

# MOROCCO'S JOURNEY INTO DEMOCRACY

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The recent political history of Morocco up to the 1990s consisted of the late King Hassan II endeavors to consolidate the power of the monarchy. King Mohammed VI took the throne in 1999 with a promise to make a change and “turn the page” on the worst cruelties of the past.

The “Arabic Spring” in Morocco was soft since February 20 movement was a peaceful democratic pressure group. In response to the protests, King Mohammed VI, in his speech of March 9th 2011, proposed a reform of the constitution which would guarantee a separation of powers, decentralization, good governance, human rights and gender equality. The new constitution passed on 1 July 2011 recognizes Berbers’ mother tongue as an official language side by side with Standard Arabic for the first time in Moroccan history.

There are three major reasons why Morocco is an exception and why it did not witness any violence or regime change. First, the monarchy is deeply rooted in the Moroccan cultural heritage. The king and the vast majority of the Moroccan people have a mutual commitment to each other and to a kingdom which will ensure development, peace, social justice, and dignity within a constitutional monarchy which can guarantee stability and unity.

The second reason is that King Mohammed VI, 51, has been in power for 14 years, which, in comparison with long-ruling dictators like Egypt’s Husni Mubarak or Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi, makes him seem like a new leader.

But the most significant reason is that, since he took power, King Mohammed VI has decided several reforms. The family law reform, for example, which was proposed by feminist activists, had been lingering in parliament for four years until he gave it his full support. The Equity and Reconciliation Council, established in 2004 to document grave cases of forced disappearance and arbitrary detention during the Years of Lead, gave him an opportunity to launch the democratization process.

These measures and reforms slowly but surely will lay the basis for a dynamic constitutional system whose central parts are accountability, independence and separation of powers, whose foremost goal is the freedom and dignity of citizens.

As indicated by the new constitution, the current Prime Minister was chosen from the moderate Islamist Party of Justice and Development that won the majority of seats on November 25th, 2011 elections. New liberties are brought forth by the new National Council for Human Rights (CNDH), which includes gender equity, children’s rights, rights of

minorities and disabled people, and the national plan to promote human rights. These amendments to the government structure and the Mediator and Economic and Social Council will provide Moroccans with the right resources and will be a step forward to achieving political participation and socio-economic progress.

Opposition groups from the 20 February movement claim that these reforms are insufficient, particularly because the king retains control of the army. But for many progressive observers this new constitution will have substantial outcomes. A more independent judiciary would help fight corruption and hold officials who perform poorly accountable.

However, these reforms may have a transitional character. Morocco will certainly need another constitution in a decade or two, but it must go through this one first and give time to the political parties to become well-structured and better organized.

The king is widely seen as a reformer, who planted the seeds of change before uprisings swept the region two and a half years ago. With the adoption of the new constitution, Morocco could emerge as a model for peaceful reform, as opposed to the Syrian and Libyan templates.

The main test for the democratization process is sluggish economic development, poverty and corruption in many sectors, contrasted with the urgent need for jobs given the soaring unemployment rate, better education and satisfactory healthcare. But so far the Islamist-led government has been slow to meet the needs and demands of the population, especially the youth.