



PJD, ISLAM, AND GOVERNANCE IN POST-2011 MOROCCO

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INTRODUCTION

The Arab Spring protests in Morocco led by the February 20 Movement ushered in a new political era. An Islamist party—the Party of Justice and Development (PJD)—found an opportunity to be part of the government due to a series of constitutional reforms implemented in 2011. This was a momentous change in Moroccan politics that not only granted the PJD a chance to govern but also potentially tested the king’s religious credentials.

Religion has always been a pillar of Morocco’s ruling Alaouite dynasty, which claims descent from the Prophet Muhammad. The king uses the title Amir al-Mu’minin (Commander of the Faithful) in order to confer religious legitimacy on his rule over Moroccans.

The PJD derives part of its political identity from its Islamic orientation. This religious identity puts the party on a collision course with the king.

Before the Arab uprisings began in Morocco, the PJD was effectively excluded from government despite its popularity and electoral success. Yet since the country’s constitutional reforms in 2011, the PJD has been the major partner of coalition governments in Morocco following parliamentary election victories in 2012 and 2016.

The PJD’s ascent to government as a hitherto excluded political actor represents a step toward inclusionary politics in Morocco. As a political party with a significant electoral base, the PJD’s inclusion in the country’s political framework carries the promise of a more pluralistic political system.

This report analyzes the dynamics of the PJD’s inclusion in Morocco’s changing political landscape and examines whether the promise of inclusive politics is borne out by the evidence. In doing so, it pays attention to the PJD’s relationship with the monarchy, its strategy to address constraints posed by the king, and its engagement with the electorate.

Sarah Feuer’s brief, “Action and Reaction: Royal Rhetoric Responds to the PJD,” examines the monarchy’s response to the threat posed by the rise of the PJD as a major political actor by focusing on two distinct areas: political accountability and religion. The PJD’s self-identification as a party of reform with an Islamic orientation represents unique challenges to the monarchy’s traditional stance above the political fray and as the preeminent Islamic authority.

In her analysis of the PJD’s potential as the standard-bearer of democratic governance in Morocco, Lise Storm offers a close look at the possible implications of such a role for the country’s gradual political liberalization. Storm’s brief “The PJD: The Vanguard of Democracy in Morocco in the Age of Populism and Authoritarian Entrenchment?” identifies the party’s strong popular base and its organizational prowess—rather than its Islamic identity or democratic credentials—as crucial assets as it aims to develop into the latest incarnation of a Moroccan democratic reform party.

Driss Maghraoui’s brief “Working Under Constraints: The PJD in the aftermath of the 2016 Elections” examines the limits imposed on the PJD and its ability to govern. Maghraoui argues that such constraints are fundamentally very similar to those that held back political parties in previous governments and that aimed to thwart the prospects of reform in Morocco.

Beatriz Tomé-Alonso offers a thorough analysis of the PJD’s approach to dealing with the highly restrictive governmental environment it has operated in since 2012. In “Party of Justice and Development: A Strategy of Differentiation,” Tomé-Alonso highlights the PJD’s efforts to survive by paying respect to the monarchy while

simultaneously striving for political relevance among the electorate by emphasizing the party's expertise, moral values, intra-party democratic processes, and communication strategy.

Amina Drhimeur goes beyond the organizational and technical elements of the PJD's strategy to remain relevant in the limited political framework allowed by the monarchy by detailing the policy initiatives employed by the party since its rise in government. In her brief "The Party of Justice and Development's Pragmatic Politics," Drhimeur argues that while the PJD's appeal to voters beyond its core constituency—through a combination of neoliberal economic policies and social services—has helped the party at the polls and increased its popularity, such an appeal also carries the seeds of the party's demise by weakening the king's support.

This report is based on "PJD, Islam, and Governance in Post-2011 Morocco," a workshop held in Ifrane, Morocco, on February 20, 2018. It is part of a broader research project on "Building Pluralistic and Inclusive States Post-Arab Spring" that is supported by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The workshop was hosted by Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane.

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Action and Reaction: Royal Rhetoric Responds to the PJD

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INTRODUCTION

In the heady days of early 2011, Morocco's King Mohammed VI responded to protests demanding jobs, political liberalization, and an end to corruption by calling for a reform process that would begin with revisions to the constitution and new elections. The resulting attenuation of the February 20 Movement, and the high participation rates in the ensuing July referendum and November legislative elections, suggested the palace's reaction to the initial unrest had convinced most Moroccans that the monarchy understood the source of their grievances and intended to be a partner in redressing them. By the winter of 2011, the regime appeared to have passed an important stress test.

But if the king had managed to puncture the protest movement and steer developments in a state-sanctioned direction, he soon faced another challenge with the results of the November vote. The emergence of the Justice and Development Party (PJD) as the dominant player in parliament—a body that had been emboldened, if modestly, by the new constitution—implied the palace now had a companion, and perhaps even a competitor, in the reform process it sought to lead. Notwithstanding the regime's ostensible stability, the PJD's rise did elicit intriguing rhetorical responses from the monarchy on a range of issues. While it can be tempting to write off discursive shifts

as mere instances of cosmetic change, Morocco's contemporary history is replete with examples of monarchs implementing policy changes in an effort to fulfill their own rhetorical commitments or to fend off opposition groups seeking to highlight discrepancies between royal discourse and action. Thus, the monarchy's rhetorical responses to the PJD's rise are worth examining, both for what they suggest about the monarchy's perception of its own vulnerabilities and because they ultimately helped to frame the environment in which both the PJD and the regime could operate.

This paper explores the monarchy's rhetorical responses to the PJD's ascension in two realms: political accountability and religion. A concluding section considers what these responses suggest about the evolving relationship between the monarchy and Morocco's leading Islamist party in the post-Arab Spring landscape.

POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Consistent with a key change introduced by the new constitution, one of the king's first responses to the PJD's 2011 electoral victory was to appoint a representative of the leading party in parliament—as it turned out, the PJD's Abdelilah Benkirane—as prime minister. The constitutional innovation of Article 47 had sought to make Moroccan governments more representative of the voting public, so the fact that the PJD came to be associated with this increased



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representativeness was likely not lost on the monarchy. Following the PJD's victory, royal rhetoric increasingly linked the matter of political representation to accountability.

The king's annual addresses to the opening session of parliament have been revealing in this regard.¹ In comparison with the half-dozen years preceding the PJD's election victory, Mohammed VI's speeches to the legislature since 2011 have contained more elaborate references to the responsibilities of parliamentarians—and especially of political parties—to the citizenry, pointed critiques of the public administration for failing to deliver services to the public, and repeated entreaties to elected officials to prioritize the needs of citizens over their own partisan interests. Compare, for example, the language of Mohammed VI's speech to the newly elected legislature in 2007 with the language of his 2011 speech to the newly elected, PJD-dominated parliament. In 2007, the king had merely noted that

representation of the nation is neither a privilege nor a renting of a position, and even less a pledge of immunity to preserve one's personal interests. Representation means, on the contrary, assuming a considerable task, and it implies an unwavering commitment to work for the general interest.

By contrast, in 2011, he singled out the role of parties in stressing that

the search for efficient [political and development-related] solutions depends ... on the willingness of serious national parties to assume their political responsibility by presenting clear and differentiated social projects. These must be in the form of rigorous, efficient, and realistic programs, which must be in line with the actual expectations of present and future generations, so that the citizen has the freedom to choose freely qualified elites who are able to meet expressed expectations.

To be sure, such shifts in tone could have resulted from the monarchy's desire to demonstrate sensitivity to the demands

of the Moroccan public following the 2011 protests. Still, the substantive changes in royal rhetoric invoking popular representation and accountability suggest a more targeted response to the PJD's ascension. For example, relative to their pre-2011 variants, the annual speeches to the legislature since the PJD's election victory have included more elaborate articulations of the need for a robust opposition in parliament, implicitly conveying a desire to check the PJD's power there. In 2006, the king briefly noted that elections

require the forging of alliances in order to facilitate the emergence of a homogenous majority and a constructive opposition.

In 2011, by contrast, he elaborated:

We are convinced that if the democratic system is based on the power of the majority and the rule of law, it is equally based on the positive participation of the parliamentary opposition. As a result, the implementation of the related provisions [called for in the new constitution] is likely to allow this opposition to constitute a responsible supervisory authority and a constructive force for proposing legislation.

And whereas speeches before the Moroccan Spring had made no mention of elected officials' patriotism, in every speech from 2011 to 2016 the king noted at least once that patriotism constituted a required attribute of elected officials. The rhetorical innovation was likely not a coincidence, and would have served to implicitly question the Islamists' loyalty to the nation-state.

RELIGION

The constitutional reforms of 2011 left untouched the king's status as the country's chief religious authority and reinforced the decades-old separation of religious questions from the political sphere, while retaining the close link between religion and state. As such, there was little reason to expect a shift in policies in the religious realm following the PJD's ascension. On a policy level, that expectation has been borne

out. The monarchy has continued to solidify its control over religious institutions and implement reforms to religious education curricula, much as it was doing before the Arab Spring. This has been reflected in decrees bringing institutes of higher Islamic learning under state supervision, continued alterations to the curricula and textbooks of Islamic studies classes, and ongoing investments in imam training.²

However, the emergence of an Islamist party in a dominant position did elicit some intriguing rhetorical reactions from the monarchy. For the first time, the king's Throne Speech of 2012 made reference to the "secular identity of Morocco," phrasing that would reappear in 2013 and 2015. The 2012 speech also highlighted the new constitution's provision identifying the High Council of Ulama (a body chaired by the king) as the sole organ responsible for consulting the palace on religious affairs. These allusions would have been less remarkable had they appeared in the Throne Speech of July 2011—i.e., shortly after the relevant provisions had been enacted. But they emerged only after the PJD's electoral victory. Likewise, the 2013 Throne Speech cited royal initiatives aimed at increasing the "religious security" of the kingdom to preserve its "Islamic identity"—language reflecting the regime's drive to weed out extremist ideologies and reassert the state's sponsorship of a religious identity revolving around Sunni and Maleki rites and certain Sufi practices—even though the relevant reforms had been launched a decade prior. The timing of such statements suggests the monarchy may have believed the PJD's electoral success was reason enough to remind citizens of the palace's primacy in the religious realm.

ACTION AND REACTION

Two sets of broader observations flow from the royal responses highlighted above. The first concerns the matter of rhetoric versus policy. A prominent debate among Morocco-watchers has concerned the extent to which the events and aftermath of 2011 fundamentally altered the state

of affairs in the kingdom. For some, the promising constitutional language and royal discourse acknowledging deficiencies in Morocco's reform trajectory have been cosmetic, whereas others see 2011 as having inaugurated a deeper, if incomplete, shift in the division of political authority between the monarchy and elected governments at the national and local levels.³ The debate between skeptics and believers is not likely to find resolution anytime soon, but in the meantime, we should be cautious about dismissing the import of rhetorical shifts brought about by the PJD's rise. The monarchy's increasing discursive attention to accountability and good governance, for example, is a positive development, even if it also partly reflects an effort to undercut the leading party's claims to represent a broad base of Moroccan society, and even if such rhetoric has not always been accompanied by immediate policy changes. Authority in government may have been a welcome development for the PJD, but it also increased the chances the party would be held to account for its governance, a liability the monarchy has deftly exploited. How the PJD manages the challenge of governing under constraints while avoiding blame for unfulfilled promises will be a key determinant of the party's success in the coming years. But rhetorical shifts also matter because discourse ultimately delineates the range of options available to the regime and provides potential opportunities for opponents to seize in holding the regime to account. In my research into Morocco's evolving regulations implicating religious institutions and discourse over the years, I have found that policy shifts often resulted from pressure on the part of opposition groups urging the Alaouite monarchs to follow through on their stated policy commitments.⁴ Even in a non-democratic setting, Morocco's rulers evidently knew they would be judged partly by how closely they adhered to their stated policy preferences. Given the country's reform trajectory in recent years, this trend is only likely to increase.

A second set of observations concerns the PJD's Islamism. The party's rise in 2011 mirrored the fortuitous trend for Islamist

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movements elsewhere in the region at the time, one that seemed to finally test the long-debated hypothesis that Islamists in power would “moderate” their positions on matters such as gender equality, religion in public life, and individual rights. That debate carried less potency in Morocco, where the PJD had largely given up its overt religious rhetoric by the time the 2011 protests broke out, and where most analysts assumed the enduring presence of the monarchy would limit the PJD's power anyway. If the inclusion-moderation thesis had posited that political inclusion would lead Islamist parties to become less identifiably Islamist, the Moroccan case suggested the reverse: namely, that reducing one's Islamism could lead to greater political inclusion. But this has posed a dilemma for the PJD insofar as preserving its presence in the political arena risks the loss of supporters originally drawn to the party precisely for its Islamist roots. Leaving overtly religious activities to its affiliated civil society organization, the Movement of Unity and Reform (*al-tawhid wa'l-islam*), has mitigated that risk somewhat, but has not eliminated it.⁵

Meanwhile, the examples highlighted here suggest the monarchy has continued to portray the PJD as an Islamist actor, even if only implicitly. The palace may find it advantageous to define this Islamism as inherently at odds with fealty to the nation, as the speeches before the legislature implied. But this tactic arguably presents something of a dilemma for the monarchy, because the more it continues to portray the PJD as a party with religious roots and motivations, the more it risks bolstering the party's popularity among conservative segments of society that otherwise might have been inclined to look elsewhere for political representation. In the aftermath of 2011, the PJD and the monarchy have evidently been competing not only for stewardship of the country's reform process, but also for a monopoly on the right to define precisely what it means to be an Islamist party in post-Arab Spring Morocco. That competition is likely to continue, with implications not only for the future of Moroccan Islamism but for political Islam across the region.

ENDNOTES

1. All speeches cited herein, including addresses before the opening session of parliament and the Throne Speeches, are available at <https://bit.ly/297FF92>. Translations are my own.

2. For more on these reforms, see Sarah J. Feuer, *Regulating Islam: Religion and the State in Contemporary Morocco and Tunisia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), chapter 6.

3. An insightful reflection of this debate recently appeared in Intissar Fakir's essay, “Morocco's Islamist Party: Redefining Politics Under Pressure,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 28, 2017, available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/12/28/morocco-s-islamist-party-redefining-politics-under-pressure-pub-75121>.

4. See Feuer, *Regulating Islam*.

5. For more on the PJD's relationship to its sister movement, see Avi Max Spiegel, *Young Islam: The New Politics of Religion in Morocco and the Arab World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 50–54 and 178–185.

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The PJD: The Vanguard of Democracy in Morocco in the Age of Populism and Authoritarian Entrenchment?

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INTRODUCTION

The idea of an Islamist party as the vanguard of democracy—whether in Morocco, Tunisia, or elsewhere in the Muslim world—sounds hollow to many secular actors and commentators, who fear that such a party has simply adapted to its environment without changing its core values. In other words, they suspect these parties have made strategic calculations in their quest for power, effectively masquerading as wolves in sheep's clothing (Wickham 2004; Ashour 2009; Schwedler 2006; Clark 2006; Tibi 2008; Baran 2008). That said, by now there are few who would argue—unless politically motivated—that the Morocco's Party of Justice and Development (PJD) is not a moderate political actor, regardless of whether the party is compared to other Islamist parties and groups within Morocco or further afield, or to other political actors within the country. In this regard, the PJD can be characterized as moderate if evaluated from the perspective of its religious discourse, and also in terms of its stance on the political process, as the party displays moderate tendencies through its support of democratic progress in Morocco. The PJD is open and tolerant of alternative perspectives (Schwedler 2006) and is willing to participate in the political system and reject violence in the pursuit of the party's agenda (Asseburg 2007). In comparison to other central actors within the political system—some more established and powerful such as the monarchy, the

makhzen parties (particularly the Party of Authenticity and Modernity, or PAM), and the Istiqlal (PI), which all have been reluctant to push for further reforms in a direction away from the current “executive monarchy” in which the king not only rules, but governs—the PJD stands out as more progressive in the sense of its commitment to a push for further democratization.¹ The reasons behind this may be neither highly altruistic nor with the state of democracy in mind, but rather result in a nice side effect (Ottaway and Riley 2006; Storm 2007; Storm 2013; Sater 2016; Boukhars 2010).

The PJD has always been a comparatively moderate actor within the Islamist political scene in Morocco, even during the days when the Movement for Unity and Reform (MUR) was a much stronger force within the party.² However, in recent years, particularly since the Casablanca bombings of 2003, the PJD has clearly moderated further with a view to appease (a) the monarchy, i.e., the gatekeeper to the formal political system, and (b) secular elements of society (Shehata 2010; Ridgeon 2015; Wegner 2011).³ This moderation began in earnest with the party's so-called “pacted” entry into parliamentary politics in the late 1990s, gaining speed during the early years in parliament when the party sought to establish working partnerships with the more established political actors inside and outside of parliament, and finally, following its ascent to the top after the party's victory in the November 25, 2011, elections and the



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subsequent appointment of the Abdelilah Benkirane cabinets (2012–13 and 2013–16) and the cabinet of Saadeddine El Othmani (2017–present).

The reality that the PJD is generally considered to be a moderate Islamist party does not, however, imply that it is universally accepted as such. Foreign governments, particularly in Western Europe and North America, have been wary of the party due to its Islamist credentials, and so have members of the Moroccan population. These views are stoked by Western concerns, *makhzen* propaganda, and opposition to the fusion of religion and politics (Wolf 2018).⁴

RECOGNIZING THE PJD: MODERATION VIA PARTICIPATION AND ATTEMPTED CO-OPTATION

Within Morocco, the monarchy—via the *makhzen*—has long pushed the idea that the PJD is an actor in need of moderation. At the same time, the party's inclusion in the formal political system is viewed as a necessity to moderate the party and provide an avenue for those members of the population who identify as Islamists and who would otherwise not have a dedicated vehicle for representation—a strategy of co-optation with a view to co-opt (Mekouar 2010; Storm 2007, 2009; Wegner 2011; Boukhars 2010; Del Sarto 2006). Hence, the PJD has always known that the party's inclusion in formal politics has depended upon not upsetting the monarchy, and there is no doubt that this reality forced the party to moderate its tone in order to first become officially recognized as a legal political party and, later, to enter parliamentary politics.

During the early years, moderation referred both to the party's stance on religious issues (and the relationship between religion and politics, although the party was never an advocate of a return to the Caliphate)⁵ and its position on the executive monarchy. However, as the years passed and the party carved out a solid position for itself in Moroccan politics, turning into the darling of the electorate, the balance of power between the *makhzen* and the PJD changed, and

with it the ability of the former to pressure the latter. This is not to say, by any means, that the PJD is an actor even remotely on par with the monarchy within the political system. Rather, it is unthinkable that the monarchy can now simply eliminate the PJD from formal politics. The idea of a Moroccan political scene without the PJD is unthinkable to many, except in the case of an enormous scandal relating to the party—but even then, it would be highly improbable. Evidence of political corruption is rife in the country (Boukhars 2010; Boussaid 2009; Transparency International 2016), and putting a credible case together against the PJD based on radical, anti-systemic tendencies would be very difficult,⁶ even though the party has ill-advisedly allowed its platform to be used by ex-jihadi Salafis at election time.⁷ However, the PJD's leadership has also demonstrated its professionalism and commitment. For example, Moroccan Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane met with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in 2015, despite the latter being a symbol of political oppression of Islamists in Egypt following the Arab uprisings. Benkirane was met with strong criticism from within the Muslim community at home and abroad, but argued that the meeting was politics, and part of the job (Hamid and McCants 2017).⁸

LOOKING AHEAD: WHY THE PJD IS CRUCIAL FOR THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS

There is no arguing that today, the PJD is a political party led by figures whose primary objective is the survival of the party, a goal that is now largely determined at the polls. The PJD is hungry for power within a political system whose ins and outs are now familiar, and which it does not seek to change. The PJD is no different from its counterparts on the Moroccan political scene. It plays by the rules of the game, and it does not actively seek to alter them in any way. It is not anti-systemic in the sense of being anti-democratic. Rather, it is one of the key actors keeping Morocco's feeble democratic process alive, although the party's commitment manifests in largely

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passive rhetoric, voiced when prompted or put under pressure. In this respect, it is similar to Ennahdha in neighboring Tunisia, which at times has also been vilified for its Islamist credentials (Wolf 2018).

Parties like Ennahdha and the PJD are vital actors in need of support (domestic and international) if democracy is viewed as the desired destination. This is not because they are Islamists or because they are inherently more democratic than other parties on the scene. Instead, they are important for the following reasons: 1) they are not “flash” parties, but those that have managed to survive a series of elections; 2) their popular base is considerable, as evidenced by their grassroots electoral mobilization;⁹ and (3) their ties to the establishment—the remnants of the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) in Tunisia (largely in the form of Nidaa Tounes) and the monarchy/*makhzen* in Morocco—are weaker than those of most of the other Moroccan political parties of substance (Storm and Cavatorta 2018). It is not the case that Morocco, Tunisia, and similar countries cannot do without the PJD or Ennahdha; however, they cannot do without parties like them. Parties with characteristics such as longevity, roots, and relative independence are necessary if democratization is to stand a chance of moving forward, rather than grinding to a halt. At present, the feeble Moroccan democratization process is threatened by the events surrounding the Arab uprisings, which strengthened the monarchy domestically and internationally. Critics were silenced and old opposition parties were used as scapegoats.¹⁰ The only genuine challenger of the *makhzen* parties at the polls is the PJD.

That said, it is important to note that the Arab uprisings did not create this environment alone. The process had already begun years earlier, but the uprisings accelerated and cemented it. As the balance of power between the monarchy and the PJD began to shift and the battleground moved to the electoral arena as it typically does under competitive authoritarianism, strategies on both sides were adapted. The PJD responded by building alliances and working partnerships with other parties

in parliament—chiefly the Istiqlal and the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP)—and with powerful actors outside of parliament, and by maintaining its comparatively strong links to society.¹¹ For its part, the monarchy sought to create a new party to balance the PJD: the PAM. At a time of an upward Islamist political trend (nationally and regionally), rising populism (globally and locally), and growing popular disaffection with the established political parties, coupled with anti-establishment sentiments in general (nationally and globally), PAM was seen as a savior of the executive monarchy and an antidote to the *makhzen*'s grip on power (Storm 2013; Wolf 2018; Hamblin 2015; Eibl 2011). The PAM, run by King Mohammed VI's old school friend and long-time ally, Fouad Ali el-Himma, is a party largely devoid of ideological foundations, but has one forte: connections, or “*wasta*.” This reality has made the party enormously popular with the electorate because it is more likely to deliver than most of its counterparts—even among the *makhzen* parties. In other words, it can get things done in a society with a murky, strictly top-down political system where connections are everything. The PAM does not have to pass any gatekeepers to be heard by the country's most powerful actor. It has direct access to the monarch.

The PAM is the modern face of regime parties. It is a party evidently created by those in the highest echelons of power who are keen to maintain that power, but it is also one that is extremely popular with voters—possibly for the wrong reasons (i.e., its ties to the regime), but popular nonetheless. And this is the crux of the matter. The PAM is not a flash party, and neither are its predecessors such as the National Rally of Independents (RNI), the Constitutional Union (UC), and the Popular Movement (MP). These parties represent a significant segment of the electorate, as does the PJD and other opposition forces such as the USFP and the Istiqlal, which were tolerated and later co-opted into the political system to keep it stable and ensure the survival of the executive monarchy. These parties form the core of the Moroccan party system. They have become the usual suspects—the parties that voters expect

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to see on the polling lists. Regardless of their flaws, this nucleus—the USFP, the Istiqlal, the PJD, the MP, the RNI, the UC, and the PAM—guarantees choice and a certain degree of representativeness both at election time (as together they cover most of the political spectrum, to the extent that it applies in Morocco) and after, via the formation of coalition governments, which most of the time tend to be oversized.¹² They also guarantee a modicum of rotation of power in the government, even if real power is vested in the monarch. These factors—rotation of power and choice—are fundamental aspects of democracy.¹³

The election campaign surrounding the 2016 legislative contest and the cabinet-formation process in its aftermath showed worrying signs that the monarchy is seeking to change this situation by weakening the opposition to such an extent that the *makhzen* parties—and particularly the PAM—will command a disproportionate amount of power. This has been a strategy of the monarchy during the entire post-independence period—but in the past, the campaigns usually took the form of divide and conquer, while 2016 was much more targeted, singling out the PJD in particular. And this is worrying, not only because such moves are against the fundamental democratic principle of reasonably free and fair competitive elections, but also because it undermines the only party on the political scene that has a modicum of interest in pushing the stale democratization process in Morocco. As it stands, the established political parties all benefit from the status quo; their interest lies in the survival of the executive monarchy and, hence, they do very little to advance change. In fact, they often do exactly the opposite. That said, out of all the parties the PJD stands to gain the least from the current system prevailing, partly due to the party's relative distance from the monarchy and to the latter's constant vilification and belittling of the PJD and its leadership (Sakhtivel 2013a, 2013b). As a result, the PJD has threatened on more than one occasion to start rocking the boat, rather than being such a good pupil. While this is in all likelihood an empty threat, it nonetheless keeps the monarchy and the

makhzen on their toes, and that is very much needed if the democratization process is not to halt entirely.

ENDNOTES

1. The party's relatively strong support for the democratization of the political system is frequently viewed as a "radical" stance by the regime, which is undeniably in favor of the status quo, i.e., the perpetuation of the executive monarchy.

2. Please note that while the moderation of the PJD gained momentum around the time that it formally separated from the MUR, most members of the PJD's leadership remain members of the MUR; it was not this separation that accelerated the process, but rather factors external to the party, most notably the monarchy. The PJD was allowed entry into formal politics by the monarchy as a means to counterbalance other (less moderate, and potentially more popular) Islamist forces. That said, the monarchy might have looked less favorably at the PJD's wish to become recognized as a political party in its own right had it not formally severed its ties with the MUR, something that the party's leadership would have been very well aware of (Mekouar 2010; Zeghal 2008).

3. It is worth noting that virtually all Western news outlets, even those on the right, including Fox News, routinely refer to the PJD as moderate.

4. Please note that according to survey data, most Moroccans are primarily concerned with economic issues. See the Arab Barometer (www.arabbarometer.org) and the World Values Surveys (www.wvs.org).

5. It is worth noting that very few highly ranked Islamists in Morocco, even within *Al Adl Wal Ihsane*, could imagine a Morocco without the monarchy. What they are taking issue with is the extent of the monarch's political powers and his use of the religious title "commander of the faithful" (Storm 2007).

6. The party has been accused by Salafis of not representing Islamic values. A frequent critic has been Sheikh Mohammed al-Fizazi, who crucially is not against political

participation, being an admirer of Egypt's *al-Nour*. In fact, it is important to note that a significant segment of the Salafi community has moderated considerably in recent years, and whereas they previously eschewed political participation, several prominent figures are now engaging in formal politics. In the October 2016 parliamentary elections, a number of ex-jihadi sheikhs ran on the slates of established political parties, the majority contesting under the banner of the PRV (Party of Renaissance and Virtue), but some also on PJD lists, and on lists belonging to smaller political entities such as the *makhzen* MSD (Democratic and Social Movement) and the Party of New Democrats. A significant number of Salafis have also joined the non-*makhzen*/traditional opposition Istiqlal party, and the main *makhzen* party at the moment, the PAM (Party of Authenticity and Modernity), is known to be aligned with Mohammed Maghraoui (Masbah 2017).

7. A further example is that of Hammas al-Khabbaj, who, despite being put forward by the PJD, was barred from contesting the elections by the local governor of Marrakech on the grounds of his "anti-democratic tendencies."

8. For a discussion of PJD strategies and scope in the wake of the Arab uprisings, please also see Daadaoui (2014, 2017) and Masbah (2017). For data on the popular support base of the PJD, see Pellicer and Wegner (2014) and Ciftci and Tekin (2009).

9. See also survey data from the Arab Barometer (www.arabbarometer.org) and supplementary data on Muslim opinions in the MENA from the Pew Research Center at <http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/07/10/most-muslims-want-democracy-personal-freedoms-and-islam-in-political-life/>.

10. This comment refers to the USFP, the Istiqlal, and the then-leader of the Istiqlal, Abbas el-Fassi, in particular, and it is not to say that these actors were not corrupt or power-hungry or, indeed, not complicit in stalling the democratization process, as all evidence points in the other direction. Rather, it is to say that they were not the main culprits given their position within the political system and, indeed, the party system.

11. See Clark (2017); Pellicer and Wegner (2014); Ciftci and Tekin (2009).

12. Given the fragmentation of the party system—Sartori (1976) would describe it as verging on atomized—coalition governments have been the order of the day since the opening up of the party system in the 1980s (Storm 2007, 2013).

13. An institutionalized and relatively strong and stable party landscape also makes for much less fraught and, consequently, more peaceful transitions to democracy, as more actors have a vested interest in a pact rather than revolutionary transition. Furthermore, most segments of the population are likely to feel included in such a scenario, as the pact will be more representative.

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ISSUE BRIEF **05.29.18**

Working Under Constraints: The PJD in the Aftermath of the 2016 Elections

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THE CURSE OF THE MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM IN MOROCCO

A fragmented multi-party system is a fundamental feature of the Moroccan political system and is often considered a critical conduit for political reform and democratization in the long term. While a multi-party system could be seen as an opportunity to encourage the political participation of different political forces, elections also carry the prospect of sustaining authoritarian rule.¹ The latter is indeed the case in Morocco, where the monarchy has used elections as a mechanism to structure and control the country's political arena. The power of the monarchy is preserved by preventing the emergence of a strong party, maintaining a balance among political parties, and further dividing an already fragmented political elite.

The Moroccan political landscape comprises 33 parties. Some, like the PAM, were rapidly established and rose quickly in order to serve as a counterweight and a balancing political force against the rising popularity of the Party of Justice and Development (PJD).² This development is part of the palace's long-term strategy of "segmentary politics," which allows it to maintain control of the political field.³ In this regard, the monarchy has strategically used elections within the multi-party system to integrate popular parties and subsequently curb their potential rise. Over the years, a number of different parties

have had electoral success and popularity among the electorate, but they have been unwilling or incapable of challenging the regime in ways that can significantly advance democracy. The PJD is no exception. Moroccan politics has been shaped by what is known in Morocco as the *makhzen*, also referred to as the deep state,⁴ which is the political authority that is associated with the monarchy and its hegemonic state apparatus. In what follows, I argue that, in its relations with the *makhzen*, the PJD faces constraints similar to those experienced by other parties, and, as a result, is unable to change the underlying dynamics of Moroccan politics.

MONARCHICAL POWERS AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL LIMITS OF THE PARTIES

In order to evaluate the PJD's status within the Moroccan political system, we must consider the following questions: constitutionally, what inhibits a greater political role for parties, and what obstacles impede the growth of powerful parties in Morocco? The first form of power that is defined in the Moroccan constitution is that of the "commander of the faithful." Accordingly, Sections 41 and 42 define the dual functions of the king as "commander of the faithful" and "head of state." Article 46 states that "the person of the king is inviolable, and respect is due him," adding that "the integrity of the person of the king shall not



Via formal and informal institutions and practices, the monarchy keeps political parties under its control, especially when it perceives that one has gained more strength or popularity.

The PJD faces a dual dilemma: the factors that might contribute to its popularity with the electorate can be perceived as a threat to the Moroccan monarchy. And the factors that can contribute to the PJD's acceptance by the regime can undermine the party's popularity among voters.

be violated.” The acts of the king also enjoy complete immunity. Constitutionally, the king is unaccountable and, hence, remains above the law. Under these constitutional provisions, the role of Moroccan parties in the country's political system is significantly limited; they lack autonomy. In addition, the majority of Moroccan parties are aligned with palace politics, which further constrains their independence and freedom of action. As a result, parties exist as instruments of the *makhzen*. Via formal and informal institutions and practices, the monarchy keeps political parties under its control, especially when it perceives that one has gained more strength or popularity.

THE PJD AND THE DIALECTICS OF POPULARITY AND VULNERABILITY

The PJD faces a dual dilemma that is inherent in the Moroccan political context. On one hand, the factors that might contribute to the PJD's popularity with the electorate can simultaneously be perceived as a threat to the Moroccan monarchy. On the other hand, the factors that can contribute to the PJD's acceptance by the regime can undermine the party's popularity among the voters. For example, the former secretary general of the PJD, Abdelilah Benkirane, was able to win a great following among Moroccans. While his widespread popularity, open style, and implicit strategy of exposing the contradictions of the Moroccan political system⁵ made him more popular with the people, he was gradually perceived as a nuisance to the regime and a clear justification for undercutting his efforts to form a coalition government after the 2016 elections.

However, when Benkirane's charismatic leadership was replaced with that of the lackluster new secretary general of the PJD, Saadeddine El Othmani, the PJD faced a different dilemma. El Othmani won the blessing of the palace but thus far has failed to gain popularity among the broader electorate or even within his own party. In the aftermath of the 2016 elections, party members were torn between keeping the blessing of the monarchy that clearly aligned

itself with El Othmani—and subsequently remaining part of the government—or siding with Benkirane, who had become persona non grata in palace circles, and shift to the opposition. The fact that the intraparty vote on party leadership favored El Othmani by a slim margin—51% for El Othmani and 49% for the mayor of Fez, Driss el-Azami—further pushed the PJD into a position of weakness vis-à-vis the monarchy because, from the perspective of the voters, it showed the party's predisposition to be as acquiescent and submissive as other parties. The PJD's compliance is therefore more likely to create a credibility gap and a sense of disenchantment among its own electorate in future elections.

Religion is also an important aspect of these dialectics because both the monarchy and the PJD can be viewed as direct competitors who use Islamic references in their political discourse. The PJD has been able to establish a moral basis and religious legitimacy that resonate with many voters. Although formally detached from the party, the Movement of Unity and Reform (MUR)—an Islamic movement—is an important factor in the PJD's popularity; many PJD members and leaders are active in the MUR, and the separation between the two organizations remains blurred.⁶ The MUR has moral standing among many Moroccans. In principle, the MUR exclusively focuses on *da'wa* (an Islamic call or missionary activism), but the relationship between politics and preaching is symbolically important. However, regardless of the PJD's efforts to downplay its religious message and symbolism,⁷ from the perspective of *makhzen*, the party was gradually perceived as a potential threat. This perception was largely based on the PJD's use of religious “symbolic capital”—such as social work and occasional references to religious codes and principles—which has served the monarchy for ages and become its “special domain.”

By the end of the 2015, it was evident that the palace did not want Abdelilah Benkirane to remain the head of government. The palace sought a strategy that would curb the popularity of the PJD in critical and gradual ways, but would not necessarily require the removal of the party from power.

Signs of this strategy began appearing during an election campaign that incited Moroccans against Benkirane and his party. This included a well-orchestrated but surreptitiously organized rally against the so-called “Islamization of the state” by the PJD.

AFTERMATH OF THE 2016 ELECTIONS

Following the September 4, 2015, municipal and regional elections in which the PJD managed victories in major cities such as Casablanca, Fez, Marrakech, and Tangier, the party continued to be an important force in Morocco’s electoral landscape, as demonstrated by its success in the 2016 parliamentary elections. Yet the party’s growing popularity was not well received by those in the inner circles of power. In 2016, the PJD increased its number of seats in parliament from 107 to 125, while the Party of Authenticity and Modernity (PAM) won only 102 seats—and this is a party created under the auspices of the king’s advisor, Fouad Ali El Himma, with the goal of undermining the growing popularity of the PJD.

Benkirane’s charisma was an important factor for the party’s success in the October 2016 elections. However, because he lacked a majority in the parliament, Benkirane had to search for partners to form a coalition government. This was exactly the terrain where the palace could engage in formal and informal politics to make the task impossible for Benkirane. The party’s former ally, the National Rally of Independents (RNI), asked to include two other parties in the coalition talks, a condition that Benkirane refused. In the end, an electoral victory did not translate into a win during the government formation process for the PJD, and for Benkirane in particular. Behind-the-scenes political maneuvering and the utilization of other political parties by the palace were sufficient to block the formation of a coalition government headed by Benkirane. This situation became popularly known as the “blockage” (deadlock).⁸ After six months of deadlock, Benkirane was replaced by El Othmani, who was finally appointed by the king to form a new coalition government.

CRACKS WITHIN THE PARTY

Following the decision to remove Benkirane from office in what was perceived as a humiliating experience for many within the PJD, it became clear that internal “cracks” might turn into long-lasting divisions. The party engaged in a heated debate over a proposal to change its internal bylaws to allow Abdellilah Benkirane to serve a third term as the secretary general of the PJD. Those opposed to the bylaw change believed that the party should not be based on the “personality cults” that characterize other parties in Morocco. This group also argued that the party should not embark on a path of confrontation with the palace. Some in this group even referred to the changing international context and the fate of Islamist parties in Egypt and Tunisia. This group was primarily associated with individuals integrated into the political and administrative system. The MUR did not favor the extension of Benkirane’s term. Another group of PJD members supported the extension. They argued that the decision to remove Benkirane countered democratic principles and contradicted the will of the people. They also suggested that under current conditions, it would be much better for the party to be part of the opposition. This group was associated with many parliament members and younger party members.

The cracks in the party’s cohesion became obvious during the PJD’s National Assembly session in November 2017, when 126 assembly members voted against amending the party’s internal laws (articles 16 and 37) while only 101 members supported the amendment that would have paved the way for Benkirane’s third term. In the opening speech before this extraordinary session, Benkirane acknowledged the existence of rifts within the party and tried to reconcile the two opposing groups. He hoped to calm the conflict by affirming that the party was established, able to withstand external pressures, and could reach independent decisions through democratic processes. After the vote, Benkirane stated, “The king has dismissed me, the party has put an end to my responsibilities.”⁹

The PJD’s use of religious “symbolic capital”—such as social work and occasional references to religious codes and principles—is perceived as a potential threat because it has served the monarchy for ages and become its “special domain.”

While this situation was a testament to the PJD's democratic process, it did make divisions within the party public, which could cause further disunity. The divisions were still evident during the party vote on new leadership. Saadeddine El Othmani barely won with 1,006 votes out of 1,943 PJD delegates against 912 delegates for the mayor of Fez, Driss el-Azami, who was clearly supported by Benkirane.

THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT AND THE SYMBOLIC WEAKNESS OF THE PJD

Given the nature of the political system in Morocco, the government is effectively powerless; Benkirane regularly made it clear that the real power resides with the king¹⁰—which is possibly another reason the former PJD secretary general became *persona non grata* within palace circles. While at the beginning of his term, Benkirane made every effort to denounce corruption and the everyday problems associated with the *makhzen*, he regularly emphasized that his hands were tied. The palace controlled the so-called “*les ministères de souveraineté*” (the ministries of sovereignty): the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Salaheddine Mezouar, the leader of the National Rally of Independents; the Ministry of Education under the technocrat Rachid Belmokhtar; and the Interior Ministry under another technocrat, Mohamed Hassad. These ministers were known for their close relationships with palace circles.

Under El Othmani, the weakness of the PJD has become even more evident, especially in view of the difficulties related to the formation of the cabinet. For example, Moroccans regularly read the following phrase in newspapers: “El Othmani's government, which is headed by Aziz Akhennouch.” Akhennouch is a billionaire, a friend of the king, and currently serves as the minister of agriculture. Because the PAM and its leader, Elyas Eloumari, fell out of favor in palace circles due to the party's failure to serve as a political counterweight to the rise of the PJD, Akhennouch has seemingly replaced Eloumari in that same mission. Akhennouch unexpectedly

became the secretary general of the RNI and emerged as the key political figure in the formation of the 2016 government. The new government follows a pattern set by those that preceded it: key ministries are kept under the control of technocrats and individuals associated with the palace. In sharp contrast to Benkirane's candor and charisma, El Othmani's uninspired leadership, acquiescence, and nonconfrontational style have exacerbated the party's weakness.

For many Moroccans, El Othmani does not exude confidence and fails to give the impression of a strong leader who can effectively manage the government. The government appears ineffective in the face of the Rif and Khribga protests. On October 24, 2017, when the king dismissed four ministers and barred five former ministers from assuming their official duties, the structural deficiencies of the government were on full display. These dismissals came only a few months after a major speech by the king in which he blamed the country's political paralysis on parties and the political elite. In his speech, the king stated that “the evolution witnessed in Morocco in the political domain and in the area of development has not led to the kind of positive reaction you would expect from political parties, leaders, and government officials.”¹¹ Meanwhile, Benkirane remains a presence in the party; his public pronouncements still stir debates and highlight the differences between him and El Othmani. Benkirane said in March 2018 that “we want the monarchy but we don't want the *makhzen*.”¹²

WILL THE PJD OR MOROCCAN PARTIES CONTRIBUTE TO DEMOCRACY?

Extensive research on the democratization process documents a well-established consensus about the crucial role of political parties. Political parties are the link between society and policymaking and their role is essential to any polity that aspires to democracy and democratic representation. Whether it is the PJD in the current context or other parties in Moroccan history,

Benkirane regularly made it clear that the real power resides with the king—which is possibly another reason the former PJD secretary general became *persona non grata* within palace circles.

political parties have agreed, implicitly or explicitly, to operate in a politically inhibiting environment that gradually deprives them of their main political function, limits their actions, and subsequently leads to their demise. Moroccans' perceptions of these parties have also shifted; parties are increasingly viewed as spineless, opportunistic, able to be co-opted by the palace, devoid of ideological consistency, and driven by personalities. The long-term policy of the palace to create the so-called "*partis de l'administration*" (parties of the administration) and its propensity to intervene in the parties' internal affairs further raises questions about the ability of Moroccan political parties to constructively contribute to the process of democratization.

Morocco's political parties have gradually veered into irrelevance because there is no indication that a confrontation between the palace and the political elite that could advance democracy is a realistic possibility. In the long term, democratization in Morocco depends on reducing the fragmentation of the party system and establishing political parties that are ideologically coherent, aspire for democratic governance, are independent of palace politics, and have strong popular support. In this regard, Europe and the United States can play a bigger role in promoting the growth of Moroccan political parties committed to democratic governance, instead of supporting authoritarian regimes in the name of the "stability paradigm" that has so far created further instability in the Middle East and North Africa region.

ENDNOTES

1. James N. Sater, "Parliamentary Elections and Authoritarian Rule in Morocco," *Middle East Journal* 63, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 381–400.

2. The PAM is often referred to the new *Front de la défense des institutions constitutionnelles* (FDIC), which was established by Hassan II in 1963 to counter the opposition.

3. Rémy Leveau, *Le fellah marocain défenseur du trône* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1985); and John Waterbury, *The Commander of the Faithful: The Moroccan Political Elite—A Study in Segmented Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).

4. The term *makhzan* means "storage" and was used historically to refer to the sultan's court. The notion of "*makhzan*" has variously been used to refer to the state apparatus; the services that the state provides to its citizens, such as education, health care, and other forms of economic and social development; and all persons in the service of the central power (the monarchy) and with official and unofficial (religious, military, economic, or political) authority. See Rachida Chérif, *Le Makhzen politique au Maroc: Hier et aujourd'hui* (Casablanca: Afrique Orient, 1988).

5. For example, Benkirane referenced the practices of informal politics and the dualism of rule, and spoke a little more openly about some of the obstacles he faced as the head of government.

6. Ashraf Nabih El Sherif, "Institutional and Ideological Re-construction of the Justice and Development Party (PJD): The Question of Democratic Islamism in Morocco," *Middle East Journal* 66, no. 4 (Autumn 2012): 660–682.

7. Driss Maghraoui and Saloua Zerhouni, "Searching for Political Normalization: The Party of Justice and Development in Morocco," in Quin Mechem and Julie Chernov Hwang, *Islamist Parties and Political Normalization in the Muslim World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

8. The idea of "*blocage*," as it came to be termed in the popular media in both Arabic and French, was associated with the obstacles that Abdelilah Benkirane faced as he sought to establish a new government following the 2016 elections.

9. *The North Africa Post*, "No Third Term for Benkirane at Helm of PJD," November 27, 2017, <http://northafricapost.com/20937-no-third-term-benkirane-helm-pjd.html>.

10. He emphatically stated that "leading the government is not synonymous with holding power."

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11. See "Maroc: Mohammed VI critique sévèrement l'administration et la classe politique," *Jeune Afrique*, July 29, 2017, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/462066/politique/maroc-mohammed-vi-critique-severement-ladministration-et-la-classe-politique/>.

12. See "Benkirane: le PJD est royaliste mais pas 'makhzénien,'" *Le Site Info*, February 4, 2018, <http://www.lesiteinfo.com/politique/benkirane-pjd-royaliste-makhzenien/>.

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ISSUE BRIEF **05.30.18**

Party of Justice and Development: A Strategy of Differentiation

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INTRODUCTION

After decades in the opposition, the Party of Justice and Development's (PJD) rise in the Moroccan government brought a critical issue to forefront: in an extremely restrictive political system, what would the PJD do to maintain its popular support among the electorate? Many within the PJD were concerned about following in the footsteps of the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) and the so-called government of *alternance* (1998–2002); the USFP failed to pursue reforms, grew increasingly unpopular, and did not win a second term in office.¹ The national context was challenging. Abdelilah Benkirane had become the head of a heterogeneous coalition government in which the PJD was in the minority. Although some PJD parliamentarians occupied Foreign Affairs, Justice, and other key ministries, the party controlled only 8% of the government budget (Desrues 2017).² In this highly restrictive context, it was particularly difficult for the PJD to enact promised reforms. Nonetheless, governing issues do not seem to have eroded Moroccans' support for the PJD, which received one-half million more votes in the 2016 legislative elections than it did in 2011, thereby consolidating itself as the country's leading political party.

The PJD pursues a dual strategy (Mainwaring 2003) to maintain its popularity. On one hand, the party plays the regime's game by assuring the monarchy

that its authority is respected.³ Indeed, PJD leaders often reference the term "kingdom" in their public communications. Former party leader Abdelilah Benkirane's statement "*le roi est le patron*" ("the king is the boss") is a clear example of this strategy.⁴ On the other hand, the PJD plays an electoral game whereby it attempts to preserve its leading political position by setting itself apart from other political actors. In this brief, I will focus on this strategy, which I term "the strategy of differentiation." In other words, the PJD presents itself as a different and alternative political party in a system where, according to the PJD, there is widespread corruption, lack of political commitment, and an absence of moral values.

The PJD's strategy of differentiation relies on three core and interrelated ideas:⁵ (1) PJD officials and activists possess the expertise, management skills, and moral values of its members and representatives;⁶ (2) the PJD is a role model for how intraparty and deliberative democracy should operate; and (3) the PJD's new political praxis seeks a direct and fluid communication with the people. I will discuss each in turn.

PJD REPRESENTATIVES: AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE PARTY'S ELECTORAL AND POLITICAL STRATEGY

PJD officials have become fundamental symbols and key political assets for the party. A new narrative that points out high-level management skills, a sense of



The PJD pursues a dual strategy to maintain its popularity: It plays the regime's game by assuring the monarchy that its authority is respected. It plays an electoral game by setting itself apart from other political actors.

responsibility, and moral commitment has been incorporated into the PJD's public discourse, which directly contrasts with the previous narrative that emphasized its "political virginity."

The PJD's current narrative highlights party officials' advanced education and good governance capabilities. Its 2011 electoral program, for example, underscored the ability of party members to manage public affairs by dedicating an entire section to a discussion of the officials and their backgrounds.

As a matter of fact, while an average of only 23.06% of local representatives in 2011 completed college, one of every two PJD representatives had a university degree. This percentage was even higher among national PJD representatives: almost all were graduates of Moroccan or foreign universities.⁷ According to data that I gathered,⁸ the majority of the PJD's parliamentary representatives are university professors or civil servants, although they hail from diverse professional backgrounds. Since the late 1990s, the PJD replaced the USFP as the "professors' party" (Bennani-Chaïbi 2013), thereby unveiling a broader social tendency: political socialization in Moroccan universities is increasingly Islamist-oriented.

PJD officials are also presented as "good Muslims." According to Abdelhak El Arabi, who oversaw the party's 2016 electoral campaign, the party's candidates should represent the party's values, which are inspired by Islam and "its moral capital and values" (PJD 2016).⁹ In line with other Islamist parties in the region, the end of the "revolutionary paradigm" brought an emphasis on moral issues in the PJD's official discourse in place of references to sharia or a hypothetical Islamic state. With this move, the PJD seeks, on one hand, to establish a dialectical relationship between its incorruptibility, transparency, commitment, and moral standing. On the other hand, by presenting Muslimhood as one of its main traits, the PJD links itself to a religious Moroccan identity.

INTRAPARTY DEMOCRACY, MERITOCRACY, AND SOCIAL ASCENSION

Beyond party officials' profiles and skills, the PJD promotes the party's image as an ideologically consistent, nationally well-established, and highly professional organization. PJD statements often highlight the party's internal democratic processes

TABLE 1 — EDUCATION LEVELS OF MOROCCAN LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS, BY PERCENT (2011)

Political party	No formal education	Primary school	Secondary school	University graduate
Party Authenticity and Modernity (PAM)	22.74	26.99	30.18	20.76
Party Istiqlal (PI)	21.75	26.07	31.62	20.83
Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP)	17.40	24.49	31.46	26.63
National Rally of Independents (RNI)	4.28	27.08	29.54	9.36
Popular Movement (MP)	22.39	25.29	32.03	20.27
Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS)	18.90	23.74	34.42	22.92
Party of Justice and Development (PJD)	6.16	12.00	28.71	53.11
Average	20.49	25.18	31.27	23.06

SOURCE National Bureau of Territorial Collectivities, 2011

as one of its distinctive features. Although the general secretariat and the electoral committee have a specific role and influence in the candidate selection process, regional and local PJD commissions can propose candidates for the party's electoral list.¹⁰ However, the electoral committee makes the ultimate decision on the candidate and the placement on the party list.¹¹ The electoral committee's decision takes into account both the candidate's individual qualifications and the party's general strategy.¹²

The candidate selection process follows the "rules of the game" that the PJD established in its internal regulations (Wegner 2011). The party highlights transparency and honesty as the pillars of its political discourse. Given the impossibility of criticizing the political system and calling attention to its shortcomings, the PJD seeks to present itself as an alternative model and example of good governance.

In this sense, the PJD aims to transcend the image of an elitist party and to project, instead, a grassroots image that highlights the role and involvement of members. From this perspective, the party is defined not by the prevalence of professional politicians but how it functions as a cohesive and coherent community. This image is presented and promoted at every national party congress, where the party highlights its nationwide mobilization, discipline, and unity.

Moreover, the possibility of intraparty promotion to and nomination for electoral lists and party offices within the PJD is an important incentive for members and potential recruits (Wegner 2011). The institutional growth and territorial expansion of the PJD creates many opportunities for party activists. In turn, activists progressively gain management experience at the national and regional levels. A national list that reserves 60 seats for women and 30 for young people opens up new positions to some of the politically marginalized sectors of the population.

Because it is a growing and relatively young party, the PJD offers new opportunities for political (and social) ascension, in contrast to older Moroccan

parties, which are increasingly constrained by their traditional approach to politics and are rapidly losing influence and parliamentary representation.

A NEW POLITICAL CULTURE: DIRECT COMMUNICATION WITH THE PEOPLE

In its efforts to mitigate the potentially adverse effects of the shift from an opposition party to a party of government, the PJD has developed a political praxis that underlines its grassroots activism and a dialectical proximity between the party and Moroccan citizens.¹³

First, PJD candidates and representatives do not confine contact with the electorate to electoral campaigns. The party's communication channels are constantly open. According to PJD parliamentarians, party directives clearly require parliament members to meet with the electorate at least twice a month.¹⁴ The "Al Misbah" caravan follows the same logic. Launched in 2007, the caravan allows party members to explain the scope and limits of their actions in government as well as "maintain a dialogue with the citizens to examine their problems and find the appropriate solutions."¹⁵ Moreover, PJD officials can present themselves and their "PJD brand" beyond the urban centers where the party's presence and leadership are already well-established.¹⁶

In the search for a direct and fluid communication with the Moroccan electorate, the role of the party's former leader and prime minister, Abdelilah Benkirane, was essential. His use of colloquial Arabic and plain and powerful language connected with many voters who felt directly addressed and represented by him. Moreover, Benkirane adopted a populist discursive approach during the 2016 electoral campaign. In line with one of the defining elements of populism, Benkirane directed strong, forthright, and sometimes inflammatory words toward his main political opponent, the Party for Authenticity and Modernity (PAM) (Hawkins 2009, 1064). Indeed, he even referred to PAM's members as "drug dealers."¹⁷ By

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calling attention to PAM as the PJD's main political antagonist, Benkirane tried to emphasize the distance between members of his own party and the traditional Moroccan political elite. While the former were average Moroccan citizens driven by serious and committed work, the latter used state institutions for their personal benefit and, therefore, "subverted the system to its own interests, against those of the good majority or the people," he said (Hawkins 2009, 1064).¹⁸ Indeed, Benkirane coined the term "Tahakum" to refer to a kind of "deep state" that failed to be neutral during the electoral campaign and pulled strings from the shadows to undermine the PJD.

IMPLICATIONS

Looking back, the PJD's strategy of differentiation can be deemed successful. Today, the party is Morocco's leading political force; it won 27% of the votes and obtained 125 seats in the parliament in the 2016 elections. This strong showing indicates that the PJD is able to attract the votes of those who do not favorably view the ability of other parties to represent them.¹⁹ One factor that has limited the party's electoral growth is its weak presence in rural areas. This failure may negatively affect the party's efforts to attract those interested in climbing the social and political ladder.

The main challenges facing the PJD in the post-Benkirane era are its ability to attract new voters and its internal cohesion. A key question is how to continue the mobilization of party activists under the less charismatic leadership of the new general secretary and head of government, Saadeddine El Othmani. Although PJD politicians insist that "the party is open to debate, but final decisions are compulsory,"²⁰ it may increasingly become a challenge to manage possible internal dissent between those who are more willing to make concessions (this group is led by the general secretary himself), and those (such as younger party members)

who demand that the PJD assert greater independence from outside pressure. This problem could become particularly serious if the party makes electoral gains in the near future.

ENDNOTES

1. While the USFP won 14% of the popular vote in the 1997 parliamentary elections, it won only 11.9% of the vote in 2002. The socialists lost 165,333 votes in five years (López García 2010). For more about the impact on the PJD of the so-called government of *alternance*, see Willis (1999).

2. For an evaluation of the PJD's government, see Desrues and Fernández Molina (2013).

3. To learn more about the dual political system in Morocco, see Desrues and Hernando de Larramendi (2011).

4. See, for example, Bilal Mousjid, "Abdelilah Benkirane: Chef du gouvernement cherche majorité," *TelQuel*, November 10, 2017, http://telquel.ma/2016/11/10/gouvernement-benkirane-face-au-mur_1523028.

5. See the PJD's construction of dialectical opposition based on Islamic concepts against the rest of the primary elites (opposition-instrumentalization) in Macías-Amoretti (2014).

6. See the PJD's electoral programs for the 2016 and 2011 legislative elections (PJD 2011 and 2016) and also Benkirane's closing campaign speech in the city of Salé on October 6, 2016, available at pjd.ma.

7. According to data extracted from their CVs, around 77% of PJD's MPs had a university degree in 2011–2016; this percentage reached 100% during the PJD's first legislative period in parliament (1997–2002) and has since been above 90% (95.25% in 2002–2007; 91.30% in 2007–2011).

8. This information is based on personal research conducted in Morocco between September and December 2017.

9. See Médias24 (2015).

10. To learn more about the PJD's candidate selections process, see Wegner (2011); also see Desrues (2017).

11. Author's interview with a PJD MP in Rabat, November 2017.

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12. To learn more about the PJD's electoral strategy, see Zaireg (2016) and Mejdoubi (2015) for interviews with Abdelhak El Arabi, who was in charge of the PJD's 2016 electoral campaign.

13. The OPEMAM electoral observation team (opemam.org) could observe *in situ* how the PJD electoral meetings were the most numerous among the political parties' electoral campaigns in Rabat. See López García (2017) and López García and Hernando de Larramendi (2017).

14. Author's interview with a PJD MP in Rabat, February 2018.

15. Author's interview with a PJD MP in Rabat, April 2013.

16. Author's interviews with different members of the PJD in Rabat, September 2014 and November 2017.

17. Benkirane's electoral speech, Salé, Morocco, September 24, 2016.

18. Ibid.

19. According to Abdellah Bouanou in an interview with the author in April 2013, available data shows that three primary reasons motivate people to vote for the PJD: (a) they agree with its Islamic references; (b) PJD's fight against corruption; and (c) as "punishment" toward other political forces.

20. Author's interviews with different PJD MPs in Rabat in April 2013 and November 2017.

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The Party of Justice and Development's Pragmatic Politics

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In response to anti-government protests that swept across the Middle East and North Africa during the Arab uprisings, King Mohammed VI of Morocco announced constitutional reforms in 2011 with a view to expand the powers of the country's parliament and to grant the judiciary greater independence. Against this background of change, the Justice and Development Party (PJD) rose as a major political party and secured two successive electoral victories, in 2011 and 2016. The new constitution of 2011, however, maintained the king's executive powers over strategic issues and preserved his religious and political prerogatives. The king is "the commander of the faithful" and the head of the ministerial council, and has the right to dissolve the parliament.¹ Another constraint in this context is Morocco's highly fragmented multi-party system, which makes it difficult for powerful parties to gain ground or become dominant. While Morocco's party system preserves the king's role as the main political actor, it also serves to fragment and weaken the political elite.² Compounding the issue, elections have long been characterized by low voter turnout, reflecting Moroccans' political disinterest and mistrust of politicians.³

In this highly constrained political environment, how did the PJD survive to win two elections? I argue that the PJD applied pragmatic politics—first, to maintain the king's support, and second, to appeal to heterogeneous constituencies—in order to remain standing. When campaigning in 2011, the PJD promised to

initiate democratic reforms. However, did pragmatic politics grant the party leeway to implement such reforms? I argue that such politics constrained the PJD and failed to protect it from moves to weaken and fragment the party.

PRAGMATIC POLITICS AND PARTY SURVIVAL

In order to survive in a highly constrained political context, the PJD recognized the necessity of gaining the monarchy's trust. The party thus prioritized improved relations with the palace over confrontation. The PJD, which had once called for a "democratic struggle," began calling for "an effective partnership" to build a democracy.⁴ To this end, it endorsed the king's decisions and showed clear support for the monarchy's political and religious roles.⁵ In his speeches, former party leader Abdelilah Benkirane often positioned himself as the servant of the king and never openly challenged him.⁶ By doing so, the party intended to win and maintain the king's support, and to survive.

Survival also required the party's ability to strengthen its popular base and appeal to heterogeneous constituencies. Thus, the PJD employed a pragmatic approach that combined neoliberal economic policies and social services. In its economic program, the party launched major construction projects, engaged in privatization reforms, and favored public-private partnerships for the provision of public services. The PJD also



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The PJD's politics constrained the party and failed to protect it from moves to weaken and fragment it.

In its efforts to survive, the PJD became unable to carry through reform policies, which compromised its political power and threatened to weaken its popularity.

sought to reduce taxes for large companies and to provide various tax credits and other incentives to small and medium-size businesses.⁷ In addition, foreign enterprises were encouraged to invest in Morocco.⁸

In regard to social policies, the PJD aimed to support the most vulnerable Moroccans through cash transfers. Widows and divorced mothers were offered financial help. Poor families also received cash assistance on the condition that they sent their children to school. More scholarships were made available for students. The PJD also replaced Morocco's system of subsidies with direct cash transfers to the poor. In addition, the party worked to lower prescription drug prices and provided a health insurance program to the most needy through a system called RAMEL, or *Regime d'Assistance Médicale pour les Économiquement Démunis* (Medical Assistance Plan for the Economically Disadvantaged).⁹ Finally, party youth groups often organized humanitarian aid campaigns for those living in rural and mountainous areas. These campaigns provided help in the form of clothing and also offered educational and extracurricular activities for children.¹⁰

The combination of neoliberal policies and improved social services proceeded in tandem with the PJD's de-emphasis of religious discourse and the adoption of modern political terminology that primarily referenced human rights and democracy. During the party's seventh national party conference in July 2012, for instance, the PJD defended the idea that religion should function only as a guiding principle to politics and included "freedom of belief" in the party program.¹¹ The PJD also endorsed a United Nations resolution on religious freedom, marking a shift to a discourse based on policy rather than morality.¹²

In order to better connect with voters, the PJD implemented a communication strategy that highlighted the personal qualities of party members and utilized populist speeches. PJD party members were particularly keen on emphasizing their moral values and how little their new positions have changed them.¹³

For example, former party leader Abdelilah Benkirane is credited with creating a new type of politics for the PJD based on a simple, populist approach, which made him extremely popular. Benkirane also favored open, direct channels of communication with citizens by using monthly parliamentary meetings to reassure them that the party was doing its best to fight corruption and implement reforms.¹⁴ In another grassroots outreach measure, PJD members of the parliament organized the "al-Misbah caravan" in 2013. In the years since, the caravan has travelled across the country and held meetings with local communities to share the party's experiences and the obstacles it faces.¹⁵

In the 2011 elections, the PJD principally prevailed in large cities, as its core constituency was primarily composed of the urban, educated middle class—engineers, doctors, professors, and lawyers.¹⁶ However, the PJD's neoliberal economic policies helped the party to expand its electoral base and gain the support of wealthy business owners as well.¹⁷ The latter, who believed the PJD's economic liberalization plans would make the Moroccan market more competitive, agreed to finance the party's social policies.¹⁸ Such social programs consolidated the party's support among the poor and helped to portray the PJD as a "people's party."¹⁹ In addition, by downplaying its religious and moral discourse, the PJD appealed to more secularists and technocrats.²⁰ The party's humanitarian aid caravans appealed to voters in rural areas who were disappointed with the lack of social policies from other parties.²¹ The strategy to develop a connection with voters, which helped the party to maintain high approval ratings,²² projected an image of the PJD as a party that understood the people's needs, and appealed to urban and rural voters disillusioned with other political parties.²³ The 2016 election results validated PJD's approach, as evidenced by its higher vote totals (from 22% to 27% of the vote) and seat shares (from 107 to 125) compared to the 2011 elections.

THE LIMITATIONS OF PRAGMATIC POLITICS

Although the PJD managed to increase its popularity in its first term in government, the party's decision to not challenge the monarchy's powers left the party constrained; its reforms were either marginally effective or not carried out if they were deemed problematic by the *makhzen*. Some reforms were primarily symbolic. For example, the reform of the National Body for Integrity, Prevention, and the Fight Against Corruption in 2014 did not grant the institution independence from the government or the right to pursue investigations.²⁴ Similarly, the charter introduced by the PJD in September 2013 to reform the judiciary led to relatively minor changes related to the judges' salaries and the modernization of courtrooms. Transparency, accountability, and judicial independence were not on the agenda.²⁵ Fighting corruption was one of the PJD's main policy stances; when the names of those who benefitted from state transportation agreements were published, no new legal measures were put in place as a result.²⁶ Such agreements—granted as royal favors to artists, notables, and top officials—have largely served to create a system of patronage and clientelism.²⁷ Efforts to curb corruption and initiate reforms would have threatened the *makhzen*'s interests. Typically, corruption investigations of figures close to the monarchy are quickly dismissed. When, for example, a former minister of justice, Mustafa Ramid, opened a corruption investigation against a former minister of finance, Salaheddine Mezouar, and the current treasurer, Noureddine Bensouda, the case went nowhere; Benkirane was quick to reassure the palace that “God has pardoned what is past,” and he rejected criticisms from his own party.²⁸

In its efforts to survive, the PJD became unable to carry through reform policies, which compromised the party's political power and threatened to weaken its popularity. However, by directing a

highly critical discourse toward the palace's coterie of elites and their manipulation of politics, Benkirane sought to maintain the party's popularity by reassuring the people that the PJD was doing its best to implement reforms. Calling the economic and political actors close to the palace “ghosts and crocodiles,” the PJD aimed to protect itself from criticism and limit the government's accountability for any shortcomings.²⁹

For a political party to survive in Morocco, it needs to operate with the king's consent. Though the PJD tried to build trust with the monarchy, there was no shortage of attempts by the monarchy to undermine the PJD or subvert its internal cohesion. First, in order to weaken and contain the PJD, technocrats³⁰ were appointed in 2011 to strategic government departments such as religious affairs, national defense, and the general secretariat, which drafts most of the country's laws. Second, in 2013, the PJD was confronted with a crisis when the nationalist, monarchist Istiqlal political party decided to withdraw from the coalition government. This situation—believed to be orchestrated by the king's counselors—led to the nomination of more technocrats to important cabinet positions, thus allowing the regime to maintain control over crucial issue areas such as the ministries of the interior and national education.³¹ Finally, despite its electoral victory in 2016, the PJD had difficulty in forming a coalition government—a predicament also believed to have been engineered by the king's coterie. After a months-long post-election deadlock, the king dismissed Benkirane and nominated Saadeddine El Othmani as the head of government. This was followed by the formation of a coalition government composed of actors that Benkirane had once rejected. El Othmani's government is weak and might be forced by coalition partners to accept governmental decisions that would eventually undermine the reputation and the credibility of the party.³²

The PJD itself went through an episode of internal polarization between those who refused to take part in the coalition government and those who accepted it.³³

Though the PJD tried to build trust with the monarchy, there was no shortage of attempts by the monarchy to undermine the PJD or subvert its internal cohesion.

Some PJD members, especially the youth, fear that cooperation with the monarchy will be ultimately detrimental to the party's credibility and the democratic process.

The latter were perceived to have been co-opted by the king and to be a threat to the party's independence.³⁴ Cracks within the party formed between Benkirane's sympathizers and El Othmani's supporters. Indeed, in February 2018, a PJD member, Lahbib Choubani, filed an appeal against an internal party regulation that bars regional party officials from simultaneously holding the office of president of a regional, provincial, or communal council.³⁵ The appeal, which stands to postpone PJD's regional congresses, presumably serves to weaken Benkirane's sympathizers and thus prevent them from winning the party's regional elections.³⁶ Disunity within the PJD was on full display in parliament when some PJD parliament members criticized the way El Othmani's government is handling unrest in the Rif.³⁷ Because Benkirane's increasing popularity began to antagonize the regime, the PJD made a practical choice to refuse to change the bylaws and elect him as secretary general for a third term.³⁸ However, the way Benkirane was dismissed by his own party angered its popular base and led to mass resignations among party members who felt betrayed.³⁹

The king's speeches have also become more critical of the PJD and the coalition government it leads. King Mohammed VI has expressed his disapproval of certain government actions related to educational system reforms and criticized the government for failing to address outstanding issues such as social inequality. "The current government should have capitalized on the positive experience gained in the field of education and training" instead of implementing unsuccessful educational programs, he said in a speech to the nation.⁴⁰ The king has also demanded that the disconnect between the educational system and the demands of the job market be addressed; likewise, he has called for a resolution to address the inconsistencies between the educational language in primary and secondary levels (Arabic) and in higher education (foreign language). Such royal criticisms are reminders that the monarchy remains the main political actor in Morocco.

LOOKING AHEAD

To date, the PJD has managed to survive by appealing to voters beyond its core constituency and transcending class, geographical, and ideological divisions. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that the party is "losing" the king's support. The self-described "party of reform" has had to make major concessions on its policies, even as its practical dealings with the monarchy create major problems within the party. Some members, especially the youth, fear that a cooperative approach will be ultimately detrimental to both the PJD's credibility and the democratic process.

For now, the fissures within the party are less apparent and the PJD remains strong at the local level. However, the palace's attitude toward the PJD follows a long tradition of delegitimizing political parties, which results not only in their marginalization but also in the citizens' disenchantment with the election process. In this regard, the PJD is still facing a formidable threat to its popularity and long-term interests.

ENDNOTES

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