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## **The 20 February Movement in Morocco: An Institutional Explanation for Political Continuity**

Berger, Eva

### **Citation**

Berger, E. (2020). *The 20 February Movement in Morocco: An Institutional Explanation for Political Continuity*. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:3232759>

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# **The 20 February Movement in Morocco: An Institutional Explanation for Political Continuity**

Bachelor Thesis International Relations and Organisations

Name: Eva Maria Berger

Student Number: s2033941

Supervisor: Dr. Frank de Zwart

Date: June 2, 2020

Word count: 8050



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Leiden**

## **Abstract**

In early 2011, the 20 February Movement took place in Morocco in the wider context of the Arab Spring. The movement in Morocco did not lead to thorough change or governmental overthrow, as it was the case in other North African countries. Morocco's political institutions remained stable after a quick response of the government and monarchy. This thesis is conducted by relying on institutional theory and the use of qualitative research methods to explore the following research question: Why has the 20 February Movement in Morocco led to the continuation of political institutions and not initiated governmental change? The results show that Morocco's authoritarian political institutions remained stable and widely unchanged because of the legitimacy of the monarchy and the king as head of state. Even though the constitution was reviewed as a response to the protests that demanded democratisation, the position of the king was not questioned. Historical, religious, social and political factors legitimise the position of the king, which make him a source of stability for the regime and decreases the likelihood of experiencing political conflict and violence.

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## Introduction

The protests of the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in the early 2010s initiated an enormous power shift in the region. Leading up to the Arab Spring, a common set of grievances was evident which went beyond the issues of unemployment and poverty. Arbitrary, unstable and authoritarian institutions privileged a small elite of every country, leaving behind the wider population. Even though the countries of the MENA region have many shared characteristics, the diversity and differences of countries must not be overlooked. An exceptional case is Morocco, where the government and monarchy were quick to make concessions in response to the changing dynamics initiated by the 20 February Movement, the Moroccan equivalent of the Arab Spring. This resulted in the political elite staying in control over the protests and enabled leaders to successfully navigate through the situation. Other North African countries comparably experienced governmental overthrow or civil war (Fernández Molina, 2011), whilst the Moroccan political system remained almost unchanged under the same century old monarchy (Bartels & Brouwer, 2014, p. 19). This leads to the research question of this thesis: Why has the 20 February Movement in Morocco led to the continuation of political institutions and not initiated governmental change?

The 20 February Movement is thoroughly researched with a vast amount of literature existing on the causes, effects and actors of the protests. However, little research looks at the movement from an institutional perspective. The objective of this thesis is to explain the institutional continuity in Morocco and the persistence of the political system after the 20 February Movement. As noted by Joffé (1988), ‘in the context of North Africa and the Middle East, modern Morocco is, in many respects, a unique state. Its institutions are based on a constitutional monarchy’ (p. 201) which enjoys wide reaching legitimacy. Therefore, I shall argue that the crucial difference of Morocco’s political institutions compared to other North African countries is the importance of the monarchy and the king as political and religious leader. I hypothesise that the explanation for political continuity is the influential position of the king and the role of the monarchy. This feature made the dynamics of the Arab Spring in Morocco unique. The government and monarchy responded quickly to the protests, resulting in the ruling elite staying stable and almost unchanged, which will be elaborated in the next chapters.

The first chapter of this thesis will serve as a theoretical framework, summarising relevant literature and theoretical aspects about institutional theory and the Arab Spring. The second chapter describes the research design and methodology and the use of qualitative research methods including textual analysis of academic and journalistic articles, speeches, documents and

public opinion data. The final chapter, the analysis, begins with a description of the Arab Spring and three other North African countries are included as a comparison to highlight the exceptional political continuity of Morocco. The chapter will continue with a characterisation of Moroccan political institutions, paying attention to the historical, cultural and political specificities. This provides a foundation for the analysis of the 20 February Movement with its actors and the demands that were made. The source of royal legitimacy will be explained and the response of the king and government to the movement will be looked at and evaluated.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Institutional Theory and Historical Institutionalism***

This thesis relies on Acemoglu and Robinson's institutional theory (2012), as well as historical institutionalism. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) are concerned with economic and political institutions which are either inclusive and lead to prosperity or extractive and lead to poverty. However, there is a lot of conceptual vagueness and variety when it comes to institutionalism (Jepperson, 1991). The exchange between different fields like political science, sociology and institutionalism is valuable to give a coherent picture and include varying aspects of the theory. Paasi (1998) describes institutions as functioning like 'stable structures for human interaction' (p. 75) which come in different shapes and forms. Adding to this, sociological features of institutionalism stress the importance of social and cognitive components, showing that an institution is more than a bureaucratic apparatus or formal organisation (Finnemore, 1996). Social institutions are intertwined with political and economic institutions and include business, work, education, law, family, medicine, government and religion (Heise & MacKinnon, 2010, p. 75). In Morocco, the monarchy is tied to all those institutions as the king is a religious representative and has unaccountable legal and political powers. Moreover, the royal family is greatly involved in the economy through owning large and profitable businesses.

In comparative politics and explanatory research institutional factors are an important element to explain political continuity. The source of continuity in a country is the structural-historical background, reinforcing 'the power asymmetries on which these identities are based' (Jones Luong, 2002, p. 15). Morocco's political continuity can be linked to the monarchy, being an exceptional example in North Africa with its legitimacy built upon historic accounts. Menaldo (2012) found that monarchies in the MENA region experience less violence than republics, what also means monarchies are less torn towards political conflict. These monarchies also show more likelihood of respecting the rule of law, property rights and growing their

economies. Monarchical countries in the Middle East are Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman, and in North Africa the only remaining monarchy is Morocco (Menaldo, 2012). Monarchies in the MENA region typically derive their resilience through means like oil richness, however Morocco stands out as an exception, since the country does not possess such easily convertible natural resources (Duke II, 2016, p. 22).

Political institutions also vary significantly depending on the type of regime of a country. North Africa is shaped by authoritarian rule, where elites use political institutions to construct order and stay in power (Pepinsky, 2014). The common characteristic of the Arab Spring protests was the longing for genuine democratisation (Moghadam, 2013) in accordance with the institutional requirements for a democracy determined by Dahl (2005, p. 118) as the following: elected officials; free, fair, and frequent elections; freedom of expression; alternative sources of information; associational autonomy; inclusive citizenship. Even though there are shared characteristics of the North African countries, it is important to not commit the fallacy of treating the Arab Spring as one single movement (Anderson, 2011), but rather to investigate the institutional differences that shape each country and pay attention to the type of regime and leadership. Authoritarian regimes underly institutional differences depending on the type of authoritarian rule which is either a military, monarchical, single-party or multi-party electoral autocracy (Fjelde, 2010). Morocco as a monarchy, or a civic sultanistic regime, is based on 'imagined tradition' and the regime is maintained through electoral manipulation, appellations to Islam and a sophisticated intelligence service (Greffrath & Duvenhage, 2014) which contradicts the requirements for a democracy.

Usually institutions can be traced back to some historic account. Accordingly, history matters because political events happen within a specific context that has direct consequences on contemporary events (Steinmo, 2008) and political continuity depends greatly on historical backgrounds (Jones Luong, 2002). In North Africa, the colonial heritage of the countries must be considered because European colonisers set up different institutions, therefore left different institutional and organisational structures after independence. In Morocco, the monarchy was a dominant influence all throughout history and its legitimacy can be traced back to historic accounts. During the protectorate, the role of the king was strengthened as a symbol of opposition, after independence political developments were initiated by the monarchy. This suggests that history 'is not a chain of independent events' (Steinmo, 2008, p. 128) and earlier events influence and condition later events in the future, demonstrating the variety and dynamic of institutional development. Like this human interaction is shaped by constraints and opportunities given by prevailing institutions (Fioretos, 2011).

### ***Critical Junctures***

Institutions are characterised as being resistant to change and enormously static, but ‘routines, identities, beliefs and recourses’ (Olsen, 2009, p. 12) connected to an institution can either maintain stability and continuity or initiate change. This institutional change occurs due to tension and conflict that motivates mobilisation and the creation of new interaction patterns. In Acemoglu and Robinson’s book *Why Nations Fail* (2012) much emphasis is put on critical junctures, which are ‘major events’ that disrupt ‘the existing economic or political balance in a society’ (p. 101). Such a critical juncture can either interfere with extractive institutions and enhance the development of more inclusive institutions, or it can further strengthen extractive institutions (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2011). Relying on their theory, the Arab Spring was a critical juncture that caused profound institutional changes of the extractive and authoritarian institutions of the MENA region on a political and social level (Greffrath & Duvenhage, 2014). Additionally, Collier and Collier (1991) describe a critical juncture as ‘a period of significant change, which typically occurs in distinct ways in different countries’ (p. 29). Because of that, small differences between countries matter during a critical juncture, as initial institutional differences ‘put in motion very different responses’ (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2011, p. 107). The results of a critical juncture are contingent and ‘shaped by the weight of history, as existing economic and political institutions shape the balance of power’ (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2011, p. 110). This is helpful concerning the profound, but diverse impact the Arab Spring had on North Africa and implies again to pay attention to history. The critical juncture was also visible in Morocco but did not have a deep impact considering the change people really wanted to see in their country. The government was not overthrown as it was the case in other North African countries, but the monarchy did make quick concessions according to the demands of Moroccans to invoke a political transition, claiming to give more sovereignty to the people in a parliamentary monarchy (Radi, 2017).

### **Research Design**

This thesis examines the political continuity of the Moroccan monarchy and government after the 20 February Movement by applying institutional theory. An explanatory comparative design is used in this thesis, as a single case study will be conducted on Morocco as a deviant case. A single case study is a comparative method which focuses on only one case, but the theories and arguments have wider implications. Even though only one case is examined, it is categorised as a comparative study as some kind of comparison is involved, whether between



different regions or time periods (Hlaperin & Heath, 2017, p. 153). In this thesis Libya, Tunisia and Egypt will be examples to compare Morocco to, which will demonstrate the unique outcome of the 20 February Movement. This kind of study has two main purposes. First, internal validity is provided through detailed thick description of a case. Second, external validity is guaranteed by engaging with the wider academic discussion and use of literature. This design is also used to examine exceptions to the rule, these are either called outliers or deviant cases (Meffert, 2018). An explanatory research design is applied to develop new theory, test an existing theory or apply existing theory on a new case (Meffert, 2018). The latter is used in this thesis, as institutional theory is applied to Morocco to draw a conclusion on the political continuity, even though the government and monarchy made concession.

### ***Methodology***

In the theoretical framework the importance of history was empathized to understand the contemporary institutions of a country, therefore historical developments and colonial heritage must be taken into consideration. Historical process research (Hlaperin & Heath, 2017, p. 241) will be conducted which examines a longer period in history in order to understand how processes and institutions change over time. The analysis will start with the time of the French/Spanish protectorate in Morocco where institutions were set up by the European colonisers, followed by independence in 1956 until the Arab Spring in 2011 and its outcome. This time period is crucial, as the position of the king was strengthened as a legitimate ruler and he became a symbol of national unity and opposition to the colonisers. The independent variable is the Arab Spring, or 20 February Movement in the context of Morocco. It causes variation in the dependant variable, which are the stability of political institutions, the monarchy and government. Morocco is an exception to the norm because the independent variable did cause variation in the dependant variable, however to a lesser extent than in other North African countries. To give an institutional explanation to the political continuity in Morocco, qualitative research methods will be applied to conduct the analysis. The methods in this research are used to analyse primary sources including speeches, documents like the Moroccan constitution and opinion polls of the Arab Barometer and World Value Survey. Secondary sources are academic articles, books and newspaper reports. Through this design and method, a comprehensive picture can be given of Morocco's political institutions, the response to the 20 February Movement and the changes that were made.

### ***Operationalisation***

Deriving from the theoretical framework, the important components of this thesis are institutions, political continuity and critical junctures. Institutions are operationalised as political, in Morocco they are defined with respect to the supremacy of the monarchy and the king, who has the ability to dominate government and profoundly influence and control national politics and enjoys wide reaching legitimacy. The critical juncture is defined as the Arab Spring, specifically operationalised as the 20 February Movement. This is connected to political continuity, which was prevalent in Morocco after the protests, showing how the political system remained stable. Institutional theory will be applied to show an exception to the norm. The critical juncture of the Arab Spring initiated governmental overthrow and political changes all over the MENA region. The focus of the analyse and comparisons is on North Africa and does not include the Middle East because Morocco stands out as an exception in North Africa as the only monarchy but shows shared cultural and historic attributes with other countries in the region. North Africa is defined as those African countries that experienced the Arab Spring, namely Tunisia, Libya and Egypt that faced revolutions, Algeria where major protests took place and Mauretania and Sudan where minor protests occurred (Maamari & Zein, 2014).

### **Analysis**

The analysis will be undertaken twofold. First, the Arab Spring will be described to provide a context for the specific elaboration of the protests in Libya, Egypt and Tunisia, which serve as a comparison to Morocco. This leads to the characterisation of Morocco's unique political institutions by empathizing its historical origins and the relevance and legitimacy of the monarchy in contemporary institutions. Second, a portray of the 20 February Movement will highlight the two distinctive features of the protests. These are on one hand the quick responses of the monarchy and government to the 20 February Movement, on the other hand the small and peaceful protests that did not ask for the government to be overthrown as it was the case in other countries. An important implication for the analysis of the 20 February Movement is given by Acemoglu and Robinson (2011). They find that developments during a critical juncture depend heavily on the effectiveness of opposing forces and coalitions or if 'leaders will be able to structure events to their advantage' (p. 110). Relying on this, the significant position of the king as political and religious leader in Morocco will be shown by looking at his response to the movement and through an evaluation of the royal legitimacy and its influence on the political system.

### *The Arab Spring*

The 20 February Movement did not happen in a political vacuum, but in the greater context of the Arab Spring which started in December 2010, when the Tunisian vegetable seller Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of a municipal office in Sidi Bouzid after his merchant ware was confiscated repeatedly (Duvenhage & Greffrath, 2014, p. 27). Dissatisfaction with the authoritarian regimes and extractive institutions has been existent for years, therefore the response to Bouzid's action spread all over the MENA region with protests and uprisings that initiated governmental changes and revolutions. To highlight the exceptional manner of Morocco's political and institutional continuity after the 20 February Movement, a short overview of the protests and outcome of the Arab Spring in Libya, Egypt and Tunisia will be given. In these cases, the Arab Spring caused profound change in the political institutions of seemingly static regimes. Leaders were not able to advantageously structure the events, but the effectiveness of opposing forces dominated.

The political regime of Libya was highly personalized under Muammar Gaddafi with an influential military and controlled media. This made the regime appear sultanistic, however the underlying factors are essentially exclusionary. These sultanistic and exclusionary characteristics are labelled as an inclusionary regime by Duvenhage and Greffrath (2014), which is shaped by populism and a cult of personality. Under the name '17 February Revolution' Libyans protested the four-decade long rule of Gaddafi which was defined by prohibition of private ownership and retail trade, no free press and widespread corruption (Anderson, 2011). The Libyan regime met the protesters with violence, resulting in Libya being the only country where NATO intervened during the Arab Spring (McQuinn, 2013). The initial peaceful protests developed into a civil war (Bhardwaj, 2012) that ended officially after Ghaddafi's death in October 2011, who had reacted defensively towards the protests and refused to give up power. The absence of social and governmental cohesion led to state failure and continuing violence long after Ghaddafi died.

Egypt was an exclusionary state, maintained primarily through repression and exclusion of masses from the political process. Police brutality, restraining social movements and political opinions created dissatisfaction with the regime of Hosni Mubarak, who had ruled for 30 years (Duvenhage & Greffrath, 2014). The regime was increasingly unable to provide basic services to Egyptians prior to Arab Spring and unemployment was rising whilst the business elite kept growing. The 'January 25 Revolution' was a non-violent opposition movement and was successful because the military, which is widely respected by the people, sided with protestors (Anderson, 2011; Nepstad, 2013). Mubarak first made some concessions after he realised the

military had sided with the movement, but eventually fled Egypt only a few weeks after the protests broke out. Initially, Mubarak refused to resign, but ultimately had to give in and hand power over to the Egyptian military (Abdalla, 2016).

The source of the Arab Spring protests in Tunisia can be drawn back to the bad economic situation, the widespread corruption and the centralised power around authoritarian leader Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who was removed after being in power for 24 years (Gabsi, 2019, p. 72). Even though Tunisia had one of the best education systems in the Arab world, a large middle class and a strong labour movement (Anderson, 2011), the government under Ben Ali was restricting political parties and free expression. After the protests broke out, Ben Ali first announced not to run for president in the next elections taking place in 2014, but responding to the revolution he eventually fled to Saudi Arabi with his family and the exclusionary system was overthrown (Duvenhage & Greffrath, 2014, p. 39). The Arab Spring was perceived as a success, which was also due to the participation of NGOs and the widespread organisation of civil society (Gabsi, 2019).

These three cases show the wide-reaching impact of the critical juncture, which brought governmental overthrow and change because of a strong opposition to the regime. The common characteristic was the removal of the authoritarian leader. This was not the case in Morocco, where leaders and the king managed to keep the upper hand and control over the situation. Thus, it is essential to examine the character of Morocco's political institutions. The exceptionality is visible when looking at the colonial history, political and religious leaders, and the cultural context including the Amazigh movement, which was marginalized in favour of Arab culture for decades and was a decisive feature of the 20 February Movement. During the time of the protectorate and post-independence, the role of the king was strengthened, as a he was perceived as a symbol of opposition to the colonisers. Further, the ties of culture and religion to the monarchy give legitimacy to the rule of the king.

### ***Historical Origins of Political Institutions***

Morocco's history is described as 'layered' by Pennell (2003, p. xi), as each phase of history influenced the current setup of the country. Crucial influences are the Carthaginians that founded the first cities, continuing with the arrival of Islam and the Arabic language in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and the domination of different dynasties, most notably the Alawi dynasty which has ruled Morocco since the 15<sup>th</sup> century until today (Pennell, 2003). When looking at contemporary institutions, the historical context of European colonialism needs to be regarded because the colonial period significantly shaped Morocco's history and established a system that

empowered extractive institutions as they are still in place today. Morocco was a protectorate predominantly governed by France between 1912 and 1956, however Spain occupied territories in the northern Rif mountains and the south (Pennell, 2003). It is important to notice the difference between a colony and a protectorate because it distinguishes Morocco from other North African countries. Under international law, a protectorate is an agreement of two international legal subjects, whereby one party subordinates its international legal status to another party, the protector. The protectorate keeps its status as an international subject, however, no longer has the power to act independently (Reisman, 1989). In North Africa, Tunisia was also a French protectorate and Algeria a French colony (Duvenhage & Greffrath, 2014), Libya was an Italian colony (Anderson, 2011) and Egypt was colonised by Great Britain.

Morocco experienced financial struggles after persistent problems with tax collection throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, therefore the country became dependent on the European capital market (Pennell, 2003). The Moroccan sultan Mawlay Abdelhafid of the Alawi dynasty started negotiating the Moroccan debt with the French government in 1909 and resulted in the sultan getting the money he needed. As a consequence, the *Makhzen*, which is the Moroccan monarchy and government under the king (Goodman, 2013, p. 102), was left with no financial independence and French domination and occupation of Morocco started. Even though the French tried to disrupt the existing system as little as possible, they used political means to control powerful leaders and force if necessary, to achieve obedience (Pennell, 2003). The colonial officials were not just interested in the economic benefits they could draw from Morocco. The social context was also worth studying to achieve a more successful colonisation strategy than in Algeria, where cultural differences were undermined (Wyrzten, 2013). Finnemore (1996) stresses the importance of acknowledging the sociological features of institutionalism like social and cognitive characteristics, which show that institutions go beyond formal organisation and bureaucratic structures. Such a crucial cultural and demographic feature of the Maghreb is the Amazigh population, who are the indigenous people of North Africa. This is important to mention because Maddy-Weitzman (2015) found that ‘the Amazigh element was very much part of the initial protests in early 2011’ (p. 2502) and a central claim was to make Tamazight a co-official language alongside Arabic. The current King Mohammed VI already had a more open approach towards the Amazigh population than his father Hassan II, still their rights remained diminished. The Amazigh in Morocco were marginalized over centuries, even though they make up almost half of the entire population and 40 percent of people speak the Amazigh language Tamazight (Crawford & Silverstein, 2004). The French had implemented a separate legal system for the Amazigh as they recognised cultural differences. However, after independence

the Amazigh's rights were diminished even more politically and culturally because the country was declared an Arab nation (Becker, 2009). Hence, the nation-building project neglected the Amazigh with their language and traditions in favour of Arab and Islamic identity (Maddy-Weitzman, 2015).

From a political perspective, the sultan remained the sovereign of the protectorate and had religious authority, but all executive powers laid with the French. After the sultan's death in 1927, he was succeeded by his son Mohammed V who often got into conflict with the French by refusing to comply or sign decrees, which eventually led to him and his family being sent to exile in Madagascar. This action made the sultan a martyr in the eyes of the people and after continuing turmoil he was allowed to return back after two years in exile and eventually led Morocco to independence in 1956 (Pennell, 2003). The king is associated with another important social component of institutions identified by Heise and MacKinnon (2010, p. 75), which is the influential factor of religion in Morocco. During the French protectorate, secular features were introduced to the system, still Islam remained an essential element of the political and social life in Morocco. This is also due to the role of the monarchy and the position of the king as important religious leader. Rondot (1973) found that this differentiates Morocco from other North African countries, where Islam is less implemented in the political system. Islam plays a crucial role in private and custom law and religiosity is expanding overall, especially among the youth as information becomes easier to access through the internet, improved education and increased urbanisation (El-Katiri, 2013). The importance of religion is reflected in opinion surveys. By 2011, 88.9 percent of Moroccans considered religion to be 'very important' in their life, and 9.8 percent finding religion 'rather important' (World Value Survey, 2011).

### ***Contemporary Political Institutions***

The extractive and authoritarian contemporary political institutions of Morocco before the 20 February Movement had developed over decades and were a source of grievance and repression for Moroccans. The king of Morocco is the head of state, who is unelected, unaccountable and has religious legitimacy as 'Commander of the Faithful', allegedly being a descendant of the prophet Mohammed (Bartels & Brouwer, 2014, p. 12). He is also the chief of the military, holds powers over parliament and the prime minister and can rule by decree (Cavatorta, 2009). As mentioned above, King Mohammed V led the country to independence in 1956 and aspired to make the kingdom more democratic by establishing the Moroccan parliament (l'Assemblée Nationale Consultative) which was built upon Moroccan and French heritage (Ebrard, 1964). But during the consecutive reign of his son King Hassan II from 1961 to

1999, there was little hope for more democracy in the country. The ‘years of lead’ under his rule are remembered as a time of dictatorship, violent repression and torture (Kausch, 2009). Nevertheless, after Hassan II died, two million people poured into the capital Rabat to pay the late king the last respects at his funeral, which is contradictory to the devastating social and political legacy he left behind. At the same time, this demonstrates that monarchical authority holds the political system together as it was validated by the population by attending the funeral (Maghraoui, 2001).

Attempts have been made over decades to democratise the system by extending suffrage or establishing pluralistic features to make political institutions more inclusive. Elections have been relatively open and competitive since the 1960s, still no real democratic rule has been achieved (Maghraoui, 2001). Initiatives and reform are introduced through top-down approaches, as it is difficult to initiate change bottom-up due to a lack of incentive structures and political opportunities. Under Hassan II, the constitution was amended seven times between 1970 and 1996, strategically giving more power to the king to ‘engage with the opposition and decongest the political space’ (Madani et al., 2012, p. 14). As a result, the executive powers remain within a small circle of the incumbent elite close to the monarchy and no genuine democratisation was achieved under the new King Mohammed VI, who became head of state in 1999. Morocco’s multi-party system includes ‘legitimate’ parties, meaning they are close to the monarchy, nationalist parties, left parties and Islamic parties. The parliament consists of an upper and a lower chamber with the prime minister as head of government (Joffé, 1998). Until 2011, when the 20 February Movement began, the Istiqlal party was the strongest in parliament. It developed towards a conservative ideology over the years and is close to the monarchy, even though the party was the main source of opposition to the monarchy after the end of the protectorate. Reform in Moroccan politics is often not supported due to the lack of incentive structures and elites that are unwilling to give up their privileges and access to power (Liddell, 2010). The inability to channel political mobilization through a bottom-up approach made the population not take elections seriously, which resulted in declining turnout rates (Maghraoui, 2001). Before the 20 February Movement, the opposition to the ruling government did not show willingness to cooperate or overcome their differences, which was also salient all-over civil society. The division is especially strong between secular, liberal leftist groups, and Islamist associations. A minimal degree of cooperation occurred on some issues, however no effort was made to overcome the established authoritarian system, the source of restriction (Cavatorta, 2009).

This section outlined Moroccan institutions with regard to distinctive historical, cultural and political features. Components like religion are strongly tied to the monarchy and social

elements like the Amazigh movement were represented during the protests in early 2011. The description of these institutions gives the necessary background for the analysis of the 20 February Movement in the wider context of the Arab Spring. Moroccan political institutions are unique in North Africa due to the position of the king as head of state, the salience of religion in the political system and the ethnic diversity.

### *The 20 February Movement*

A critical juncture causing thorough change cannot be observed in Morocco as it was the case in Libya, Egypt and Tunisia. Even though these four cases show many similar cultural and political characteristics, the Arab Spring in Morocco developed distinctively. The 20 February Movement is distinguishable from other Arab Spring uprisings in North Africa because of two factors. First, immediately after the protests started, the government and the king responded quickly and showed willingness to make concessions. The discontent of protestors was not directed towards the king as head of state, but the government and ruling parties. Second, the protests were not as intensive or violent as in other countries and fewer participants were counted. During the 20 February Movement, which is named after the day when protests officially started in 2011, Moroccans took the street, demanding political reform and democratisation. Popular chants during the protests included the following (Madani et al., 2012, p. 10; McManus, 2016, p. 643):

al-shai'b urid udustur anjadid! *The people want a new constitution!*

al ch3ab ureed as9at alistibdad! *The people want an end to tyranny!*

houbz, houriya, karama insaniya!<sup>1</sup> *Bread, dignity and respect of the people!*

The demands put emphasis on 'the people' which were marginalised in favour of a dominant elite and the monarchical establishment. The lack of change and reform had led to political frustration in Morocco. Opinion polls of the World Values Survey (2007) show that the importance people place on politics is rather low. In 2007, four years before the protests, 60.2 percent of respondents said politics are 'not very important' to them or 'not important at all'. By 2011, that number had increased even more to 75.5 percent of people seeing politics as 'not very important' or 'not important at all' to them. People did not want to take part in a corrupt political system (Radi, 2017, p. 39), which is confirmed by McManus (2016, p. 645) who found that conventional political participation like voting was regarded with dissatisfaction and disinterest. Still, politization of Moroccans was visible during the 20 February Movement through unconventional political participation like taking part in protests and boycotts, implying that

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<sup>1</sup> Quotes are transcribed in the Moroccan Arabic dialect 'darija'.



the type of mobilisation and a common goal matter. However, it was not the will of the people for the king to abdicate or be overthrown, as other chants during the 20 February Movement called for the king to be ‘the supreme representative of the nation and the symbol of the unity thereof’ and also ‘ensure respect of the constitution’ and protect ‘the rights and liberties of citizens, social groups and organizations’ (Madani et al., 2012).

The protests were predominantly organised through social media platforms, which means that the movements consisted of large numbers of young protesters. Emphasis was placed on the peaceful nature of the protests (Radi, 2017). The protesting groups included trade unions, leftist parties, Islamists, feminist organisation, human rights NGOs, the Amazigh movement and groups of unemployed graduates (Hoffmann & König, 2013). The variety of groups participating indicates on the one hand that the opposition in Morocco, which usually did not manage to find a consensus and common ground against the ruling elite, finally agreed upon a shared response to the years of corruption and injustice. On the other hand, finding this common response was difficult, but the shared goal of ending the dominant and non-inclusive *Makhzen* was eventually established and the demands of protesters were summarized by Radi (2017, p. 39):

- An elected constituent assembly should draft a democratic constitution that reflects the genuine will of the people.
- Government and parliament should dissolve and an interim transition government will be formed that is subject to the will of the people.
- A judiciary that is independent and impartial.
- Those involved in corruption cases, abuse of power and looting of the country’s resources should stand trial.
- Recognition of Tamazight as an official language next to Arabic, considering the specificities of Moroccan culture, history, and identity.
- Releasing political prisoners.
- Fair and transparent integrating of the unemployed in the civil service.
- Increasing the minimum wage to ensure a dignified life.
- Improving cost effectiveness and access to social services.

The protests took place in 53 cities all over Morocco. Rabat and Casablanca, being the political and economic centres, experienced peaceful protests without violent intervention of security forces. In cities more to the periphery of the media like Tangiers, Tetouan, Larache, Chefchaouen, Sefrou, Marrakesh, Al Hoceima and Guelmim, disorder and confrontation was

greater (Fernández Molina, 2011). The number of people participating varies depending on the source, the organisers of the 20 February Movement announced 240,000 to 300,000 protesters, whilst the Interior Ministry claimed only 37,000 people were on the streets (Fernández Molina, 2011; Hoffmann & König, 2013). Early after the protests started, national and international newspapers started to observe that the dimension and intensity of protests were not the same as in other North African countries. Fewer protesters and peaceful marches characterise the 20 February Movement, and journalists noticed the absence of slogans against the monarchy. The demands focused on socio-economic justice and democracy, however not directly addressing King Mohammed VI as head of state, as it was the case in other North African countries which called for their leader to step down. This can be explained with the legitimacy of the monarchy in Morocco and the illegality of questioning the king and his reign (Hoffmann & König, 2013, p. 18). It is difficult to access public opinion on the king and royal family, since no opinion poll questionnaire will ask about the monarchy, as voicing public discontent is punishable. Questioning the legitimacy of the monarchy would cross a red line (Loudiy & Smith, 2005), therefore, it is crucial to understand the source of legitimacy of the Moroccan monarchy and its prevailing relevance.

### ***The Source of Legitimacy of the Monarchy***

Morocco's uniqueness 'lies in the weight given to the role of the monarchy, with its links to pre-colonial political structures and their specific characteristics of continuity, longevity and religious legitimacy' (Joffé, 1988, p. 202). After independence from France in 1956, both the monarchy and nationalist movements sought to fill the power void left behind by the colonisers. King Mohammed V and the crown prince Hassan managed to marginalise the nationalist front, which was led by the Istiqlal party, by gaining support in the countryside and from Amazigh tribes (Sater, 2009). The mobilisation of people in rural areas provided a large electorate, as it amounted 70 percent of the population in 1960 compared to 40 percent today (World Bank, 2019). As a result, the first constitutional referendum of Independent Morocco in 1962 created monarchical hegemony and established the monarch as the liberator from the colonisers (Sater, 2009, p. 384). The title of 'sultan' changed to 'king' and the constitution enshrined that Morocco was to be ruled by the eldest male heir of the Alawi family.

The king represents people through religious and traditional channels (Sater, 2009, p. 384), which is also how he obtains legitimacy. Religious legitimacy is established through descendants from the prophet Mohammed. Legitimacy deriving from tradition is institutionalised through an annual oath of alliance sworn by representatives of the community called *bay'a*

(Maghraoui, 2001). Institutional identification of the population with the monarchy is important for its legitimacy and establishment. To many people the king may be considered unjust and unfair, but as a symbol, the monarchy portrays national unity and a legitimate form of governance. The regime structure adapted over years, but ‘a system of symbols and rituals through which the King legitimizes his power’ stayed in place (McManus, 2016, p. 645). This makes the Moroccan monarchy the most stable and secure of any current regime in North Africa (Duke II, 2016, p. 10). Also, the economic strength of the king cannot be overlooked, as the royal family owns businesses all over the country, comprising 30 percent of the entire Moroccan economy (Bartels & Brouwer, 2014, p. 12). In the Moroccan constitution before the reform in 2011, the king was declared ‘sacred and inviolable’ (Maghraoui, 2001, p. 75) with all legislative, executive and judicial authorities under his power. The royal powers were enshrined in Article 19 of the constitution, which was demanded to be amended by protesters of the 20 February Movement as it gives the king unlimited power (Madani et al., 2012).

### ***Response to the 20 February Movement***

The 20 February Movement was framed as a call for genuine democratisation, which was the major theme as inspired by the Arab Spring in Tunisia or Egypt. The protesters demanded that the ‘royal institution make the necessary changes to the political system, in a way that allows Moroccans to rule themselves’ (Hoffmann & König, 2013, p. 15). People demonstrated for the improvement of social circumstances and democratic participation in decision-making processes. Right after protests had started, the prime minister and the interior minister met with leaders of parliamentary parties, representatives of trade unions, associations of unemployed graduates and NGOs like the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (Fernández Molina, 2011). The aim of these meetings was to win time and divide the opposition, making promises for job opportunities to the unemployed or preventing public sector strikes. In the meantime, the government continued meeting and consulting, as new legislative elections were scheduled for the next year. The dynamics changed when on March 9, less than three weeks after the outbreak of the 20 February Movement, King Mohammed VI addressed the nation in a speech.

‘I’m addressing you today concerning the launching of the next phase of the advanced regionalization process, the impact such a development can have in terms of strengthening our democratic development model and the substantial revision of the constitution it implies. The latter should serve as the cornerstone of the new, comprehensive reforms we intend to initiate, as part of the continuing interaction with all of the nation’s needs and components’ (Mohammed VI, 2011, March 9).

This opening statement makes no reference to the ongoing protest or the 20 February Movement, which are not mentioned once throughout the ten-minute speech. King Mohammed VI refers to the ‘national regionalisation plan’ that was first initiated in 2008. It aimed to decentralise the political system by shifting important responsibilities and institutions to the different regions to enhance socio-economic development (Ben-Meir, 2010). The speech went on by proclaiming the national regionalisation program as ‘confident, forward-looking initiative to make sure broad regionalization will stem from the direct free will of the people, through a constitutional referendum’ and that ‘a democratic constitution is both the basis and the essence’ of substantial reform. The king also expressed his pride of ‘the patriotism displayed by our faithful people’ and summarised the amendments for the constitutions, which were to include the diverse but unified character of Moroccan identity and the components for a more democratic system. Many of the amendments were in accordance with the demands people made during the 20 February Movement, even though the movement was not mentioned directly in the speech. For the revision of the constitution, the king created a committee to ensure ‘competence, impartiality and integrity’ and the new constitution was to be voted upon in a referendum on July 1, 2011.

The committee consisted of 19 members that were either experts in the legal and political field or representatives of civil society. All of the committee members were appointed by the king, which is a contradiction to the democratic demands made during the 20 February Movement. The constitution was aimed to be made ‘by Moroccans, for all Moroccans’ as King Mohammed VI declared in a speech on June 17, 2011. This process of revision should also include parties, social organisations and even the 20 February Movement by giving the opportunity to send proposals to the committee. The rewriting of the constitution still faced opposition and boycott by some political parties, human rights associations and members of the 20 February Movement (Fernández Molina, 2011). The royal power and legitimacy of the monarch was established in Article 19, making it one of the main points of revision. In the new constitution, the king’s powers are summarised in Articles 41 to 59 and he is still assigned wide reaching powers as head of state, making him unaccountable to other institutions. Protesters voiced their concerns as the amendments did not ‘meet our demands for a true separation of powers’ and showed disappointment with the king retaining ‘most of his powers as a political actor’ (Le Monde, 2011). Some other demands of the 20 February Movement protesters were implemented in the new constitution, one of them was the recognition of Tamazight as co-official language alongside Arabic. This made Morocco the only North African country and one out of two countries in the Arab League next to Iraq to not exclusively have Arabic as the official

language (Maddy-Weitzman, 2017, p. 416). Making some concessions worked as a counterbalance to keeping other parts of the constitution almost unadjusted, which ended up satisfying wide parts of the population in the prospect of change.

Other North African countries also made efforts to revise and change their constitutions. Egypt adopted a new constitution in December 2012, however the process took longer in Tunisia, Libya and Algeria, where the new constitutions were implemented between 2014 and 2017 (Madani et al., 2012). The quick response to the 20 February Movement by amending the constitution was received positively by the population, which showed through an approval rating of 98 percent and a voter turnout of 73 percent in the constitutional referendum (McManus, 2016, p. 645). Nevertheless, this also leaves some paradoxes. A constitutional reform is a decisive initiative that was necessary for decades, but it was started rapidly and had to happen under a limited time period of three months. This created pressure and political actors did not have sufficient time to send proposals, review and criticise the text (Madani et al., 2012; McManus, 2016). Furthermore, the voter turnout is incoherent because in 2011, 33 percent of the Moroccan population was illiterate (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2020). Even though the literacy rate had improved in recent years, the ability to read and write or understand and approve a complicated legal text are different tasks.

### ***Outcome and Legacy of the 20 February Movement***

Activists who took part in the 20 February Movement voice their discontent about the lack of change until today, as issues like privatisation, insufficient health care or unemployment are still prevalent. Because of that, Khadija Ryadi, a Moroccan activist who received the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights in 2013, claims that many demands of the 20 February Movement are still alive today (Khetrou, 2020). Slogans that were first used in 2011 were again chanted during protest in later years, and Ryadi thinks that fear was taken away from Moroccans and courage was built up to make their voices heard. Deau and Goeury (2019) support this claim as their study on the '20 February generation' found that trust in individual and collective activities has increased and wide-reaching collaboration of civil society was achieved.

Some recent progress towards democratisation can be observed by looking at the Democracy Index, which categorizes Morocco as a Hybrid regime with a score of 5.10. Before 2010, Morocco was categorized as an authoritarian regime, indicating that after the Arab Spring more progress toward democratisation was accomplished (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2019). Still, the political institutions in Morocco remain almost unchanged. The king kept his unaccountable

status and the *Makhzen* stayed in place. An opinion poll by the Arab Barometer (2017) asked Moroccans about their political institutions five years after the 20 February Movement, which showed that parliament and political parties are the institutions people trust least. Again, the poll does not include opinions on the king and monarchy. This highlights how untouchable the royal institution is still, even after changing the constitution and making efforts to democratise the country. This also empathises that the monarchy is a source of stability and stayed in place despite movements taking place to initiate change.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this thesis was to explain the political and institutional continuity in Morocco after the 20 February Movement. Institutional theory was used as a framework and critical junctures were an important account to describe the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring as a critical juncture initiated thorough change and caused governments to be overthrown in the strive for democratisation in North Africa. The decisiveness of the Arab Spring was evident in the cases of Libya, Egypt and Tunisia, which served as examples to demonstrate the impact the protests had on the political system and leaders. In these three countries, the leaders were not able to hold on to power and the political establishment experienced thorough change after years of authoritarian rule. The Moroccan case is unique because of the political continuation due to the distinctive political institutions and the enduring legitimacy of the monarchy. Monarchies in the MEAN region are expected to show more political stability and less conflict. In Morocco, the legitimacy of the king can be traced back to historical and religious origins which make him a symbol of national unity. Through the analysis of discourse during the protests, speeches given by the king and the Moroccan constitution before and after 2011, the continuation of political institutions is evident. Two decisive features that led to this outcome are the immediate response to the protests and the general lower intensity and violence of the 20 February Movement. Moroccans did not want an end of the monarchy and the king to be removed as head of state, but a more inclusive and democratic system was demanded.

This thesis confirms the hypothesised explanation of the monarchy being the reason for institutional continuity. The quick response of King Mohammed VI to the 20 February Movement resonated positively with the population as some demands of the people were fulfilled, like the inclusion of Tamazight as a co-official language in the constitution. Even though the response to the protests only happened indirectly since the 20 February Movement was not officially acknowledged in the king's speeches, important choices were made to show willingness to change. At the same time, this ensured the stability of the system and leadership. The

20 February Movement was an attempt to change the political system and achieve genuine democratisation, however as stated by Loudiy and Smith (2005), questioning the legitimacy of the monarchy would cross a red line, but only such a violation would result in true change. Critical voices about the lack of change are still being raised, but the quick response to the protests, the willingness of the government and king to make some changes, and the monarchy's legitimacy ensured political and institutional continuity.

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