

# **Perceptions of Democracy in Morocco**

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## Abstract

Morocco's parliamentary monarchy is a political model frequently discussed as exceptional. This characterization raises interest in how Moroccans conceptualize democracy. Utilizing Afrobarometer survey data I analyze the extent to which Moroccans perceive their political system as democratic and explore the factors that shape their views. My analysis produces two findings. First, based on key individual attributes one can predict whether a Moroccan will or will not see the country as democratic. Second, only a small proportion of Moroccans perceive a democracy gap in the country (i.e., feel that the system provides them significantly less democracy than what they aspire for). One can hypothesize that this absence of a perceived democracy gap partially explains the Moroccan monarchy's stability since the Arab uprisings of 2011.

**Keywords:** monarchy, exceptionalism, democracy, perceptions, stability, Arab Spring

## Introduction

Since 1961 Morocco has been ruled by two men—father and son. Most recently, this hereditary monarchy survived the Arab uprisings of 2011, responding to Moroccan demonstrators' demands through a range of quasi-democratic reforms that restructured the government but circumscribed King Mohammed VI's authoritative position. Juxtaposing revolutionary movements across the region that challenged the legitimacy of longtime rulers, Morocco's protests never questioned the king's mandate. Rather, popular calls for political reform emphasized constitutional revisions and an overhaul of the parliament. This political trajectory has prompted scholars and journalists to label Morocco "exceptional"—a designation that captures the distinctiveness of the political arrangement that it maintains in relation to its regional neighbors (Alami, 2012). This paper seeks to shed light on the notion of Moroccan

exceptionalism by examining how Moroccans perceive their monarchical political system. Specifically, it focuses on the degree to which Moroccans view their country as democratic and the factors that shape their views.

## **Background**

### **Morocco and the Arab Spring**

In early 2011, Morocco watched as revolutions driven by consensus demand for more democratic government erupted across the Middle East and North Africa. Influenced by this regional political current, thousands of Moroccans rallied on February 20 calling for significant constitutional reforms and new parliamentary elections. While critical differences distinguish each of the individual Arab uprisings and incidents of protest, a clear enough portrait of the regional unrest emerges to distinguish Morocco's trajectory as unique. Relative to other regional upheavals, Morocco's unrest was: (1) smaller in scope (less participants), (2) more modest in its demands (calls for constitutional reform but not the ouster of the king), (3) characterized by cooperation between the state and society (the government was responsive to calls for change), (4) comparatively nonviolent, and (5) ultimately less consequential (the king maintained his rule). By the end of 2011, constitutional reforms and a new round of parliamentary elections had largely tempered the country's unrest. The monarchy remained intact with a range of political features still demonstrating the supremacy of the king, including his capacity to dismiss the parliament at will and his complete control over the military and security apparatuses (Pollock, 2013, p. 59).

## Explanations of Moroccan Exceptionalism

One frequently referenced explanation for Morocco's political distinctiveness is cultural. This argument asserts that the stability of the monarchy stems from King Mohammed VI's symbolic status among the citizenry and embeddedness in the country's national identity. This consideration is germane, highlighting a dynamic not present elsewhere in North Africa. Yet simultaneously such reasoning is unsatisfactory because it invokes a tautology: Morocco's distinct political trajectory is an outcome of its distinct political model. Relatedly, at least one scholar has deemed the country's political situation an anomaly that precludes comparison: "Morocco's situation is so unusual that it probably cannot serve as a model for any other country, even among the other Arab monarchies" (Ibid, 57). Going beyond essentialist and determinist understandings of Morocco, this paper presumes that while the country's political model is indeed singular, it is not immune to change by way of the same forces that resulted in the collapse of one-man rule elsewhere in the region (e.g., rising unemployment and wealth disparity). Indeed, on the eve of the Arab Spring, Morocco's economic picture was no rosier than that of its neighbors. At the end of 2010, Morocco's GDP per capita was 50 percent lower than that of Tunisia (World Bank, 2016), while its corruption perceptions index (CPI) score was nearly identical to Egypt—an alarming 3.4 (Transparency International, 2016). Yet, if Morocco looked so much like its neighbors in way of the factors that proved pivotal in instigating political transformation during the Arab Spring, why did it remain stable during this period of change?

This puzzle prompts deeper analysis of how Moroccans conceptualize democracy. As such, this paper explores two interrelated subjects of interest: (1) the extent to which individual Moroccans perceive their political arrangement as democratic and (2) the individual attributes that shape their perceptions of this issue. Additionally, the paper introduces the notion of a



democracy gap—that is, the extent to which Moroccans aspire for greater levels of democracy than what they believe they are allotted. Given the degree to which Morocco’s cultural, economic, and developmental features mirror those of its Arab counterparts, this paper uses the Arab Spring as an analytical framework hypothesizing that the same grievances that sparked the Arab revolutions are likely to linger as factors shaping perceptions of democracy in the post-revolutionary context.

Predicting whether a Moroccan perceives the government as democratic or not, lessons from the Arab Spring offer insight. If one individual typified this period it was Mohamed Boazizi, a disenfranchised Tunisian street vendor who moments before his self-immolation declared, “How do you expect me to make a living?” This narrative in mind, the analysis below explores individual economic status as a predictor of whether a Moroccan perceives the political system as democratic. If one slogan summarized the Arab Spring, it was “aysh (bread), hooriya (freedom), adala (justice),” popularized by demonstrators in Egypt’s Tahrir square. Such rhetoric considered, this paper explores perceptions of corruption (a useful proxy for sense of justice) as a separate predictor variable. Arab Spring demonstrators were largely characterized as young, educated but underemployed, and willing to confront the blatant deficiencies of aging regimes. Consequently, age and education are explored in this paper as predictors of Moroccans’ democratic perceptions.

In the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, scholars explored a range of variables linked to the revolts. Looking at society, they examined poverty, unemployment, youth bulge, changing attitudes toward authority, the emergence of satellite news, social network technologies, and numerous other dynamics as causal factors that sparked or abetted the popular revolts (Lynch, 2012, et al.). Examining the state, the literature focused on police brutality, government

corruption, stagnant economic policy, aging autocrats, weak accountability mechanisms, and ineffective policies as variables that diminished public support for longstanding regimes (Brownlee, Masoud, Reynolds, 2015, et al.). This paper links with such studies, but remains different in that it explores individual attitudes toward democracy, not macro-structural factors associated with regional democratization.

## **Key Variables and Existing Literature**

I explore the following eight variables as predictive of whether Moroccans perceive their country as democratic: (1) cash scarcity (i.e. economic condition), (2) rural classification, (3) education, (4) age, (5) involvement in community associations, (6) perception of government corruption, (7) perception of Islamic governance, and (8) past participation in protests. Below I briefly justify my inclusion of these variables and outline what the existing literature reveals about their effect on individuals' perceptions of democracy.

### **Economic Condition**

Based on the relationship between material grievance and political dissatisfaction, I hypothesize that economic condition affects Moroccans' perceptions of democracy. As an individual's economic condition deteriorates, he or she is more likely to take objection with the state viewing the government's shortcomings as a contributing factor to his or her individual plight. Afrobarometer research on democratic attitudes in sub-Saharan Africa reveals that poverty affects individual satisfaction with democracy. It shows that the poor are more inclined to express the opinion that democracy is not working (Bratton, 2006, p. 19). Returning to the Arab world, an Arab Barometer survey (2004-2007) found a statistically significant relationship

between income and protest activity. Lower income is associated with more frequent involvement in political protests (Hoffman and Jamal, 2014, p. 290). Based on strong evidence that an individual's economic condition is a politically salient variable affecting his or her attitude toward the state, I hypothesize that poor Moroccans are more likely to see the government as undemocratic.

## **Rural Classification**

I theorize that Moroccans living in rural areas are more likely to live beyond the state's network of public service provision and are especially likely to associate their material plight with the government's shortcomings. Accordingly, in my analysis I hypothesize that rural Moroccans are less likely to perceive the country's monarchical system as democratic—that is, representative of their interests on the geographic periphery. Such reasoning also conforms with empirical evidence from the Arab Spring. As Anderson (2011) notes, Tunisia's unrest emerged 130 miles from the capital of Tunis in a rural provincial town inciting demonstrations that “spiraled toward the capital from neglected rural areas” (Ibid).

## **Education**

Education has been studied as a social prerequisite for the emergence of democracy (Lipset 1959, et al.). But does the conclusion follow that educated citizens will aspire for more democracy in contexts that appear democratically deficient? Two relevant papers evaluating attitudes toward democracy in both the Muslim world and Africa offer insight on this question. Looking specifically at Muslim-majority countries, Shafiq (2009) finds that secondary and higher education increase support for more democracy in Jordan, Lebanon, and Pakistan.



Relatedly, Afrobarometer survey research across 15 countries in sub-Saharan Africa pinpoints aggregate years of schooling as having a statistically significant relationship with expressed preference for democracy (Bratton, 2006, p. 19). Drawing on Shafiq (2009) and Bratton's (2006) findings, I hypothesize that educated Moroccans are more likely to critique the country's monarchical model as not being sufficiently democratic.

## **Age**

Arab countries today are characterized by their distinctly young populations (youth bulge). This demographic dynamic has political implications. Based on the notion that Arab youth are less deferential to traditional sources of authority than previous generations (Lynch, 2012, p. 13), youth bulge is associated with increased likelihood of political protests. Supporting this assertion, a recent wave of Arab Barometer surveys across seven countries revealed the youth category (18-24) to be statistically significant in regression models evaluating the frequency of protest activity (Hoffman and Jamal, 2014, p. 286). Based on these results, I hypothesize that young Moroccans are more likely to view the political system as being undemocratic.

## **Involvement in Community Associations**

Associational life cultivates networks and norms of civic engagement integral to democracy (Putnam, 1993). As such, one can predict that Moroccans active in community associations are more civically engaged and thus more likely to perceive the country's political system as lacking key features of democracy. I hypothesize that involvement in community associations inclines Moroccans to view the political system as undemocratic.



## **Perception of Government Corruption**

Perception of corruption, closely associated with the notion of distrust, is linked to eroding faith in the legitimacy of the political system (Seligson, 2005; Easton, 1975). When individuals distrust the government, they are less likely to see it as representing their interests and hence are more inclined to view it as undemocratic. Returning to the Arab Spring, one notes that calls for greater democracy and political rights were closely tied to growing discontent with corruption among state institutions (Anderson, 2016). I hypothesize that Moroccans perceiving the government as corrupt are more likely to view it as undemocratic.

## **Perception of Islamic Governance**

Personal attitudes toward the relationship between Islam and governance shape Moroccans' perceptions of the government. Moroccans viewing Islam as a divinely-inspired moral framework meant to guide social rules and norms are likely to hold different views toward the government than those who consider religion a private affair. In the Arab-Muslim world, mainstream Islamist groups (i.e. those calling for a fusion of Islam and the state through electoral democracy) are traditionally among the strongest critics of regimes, inclined to highlight their governments' democratic shortcomings while viewing elections as their path to political relevance (Hamid, 2014). Consequently, I hypothesize that Moroccans holding a positive attitude toward Islamic governance (i.e., those supportive of electoral Islamism) are more likely to view the government as undemocratic.

## **Past Participation in Protests**

Moroccans that have previously protested the government are less inclined to view it as democratic. Past protest activity demonstrates that an individual is (1) politically engaged and (2) holds grievances with the government on at least one issue of public consequence. I hypothesize that such individuals are more inclined to view the government as undemocratic.

## **Methodology**

The statistical analysis utilizes sample data acquired from the “Quality of Democracy and Governance in Morocco Survey,” completed as a component of Afrobarometer’s fifth wave of survey research. The nationwide survey was distributed during April/May 2013 and included a sample size of 1200 participants. Survey researchers replicated the Enumeration Areas (EAs) from Morocco’s 2004 Population and Housing Census to create their Primary Sampling Units (PSUs). They then selected 120 PSUs, stratifying the sample across urban and rural locations, and proceeded to randomly interview 10 participants in each.

Table 1.0 (below) discusses each of the eight variables used in the statistical analysis. The survey includes a weighting variable used to adjust the distribution of the sample based on individual selection probabilities for region, gender, urban-rural distribution, and size of household and enumeration area.

**Table 1.0: Variables**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Hypothesized Relationship</b>	<b>Operationalization</b>
Perceived Level of Democracy	[Dependent Variable]	<p>Respondents categorized across 11 levels: Morocco's level of democracy today is 0 (completely undemocratic) to Morocco's level of democracy today is 10 (completely democratic).</p> <p>Operationalized as binary by creating a group that perceives country as undemocratic (levels 0-3).</p> <p>Operationalized as democracy gap variable by subtracting respondents' perceived levels of democracy from their ideal levels (not shown in this paper).</p> <p>Operationalized for multinomial model by creating three groups low perception of democracy (levels 0-3); moderate perception of democracy (levels 4-6); high perception of democracy (levels 7-10).</p>
Cash scarcity	Cash scarce individuals are more inclined to hold material grievances against the government, leading them to perceive system as undemocratic.	Respondents categorized across four levels: never without cash income to always without cash income. Operationalized as a binary by creating a cash scarce group (individuals that are often or always cash scarce).
Rural	Rural citizens are more likely to live in areas where state social service footprint is weak, leading them to perceive system as undemocratic.	Binary created by grouping rural respondents as one group.
Education level	Educated citizens are more likely to critically scrutinize the country's constitutional monarchical model; prone to critique system as undemocratic.	Respondents categorized across nine levels: no schooling to post-graduate. Binary created by isolating one group as educated (individuals that have completed some level of schooling beyond high-school).
Age	Younger individuals are more inclined to challenge political authority than their older counterparts; more likely to view the system as undemocratic.	Used as interval variable.
Engaged in community associations	Individuals involved in community associations demonstrate higher levels of civic engagement. They are more inclined to aspire for greater democracy and view system as undemocratic.	Respondents categorized across four levels: have never attended a community meeting to often attend community meetings. Binary created by isolating one group as engaged in community (individuals that have attended at least one meeting).
Perceives corruption	Moroccans with high perceptions of government corruption are less inclined to see the state as representing their interests, leading them to critique system as undemocratic.	Respondents categorized across four levels: those stating no government officials are corrupt to those stating all officials are corrupt. Operationalized as binary by creating group that perceives corruption (those seeing most or all officials as corrupt).
Supports Islamic governance	Moroccans receptive of Islamic governance are likely to see greater democracy (i.e. elections) as a pathway to achieving fusion of politics and religion; will see system as undemocratic.	Respondents categorized across five levels: strongly disapprove of system governed by Islamic law to strongly approve of system governed by Islamic law. Operationalized as binary by creating group that positively views Islamic governance (individuals that approve or strongly approve of Islamic law).
Past participation in protests	Past protest activity suggests individuals hold grievances with state and are thus more likely to view the system as undemocratic.	Respondents categorized across four levels: those who have never and would never attend a protest to those that often attend protests. Operationalized as binary by creating a past protest group (individuals that have attended a protest at least once).



# Results

## Descriptive Statistics

As Table 2.0 (below) shows, the median perception of democracy among respondents is level 5 on the scale. The table also shows that 22 percent of respondents view the country as undemocratic (i.e., all individuals ranking the country from levels 0 to 3 on the perception of democracy scale). Similarly, the democracy gap group (i.e., all individuals with a democracy gap score between 7 and 10), captures 16 percent of the possible respondents. All the predictor variables are coded in their binary form (except for age). The mean values indicate the percentage of respondents falling into the categories listed (cash scarce, rural, educated, etc.)

<b>Perception of Democracy in Morocco (0-10)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>N</b>
	5.35	2.69	5	0	10	1026
<b>Perceive Morocco to be Undemocratic</b>	0.22	0.42	0	0	1	1026
<b>Perceive Democracy Gap</b>	0.16	0.37	0	0	1	1009
<b>Cash Scarcity</b>	0.35	0.48	0	0	1	1193
<b>Rural Indicator</b>	0.58	0.49	1	0	1	1200
<b>Educated</b>	0.27	0.44	0	0	1	1197
<b>Age (years)</b>	36.10	13.14	33	18	80	1200
<b>Engaged in Community</b>	0.63	0.48	1	0	1	1191
<b>Perceives Corruption</b>	0.40	0.49	0	0	1	1100
<b>Supports Islamic Governance</b>	0.47	0.50	0	0	1	831
<b>Past Participation in Protest</b>	0.11	0.31	0	0	1	1164



Figure 1.0 (below) shows that level 5 is the mode of the data set, allowing us to conclude that a plurality of respondents perceive the country to be moderately democratic (i.e., halfway between completely undemocratic and completely democratic). Most respondents cluster in the middle of the scale: levels 4-6 include 43 percent of the respondents.

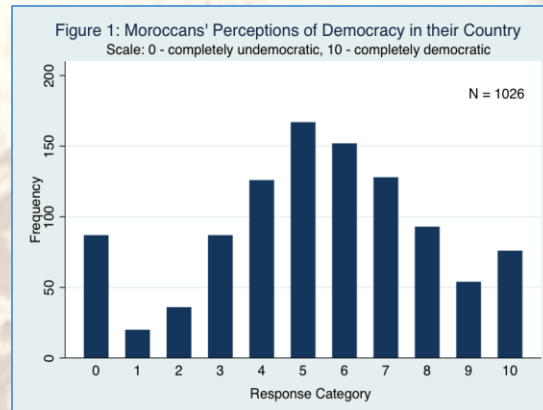


Figure 2.0 (below) illustrates democracy gap score categories. Level negative 10 on the far left shows that one respondent perceives the country to be completely democratic, while aspiring for no democracy at all. In total, 2 percent of respondents have negative democracy gap scores. This indicates that some respondents want less democracy than what they perceive they have. One must keep in mind the possibility of survey error when evaluating such results. Conversely, 16 percent of respondents fall into the democracy gap category (e.g., individuals with scores in the categories 7 to 10). These individuals aspire for far higher levels of democracy than what they perceive the monarchical model affords them. This would include, for example, an individual that ranks the country as a 3 for current level of democracy but aspires for democracy at a level of 10 yielding a democracy gap score of 7.

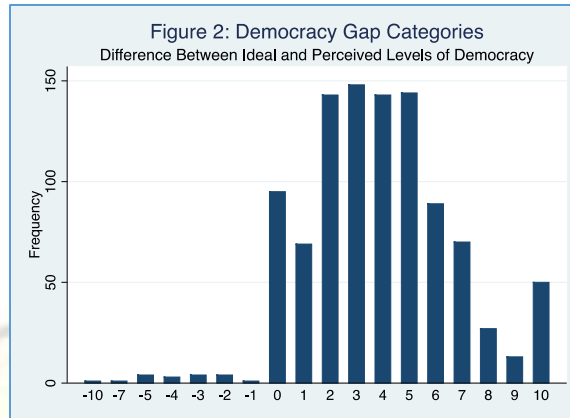
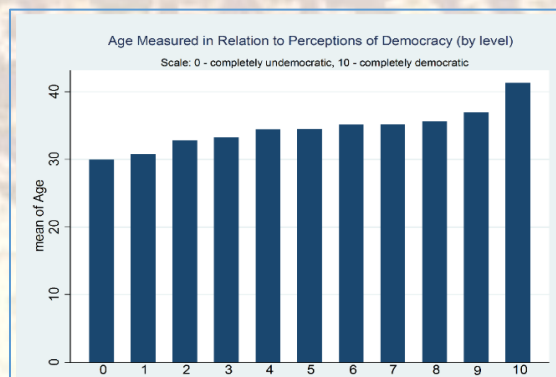


Figure 3.0 (below) shows bivariate association between perception levels of democracy and age. One notes that moving from 0 to 10, the mean age tends to rise as the perception levels of democracy increase. The mean age for those perceiving democracy at a level of 10 is 41 years. The mean age for those perceiving democracy at a level of 0 is 33 years. Relatedly, a chi-square test between those viewing the political system as undemocratic versus those viewing it as democratic yields a statistically significant difference in the mean ages of the two groups.



Finally, the correlation matrix shown in Table 3.0 (below) reveals that regular cash scarcity, age, perception of corruption, and past participation in protest are all associated with perceptions of democracy (0.001 level of statistical significance).

	Perception Democracy	Cash Scarce	Rural	Education	Age	Engaged in Community	Perceives Corruption	Islamic Governance	Past Protest
Perception Democracy									
Cash Scarce	-0.138***								
Rural	-0.001	0.154***							
Educated	-0.0459	-0.168***	0.206***						
Age	0.1430***	-0.010	-0.085**	-0.175***					
Engaged in Community	-0.080*	-0.072*	-0.026	0.080**	-0.110***				
Perceives Corruption	-0.215***	0.078**	-0.065*	-0.072*	-0.072*	0.045			
Islamic Governance	0.092*	0.209***	-0.150***	0.018	0.018	-0.077*	0.102**		
Past Protest	-0.186***	-0.007	0.066*	-0.080**	-0.080**	0.214***	0.094**	0.009	

Note: \* sig. at the p < 0.05 level; \*\* =p < 0.01; \*\*\* = p < 0.001 level

## Linear Regression Models (1/2)

Models 1 and 2 (Table 4.0) are linear regressions treating level of democracy as an interval variable. Evaluating the independent variables, a positive coefficient predicts an increase in an individual's perception of democracy; a negative coefficient predicts a decrease in an individual's perception of democracy. In Model 1, cash scarcity, age, perception of corruption, support for Islamic governance, and past participation in protest prove statistically significant. Individuals classified as cash scarce or those who perceive government corruption are predicted to view Morocco's level of democracy to be slightly more than one level lower than their counterparts (controlling for all other variables).

Age and support for Islamic governance both predict higher perceptions of democracy. Individuals supportive of Islamic governance perceive the country as more democratic by 0.82 units on the perception levels scale (controlling for all other variables). Meanwhile, for an increase in age by one year, an individual's perception of democracy in the country rises by 0.02 units on the perception levels scale (controlling for all other variables). This suggests that the age difference between a parent and child (e.g., 30 years), produces 0.6-unit difference in perception of democracy (slightly more than half of a perception level on the scale).

## Logit Regression Models (3/4)

Models 3 and 4 (also Table 4.0) are logit regressions treating the dependent variable as a binary. In Model 3, the dependent variable is the perception that Morocco lacks democracy. In Model 4, the dependent variable is the perception of a democracy gap. Coding the dependent variable to measure the perception that democracy is lacking or the perception of a democracy gap, rather than level of perceived democracy (as is in the case in the first two models) causes the signs on the coefficients of significant variables to flip between Models 1/2 to Models 3/4.

In Model 3, the variables cash scarcity, perception of corruption, past participation in protest, and support for Islamic governance are statistically significant. The first three increase the log odds of an individual perceiving the political system as undemocratic (controlling for all other variables). Support for Islamic governance decreases the log odds of an individual perceiving the country as undemocratic (controlling for all other variables). Like Model 1, the variables cash scarcity and perception of corruption have the strongest effect, increasing the log odds by 0.61 and 0.81 (respectively) that an individual views the country as undemocratic (controlling for all other variables). Model 4 confirms that individuals classified as cash scarce or perceiving the government as corrupt are statistically more likely to see a democracy gap in the country. Perception of government corruption increases the log odds of an individual believing that there is a democracy gap by 0.80 (controlling for all other variables).



<b>Table 4.0: Regression Results</b>				
	<b>(Model 1) Perception of Democracy</b>	<b>(Model 2) Perception of Democracy</b>	<b>(Model 3) Perceive Lack of Democracy</b>	<b>(Model 4) Perceive Democracy Gap</b>
Cash Scarce	-1.08***	-0.71*	0.61**	0.46*
Rural	0.01	0.39	0.06	0.23
Educated	0.10	(omitted)	-0.38	-0.32
Age (years)	0.02**	0.01	-0.01	-0.003
Engaged in Community	-0.10	-0.23	0.26	-0.002
Perceives Corruption	-1.02***	-0.85**	0.81***	0.80***
Islamic Governance	0.82***	1.01**	-0.38*	-0.54*
Past Protest	-0.90**	-1.02	0.54*	0.40
N	685	397	685	676
R <sup>2</sup>	0.12	0.09		
Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>			0.06	0.04
Note: * sig. at the p < 0.05 level; ** =p < 0.01; *** = p < 0.001 level				

## **Logit Regression Model (Multinomial)**

The multinomial regression (Table 5.0 below) uses moderate perception of democracy as a reference group relative to low and high perceptions of democracy. Corruption proves significant in predicting a low level of democracy relative to a moderate level. For individuals that perceive corruption, the log odds of viewing the level of democracy in the country as low compared to moderate increase by 0.71 (controlling for all other variables). Cash scarcity, age, and support for Islamic governance are statistically significant in predicting whether or not individuals hold high perceptions of democracy relative to moderate ones. Support for Islamic governance increases the log odds of an individual seeing the country as highly democratic

relative to moderately democratic by 0.70 (controlling for all other variables). Alternatively, cash scarcity decreases the log odds of an individual seeing the country as highly democratic relative to moderately democratic by roughly the same log odds (controlling for all other variables).

<b>Low Perception of Democracy</b>	
Cash Scarce	0.38†
Rural Indicator	0.11
Educated	-0.44
Age (years)	-0.003
Engaged in Community	0.27
Perceives Corruption	0.71***
Support Islamic Governance	-0.15
Past Participation in Protest	0.39
<b>Moderate Perception of Democracy (Reference Category)</b>	
<b>High Perception of Democracy</b>	
Cash Scarce	-0.71**
Rural Indicator	0.13
Educated	-0.19
Age (years)	0.02**
Engaged in Community	-0.004
Perceives Corruption	-0.29
Support Islamic Governance	0.70***
Past Participation in Protest	-0.49
N = 685   * sig. at the p < 0.05 level; ** = p < 0.01; *** = p < 0.001 level † sig. at the p < 0.10 level	

## Findings

### Two Portraits of Morocco

The above results suggest that specific individual attributes are predictive of the extent to which Moroccans perceive their political system as democratic. Individuals that are older and more supportive of Islamic governance are inclined to see the system as democratic relative to other Moroccans. Individuals of low socio-economic status (measured through the proxy variable cash scarcity) are inclined to see the system as undemocratic. Similarly, individuals that perceive

the government as corrupt are predicted to see the system as undemocratic. These two variables prove significant across all the four models in Table 4.0. Finally, while only a small portion of the survey's respondents (11 percent) demonstrate past protest activity, this characteristic serves as a significant explanatory variable predicting that an individual will perceive the government as undemocratic.

## **Revisiting the Islam Effect**

As noted in Table 1.0 and the literature review, I initially hypothesized that support for Islamic governance would be associated with an individual viewing the political system as undemocratic. As the analysis shows, this hypothesis was incorrect and in fact the direction of the relationship is the opposite: individuals supportive of Islamic governance are more likely to view the political system as democratic. Explaining this outcome, I believe it hinges on the timing of the Afrobarometer survey in relation to political events on the ground. The survey used for this study was completed in the spring of 2013, approximately 18 months after Morocco's mainstream Islamist party (Justice and Development Party, PJD) won a plurality of seats in the parliament. I suspect that survey respondents with a positive attitude toward Islamic governance were especially inclined to rank the system as democratic considering the PJD's recent victory. In short, based on the PJD's success, individuals supportive of Islamic governance were more inclined to see the system as working toward their interests and hence inclined to perceive it as democratic.

## **The Democracy Gap: Implications on Monarchy**

Only 16 percent of respondents, a relatively small proportion, fall into the democracy gap group that I defined. I believe this is suggestive of why Morocco's monarchy stands out as politically stable in North Africa and the region. To the extent that this sample speaks for the larger Moroccan population, I hypothesize that only 15 to 20 percent of Moroccans aspire for levels of democracy that far exceed what they believe the system affords them. That this group remains comparatively small relative to the larger population contributes to our understanding of the monarchy's political stability amid forces of regional change. I believe that Moroccan exceptionalism partially hinges on this democracy gap group remaining comparatively small. Should this group get larger, for example surpass 30 percent of the population, I suspect it would have concrete implications on the stability of the Moroccan monarchy.

### **Limitations**

The results of this study are limited in two ways. First, while perception of corruption is consistently significant across models, it is important to note how it differs from the other variables. Perception of corruption measures participants' attitudes toward the government, but is not a personal attribute like cash scarcity or level of education. In this regard, we recognize that it is naturally more likely to shape perception of democracy, which likewise measures participants' attitudes toward an aspect of government. Second, I must note that the democracy gap variable is one that I constructed, but not one drawn from the survey. I am inferring the notion of a democracy gap, but it is not a variable that emerged organically from the dataset.



## Conclusion

Drawing larger conclusions about Morocco from my statistical analysis of the Afrobarometer survey, I close with the following three conclusions about the Moroccan population and its view of democracy within the conceptual framework of monarchy. First, I hypothesize that in the post-Arab Spring context, most Moroccans view their country as moderately democratic—neither democratically deficient nor exemplary. Second, I posit that the notion of a democracy gap outlined in this paper helps clarify our understanding of Moroccan exceptionalism. Moroccan exceptionalism relies partly on the fact that only a small portion of Moroccans aspire for far more democracy than what they believe the system provides. Third, while Morocco is unique, it is not insulated from the socio-political currents of the Arab world. In the wake of the Arab uprisings, perceptions of democracy in the country are shaped by predictable regional forces, including economic hardship, frustration with corruption, and divergent opinions regarding the relationship between Islam and the governance.

Finally, as a case study, Morocco raises important questions about the meaning of democracy in the context of Arab monarchy. For a substantial number of Moroccans, democracy does not seem to be associated with turnover at the top. Conceptually, the king seems to rise above the public understanding of democracy, which is associated with constitutional and parliamentary reform but not an end to one-man rule. As academics and practitioners continue to frame the Moroccan case as both paradoxical and exceptional, it remains important to recognize that the concept of democracy is fluid and open to interpretation. Finally, despite the region's historic political change in 2011, only one monarchy, the House of Khalifa in Bahrain, faced a serious threat. Ultimately, all eight monarchies survived the Arab Spring, many without incident, warranting further research into contemporary Arab perceptions of political authority.

**About the Author:** Matthew Timmerman is a PhD student in International Relations at the American University, Washington, D.C. He specializes in democratization, political Islam, and the geopolitics of the Middle East and North Africa. Matthew holds a Master's degree in Public Policy from the American University in Cairo and had several years of experience as a researcher/writer in the region.

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