013.[17] Then, we re-coded the response categories using CAP content coding technique (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; Bulut, 2016; Bonafont & Palau Roqué,

[15] The lower house a had total of about 30,000 written questions during the same period. In this paper, we will use the coded oral questions due to the high level of media and government attention to these oral questions.

[16] Four graduate-level researchers coded the Moroccan parliamentary data. The coders have received extensive training and worked closely with researchers in the Policy Agendas Project headquarter at the University of Texas, Austin. Finally, we had 94 percent inter-coder reliability.

[17] Afrobarometer included Morocco for the first time in its fifth wave. More specifically, we used the survey questions asking respondents what are the most, second most, and third most important problem currently facing Morocco. We have aggregated the respondents' answers on these questions to obtain a single public priority index.

2011). Appendix A lists the response categories for the MIP question and our matching with the topic codes.[18]

Figures 1 and 2 here

Matching the MIP question data with the legislative issue attention data has two important challenges. First, public opinion data generally has lower number of categories; therefore, several issue categories that were used while coding legislative attention were not used as a MIP response category. For example, issues areas such as foreign trade, science, or technology were typically not used as a MIP response category in public opinion surveys. Second, macroeconomic issues are always by far the top citizen priority, while only a small portion of legislative activities is on macroeconomic issues. Earlier studies on agenda setting overwhelmingly confirmed this gap. For example, Jones & Baumgartner found that less than 5 percent of the Congressional hearings between 1946 and 2000 were on the topic of economics, while roughly 25 percent of the public agreed that the economic problems are the most important issues facing the country (2004). Similarly, Bulut found that since 2003, only 15 percent of the enacted bills were on the topic of economics; yet, 55 percent of the citizens thought that economy is the most important problem in Turkey (2016). In order to deal with these two challenges, we have dropped the categories that are not mentioned in the public opinion surveys as well as the category of macroeconomics, and then, we estimated the percentages for the remaining set of categories for further comparison of the priorities of the elite versus citizens.[19]

Results and Discussion

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the relationship between the elite and the public priorities on major issue areas and present interesting patterns. In general, there is noticeable congruency between parliamentary questions and the public opinion in the Moroccan House of Representatives. Figure 3 demonstrates that both elites and the public pay much attention to health, transportation, and education issues, while issues areas such as the environment, women and children's issues, and space-science-technology-communication receive significantly less attention from both legislators and the general public. It is also clear that the biggest gap between the elites and the citizens exists in the

[18] Due to limitations related to public opinion data, we currently have a total of 15 topics in the study (out of the original 25 CAP categories).

[19] Appendix B has the comparison between elites and citizens before dropping the category of macroeconomics and re-estimating the percentages for the remaining categories. The figures show that there is a more than 30 percent gap between the percentage of people who thinks macroeconomic problems are the most important issue of the country and the percentage of parliamentary activities on the macroeconomic issues.

area of corruption-fact checking, where there is a more than 10 percent gap between the elite attention and citizen attention.

Comparing the issue congruency between the bills proposed by the legislators and the public opinion presents a totally different picture. As shown in Figure 4, there is almost no congruency between the two groups. Our data demonstrates that there is some level of overlapping on few issues, such as environment and energy. However in many other issues, there are substantive gaps. These issues include law and crime, health, corruption, women-child-family, and transportation. This finding confirms our theoretical expectation that legislative bills may not be as representative of the public priorities as the parliamentary questions, given the king's veto power on the legislation and the complexity of the bill initiation and approval process.[20]

Figures 3 and 4 here

Following earlier studies measuring issue congruency between elites and citizens, we have used the correlation scores to discern the gap between the priorities of the elites and citizens. We also use the mean absolute difference (MAD) scores to measure the average gap across topics (e.g., see: Baumgartner et al., 2011; Bonafont and Palau Roqué, 2011; Bulut, 2016). Table 2 summarizes the relationship between the public versus elites' priorities using these scores. Higher levels of responsiveness are associated with higher correlation scores and low MAD scores.[21]

The correlation scores between the parliamentary questions and the mass public priorities are 0.58 as shown in Table 2. The mean absolute difference (MAD) across topics is 3.32. These scores confirm the presence of substantial issue congruence between the question topics and the priorities of the public. Table 2 also shows that the correlation scores between parliamentary bills and the mass public priorities is -0.11, which suggests the presence of weak, and negative relationship. Moreover, the MAD between the bills and the citizens' main concerns is 5.79, which is larger than the MAD between the questions and the public priorities (i.e. 3.32). These findings lend further evidence to our theoretical expectations in regard to the lower levels of congruency in the parliamentary bills compared to the legislative questions.

Table 2 here

[20] Passing a bill in Morocco may take up to three decades:
http://www.chambredesrepresentants.ma/ar/مشروع-قانون-رقم-8815-يوافق-بموجبه-التشريعية-النصوص-للاتصالات-الإسلامي-للاتحاد-الأساسي-النظام-على

[21] Due to their definition, correlation scores range from -1 to 1, and MAD scores range from 0 to 100.

Political Parties and Policy Responsiveness in the 9th Legislature

To test our other theoretical expectations concerning the relationship between the major political parties in Morocco and the mass public as well as their support bases, Figures 5 and 6 plot issue attention of the political elites, the mass public, and the party support bases. Figure 5 sheds light on variations related to the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) while Figure 6 deals with the secular, nationalist Istiqlal Party (IP). In these figures, we plotted the percentages of the topics of the parliamentary questions introduced by party members, the percentages of topics deemed by the general public as the MIP, and finally, the percentages of topics viewed as the MIP by the party supporters.

The visual illustration in the figures suggests that the elite priorities of the Istiqlal Party are slightly more representative of the public priorities compared to the Justice and Development Party. The correlation and the MAD scores presented in Table 2 also confirm this finding. The correlation score between the parliamentary questions proposed by the PJD and the mass public is 0.45 while that of the IP is .59. The MAD for the PJD's questions and the mass public is 3.87, compared to 3.33 for the IP.

These findings are very striking in comparison with previous studies on agenda setting. For example, Bulut found that the correlation scores for the major Turkish parties' responsiveness to the public range from -0.03 to 0.35 (2016). This range is smaller than the correlation scores we found in our analysis. Moreover, the Moroccan parliament seems to perform better in terms of MAD, since the range of MAD for Turkish parties is 7.43 to 9.06, which is larger than MAD for the top two Moroccan parties noted above. Therefore, even though Morocco is viewed as an authoritarian country compared to Turkey, the level of issue congruency between the elites and citizens is higher in the Moroccan context.

Figures 5 and 6 here

The final question that we aim to explore in this section is whether political parties under competitive authoritarianism are more responsive to their support base compared to the mass public. Previous studies suggested that since clientelism may be the norm in most of competitive authoritarian regimes, political institutions (i.e. parliaments) mainly exist to distribute benefits to the party's support base. Therefore, we may expect that, once in power, political elites/parties will pay more attention to the priorities of their support base compared to the general public.

Both the visual illustrations in Figure 5 and 6 and the statistics from the Table 2 indicate that this is not the case, at least in Morocco. The correlation score between the PJD and mass public is 0.45, almost double the correlation score between the PJD and its support base, which is 0.23. This is also true to some extent for the IP. Their scores are 0.59 and 0.56, respectively.

In terms of MAD scores, both parties—especially PJD—are also more representative of the mass public rather than their own support base. The MAD for the PJD and mass public is 3.87, which is smaller than the MAD for the PJD and its support base, 5.21. Similarly, the MAD for the IP and the mass public is 3.33, which is smaller than the MAD for the IP and its support base, 4.66.

Conclusion

Previous literature investigating electoral politics in authoritarian regimes, including the MENA region, has repeatedly emphasized the role of elections in strengthening the incumbent regimes and solving the issue of power sharing. Despite the plethora of studies investigating the relationship between the ruling and political elites, we continue to know very little about the link between political elites and the mass public. Despite the fact that elections are now recurrent political phenomena in the Arab World that are taken very seriously by both voters and candidates, our understanding of the dynamics of these elections remains exceedingly limited. Former studies investigating the relationship between party elites and voters have overly emphasized the role of elections as a means to distribute rents, provide voters with access to state resources, and establish patron-client networks. While we are not necessarily challenging these findings, we believe that the excessive focus on these issues has masked many other significant aspects related to these elections, such as the issue congruency and the elites' responsiveness to mass public opinion in general, and their support base in particular.

To bridge these gaps, we aimed in this paper to achieve two main goals. Our first objective was to assess the issue congruency between political elites and the mass public using our original dataset of parliamentary questions and bills from Morocco's 9th legislature. By and large, issue responsiveness is significantly lower in some legislative activities, mainly parliamentary bills, compared to parliamentary questions. Interestingly, we found considerable levels of responsiveness to the mass public opinion, especially in areas such as education, health, and transportation. We found that contrary to what was suggested by the previous studies on political institutions in dictatorial regimes, there is a considerable level of issue congruency between elites and citizens. Our correlation scores have also confirmed such findings and showed that the largest two parties of the Moroccan parliament has higher levels of responsiveness than the major parties in democratic states such as Turkey.

The second objective of this paper was to analyze variations across parties in the government when it comes to responsiveness to the general public versus the party's support base. We found that the governing PJD party is less responsive to the priorities of the mass public in comparison to the second largest party in Morocco–Istiqlal Party. We also observed that the two largest parties in Morocco, PJD and IP, pay more attention to the priorities of the mass public rather than being more responsive to their own party

supporters–a finding that directly challenges the previous literature on clientelism and patronage in the MENA.

However, it is worth noting that the PJD performs much better in regard to paying more attention to the priorities of the general public compared to its supporters, which may also explain the PJD's victory in Morocco's most recent elections. Due to data limitations related to public opinion data, we are unable to measure the same patterns across different parties, such as PAM and other secular parties.

Finally, our future research will focus on testing our findings over time in Morocco. We have obtained legislative data from other MENA parliaments and we are currently analyzing the data and matching it to the available public opinion data. Future analyses will also focus on explicating variations across gender and different ideological groups cross-nationally.

Tables and Figures

Table 1. Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) Topic Areas

1. Macroeconomics
2. Civil rights civil issues and minority issues
3. Health
4. Agriculture
5. Labor and employment
6. Education
7. Environment
8. Energy
9. Immigration/citizenship issues
10. Transportation
11. Women/child/family
12. Law and crime
13. Social welfare
14. Community development and housing issues
15. Banking, finance, domestic commerce
16. Defense
17. Space, science, technology, communications
18. Foreign trade
19. International affairs and foreign aid
20. Government operations/budget
21. Public land and water management
22. Corruption/fact checking
23. Arts and entertainment
24. Sports and recreation
25. Religion

Table 2. Statistics for the issue congruence between elites and the mass public

		Mass Public Opinion	Party Supporters' Opinion
Correlation Scores	Questions	0.58	
	Bills	-0.11	
	PJD Questions	0.45	0.23
	IP Questions	0.59	0.56
Mean Absolute Difference	Questions	3.32	
	Bills	5.79	
	PJD Questions	3.87	5.21
	IP Questions	3.33	4.66

Figure 1. Questions in the Moroccan House of Representatives (2012-2016)

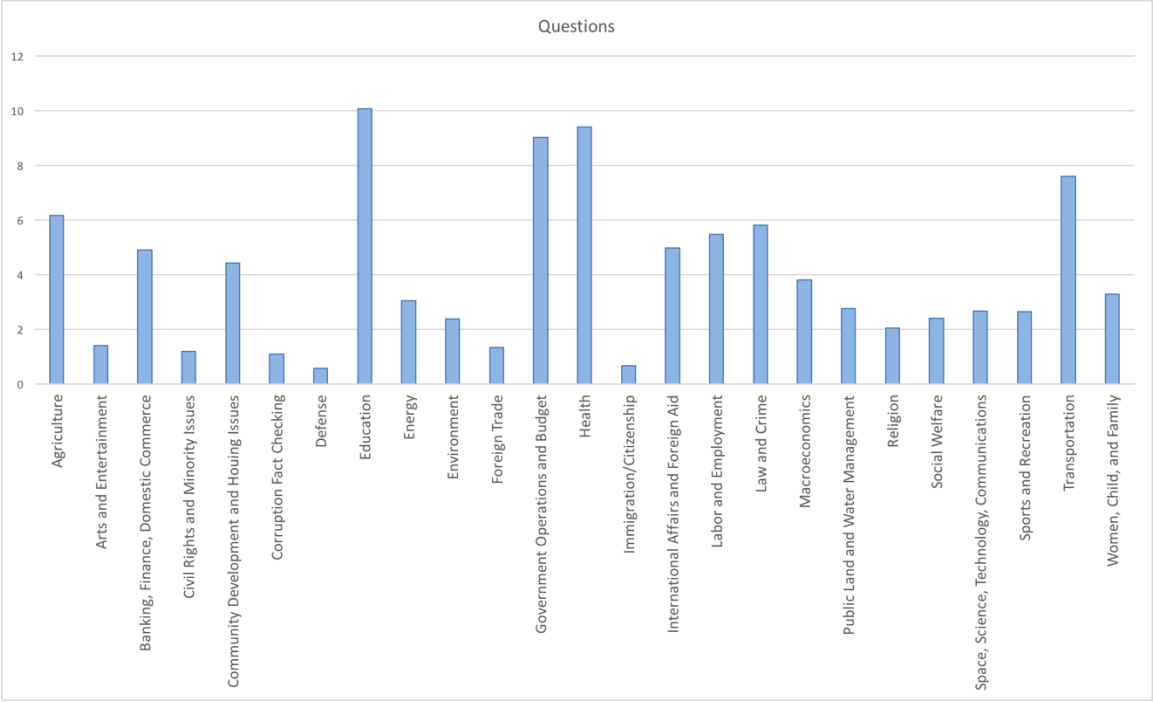


Figure 2. Draft Bills in the Moroccan House of Representatives (2012-2016)

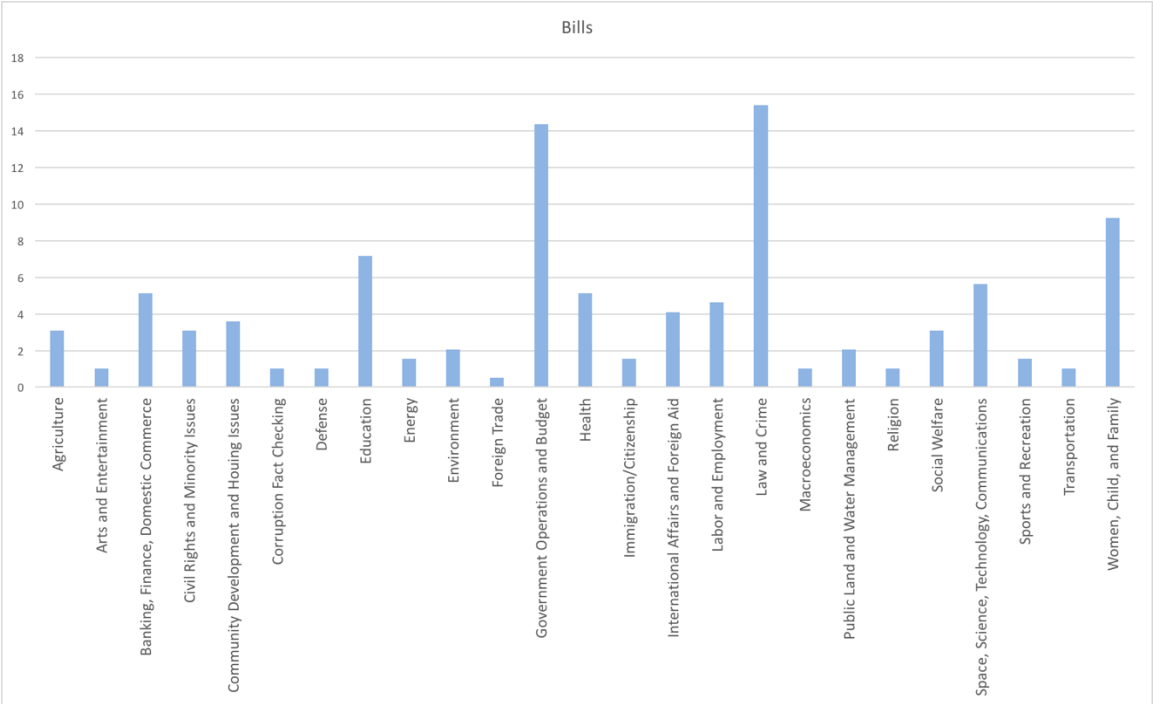


Figure 3. Parliamentary questions in comparison to mass public opinion, macroeconomics excluded (2012-2016)

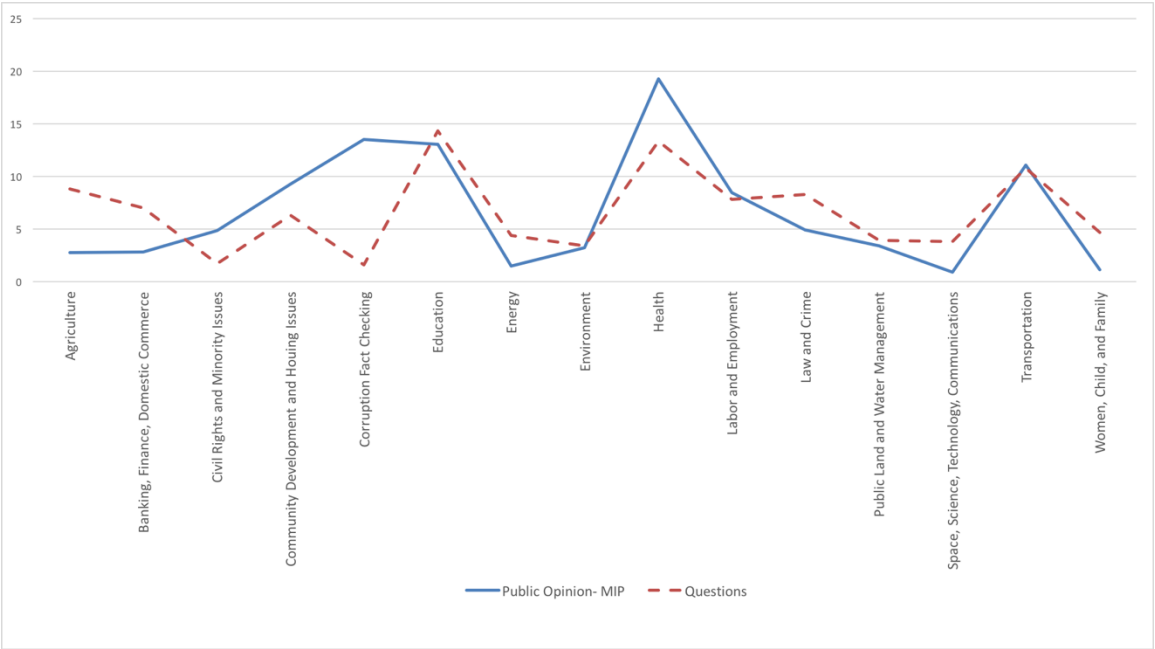


Figure 4. Draft bills in comparison to mass public opinion, macroeconomics excluded (2012-2016)

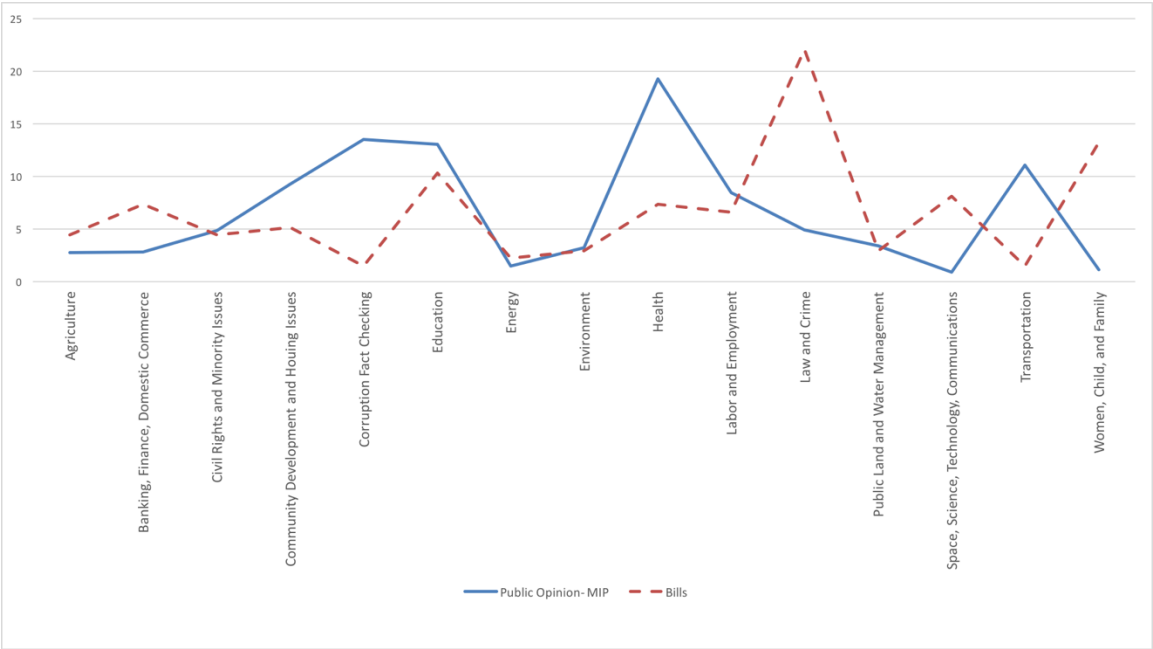


Figure 5. Justice and Development Party in comparison to the mass public and the party's supporters

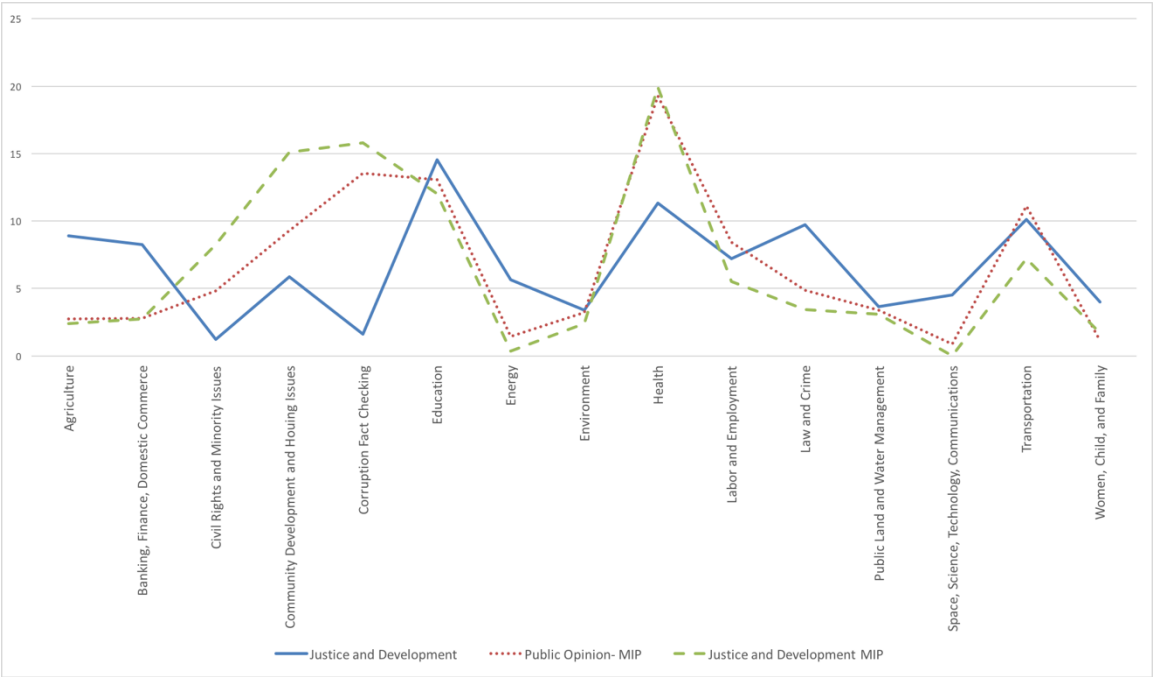
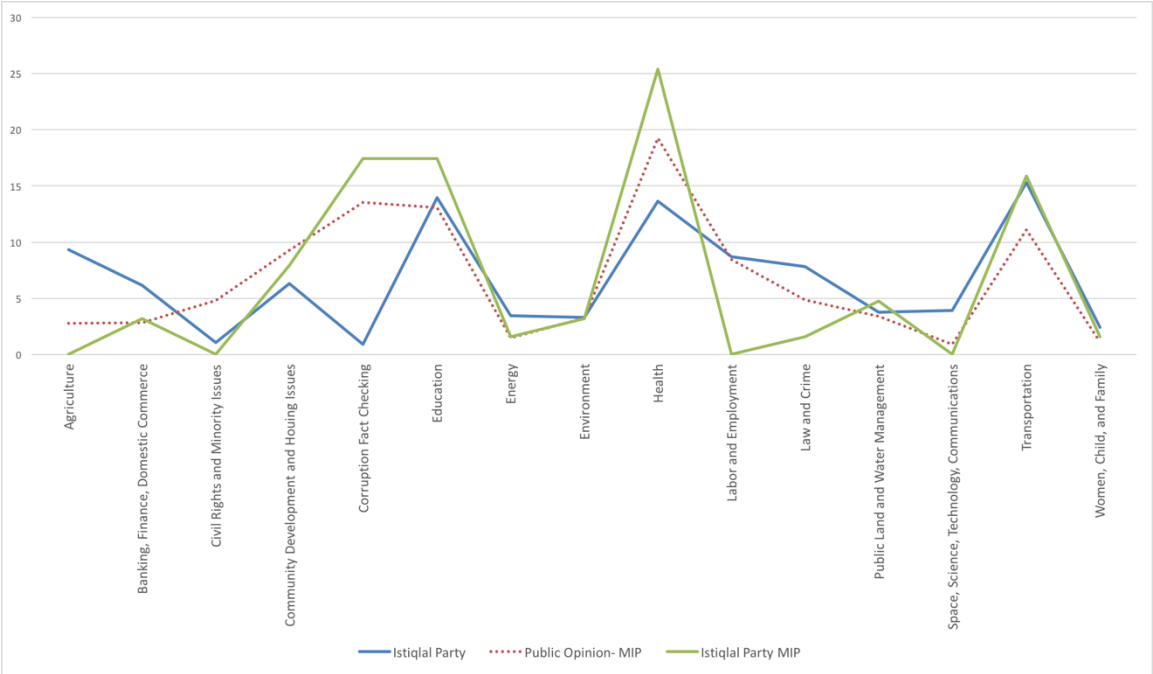


Figure 6. Istiqlal Party in comparison to the mass public and the party's supporters



Appendix A

Table 1. MIP Response categories and their Matching from the CAP categories

MIP Categories	CAP Matching
Management of economy	1
Wages, incomes and salaries	5
Unemployment	1
Poverty/ destitution	1
Rates and taxes	1
Loans/ credit	15
Farming/ agriculture	4
Food shortage/ famine	4
Drought	7
Land	21
Transportation	10
Communications	17
Infrastructure/ roads	10
Education	6
Housing	14
Electricity	8
Water supply	21
Orphans/ street children/ homeless children	11
Health	3
Aids	3
Sickness/ disease	3
Crime and security	12
Corruption	22
Political violence	2
Political instability/ ethnic tensions	2
Discrimination/ inequality	2
Gender issues/ women's rights	11
Democracy/ political rights	2
Agricultural marketing	15

Appendix B

Figure B1: Parliamentary questions in comparison to mass pubic opinion in Morocco (2012-2016)

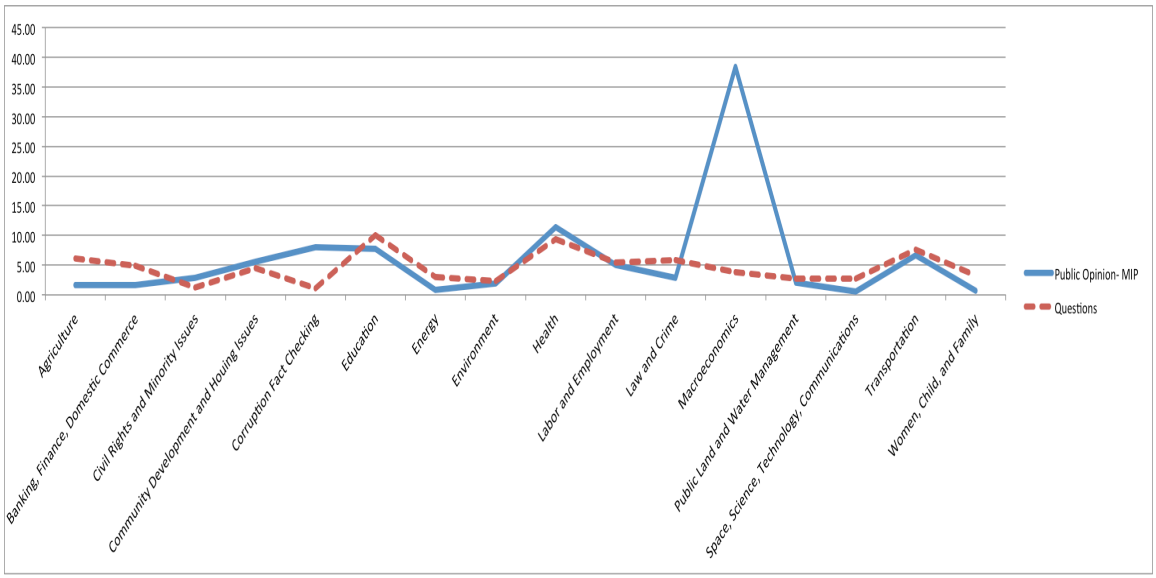
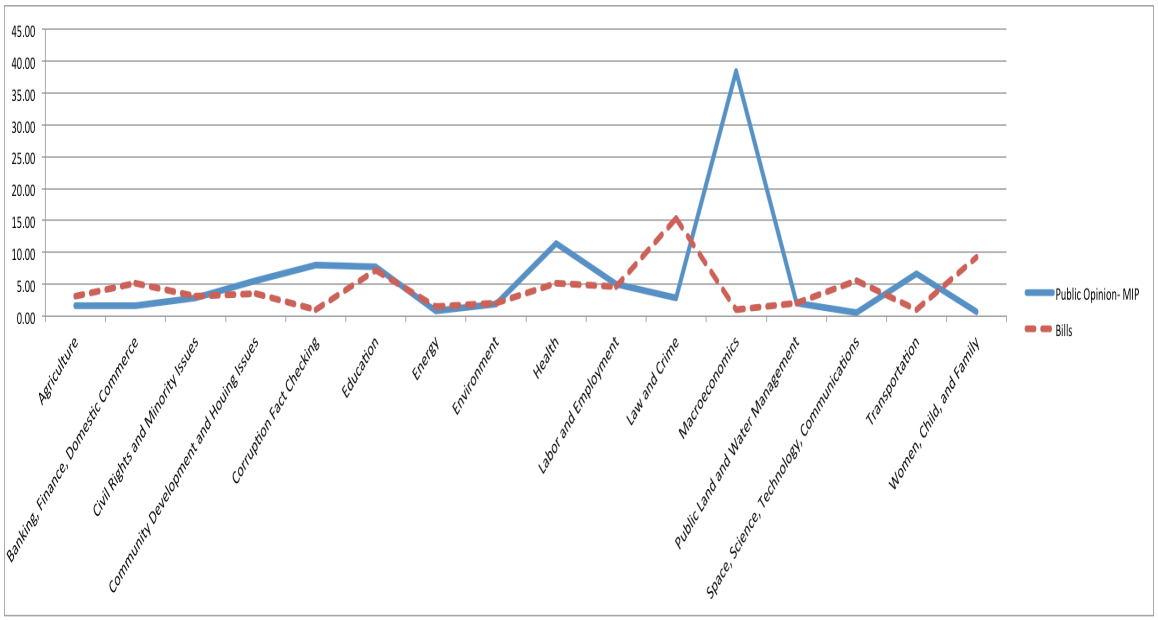


Figure B2: Draft bills in comparison to mass public opinion in Morocco (2012-2016)



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