

Country Report

Morocco

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November 2019

This Country Report offers a detailed assessment of religious diversity and violent religious radicalisation in the above-named state. Published by the GREASE project, this report is part a series covering 23 countries on four continents. Each report in the series has a corresponding Country Profile (issued separately) offering more basic information about religious affiliation and state-religion relations in the given country. Both the reports and profiles are available on the GREASE project website.

Countries covered in this series:

Albania, Australia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malaysia, Morocco, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

<http://grease.eui.eu>



The GREASE project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement number 770640

What is the GREASE project?

Involving researchers from Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Oceania, GREASE is investigating how religious diversity is governed in 23 countries. Our work focuses on comparing norms, laws and practices that may (or may not) prove useful in preventing religious radicalisation. Our research also sheds light on how different societies cope with the challenge of integrating religious minorities and migrants. The aim is to deepen our understanding of how religious diversity can be governed successfully, with an emphasis on countering radicalisation trends.

While exploring religious governance models in other parts of the world, GREASE also attempts to unravel the European paradox of religious radicalisation despite growing secularisation. We consider the claim that migrant integration in Europe has failed because second generation youth have become marginalised and radicalised, with some turning to jihadist terrorism networks. The researchers aim to deliver innovative academic thinking on secularisation and radicalisation while offering insights for governance of religious diversity.

The project is being coordinated by Professor Anna Triandafyllidou from The European University Institute (EUI) in Italy. Other consortium members include Professor Tariq Modood from The University of Bristol (UK); Dr. H. A. Hellyer from the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) (UK); Dr. Mila Mancheva from The Centre for the Study of Democracy (Bulgaria); Dr. Egdunas Raciunas from Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania); Mr. Terry Martin from the research communications agency SPIA (Germany); Professor Mehdi Lahlou from Mohammed V University of Rabat (Morocco); Professor Haldun Gulalp of The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Turkey); Professor Pradana Boy of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang (Indonesia); Professor Zawawi Ibrahim of The Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (Malaysia); Professor Gurpreet Mahajan of Jawaharlal Nehru University (India); and Professor Michele Grossman of Deakin University (Melbourne, Australia). GREASE is scheduled for completion in 2022.

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GREASE - Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing Together European and Asian Perspectives

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Religious governance in Morocco: Demographic and socio-economic context, radicalisation challenges and the role of the King/state

1. Introduction

Morocco is a country situated in the North-West of Africa, 14 km far from Spain, comprised of about 36 million people. The Moroccan population is presented as almost totally Muslim. 99% of Morocco's inhabitants are considered to be Muslim. Such a labeling is, however, only statistical. In reality, the census does not provide any question about the religion of the interviewees or whether they are practicing or not. Also, any survey has never been led in Morocco concerning such a subject, i.e. what are the parts of Muslims, non Muslims, practicing, non practicing, and so forth.

Morocco has known during its recent history – especially since the seventies of the last century - two predominant developments, one of which makes it similar to the rest of the MENA region, from Algeria to Iraq, passing by Tunisia, Libya, Egypt or Jordan, while the other is that it represents a sort of exception within the Arab world.

When it comes to this second point, Morocco is generally considered, among the Arab world, as a democracy, with a “multi-party system”, local and national elections, a parliament functioning formally since the beginning of the sixties of the last century, even if it has any important power.

The fact is that the real powers in the country are held by the King, who is not subject to election, is not politically responsible, so even he is the Chief Commander of the Army, the Head of the Ministers council, the head of the Justice Authority and the head of National security Council, etc.

Another manifestation of this “Moroccan exception” is illustrated by the form and the consequences of the so called Arab spring which were initiated and led in Morocco, at the beginning of 2011, by the “20 February” movement.

This movement - supported by the radical socialist opposition parties (represented by all the socialist movements except the USFP - *Union socialiste des forces populaires*) and by many Human rights associations as by some associations of non employed persons - led a series of important protests in almost 150 cities, especially in the most important ones like Rabat, the capital, Casablanca, Fès, or Tangiers.

The main demands of the protesters were, as in the other Arab countries:

- The reform of the state;
- The fight against corruption;
- The independence of the justice system;
- The separation at the head of the state between politics and affairs and between politics and religion, i.e. the constitution of a Civil State;
- The reduction of the social gap within Moroccan population/less social injustice;
- The eviction of some regime symbols represented by some friends of the King and other persons very close to him.

But, contrary to what happened in Tunisia—where the demonstrators in the street shouted “Ben Ali *dégage*” (Ben Ali go away)—, or to Egypt—where the protesters did the same with former President Houssni Mubarak—the streets didn't resonate in Morocco with similar slogans such as “le roi *dégage*” (Mohamed VI go away). Demonstrators only expressed the will/hope for deep reforms, for more justice, more jobs, more dignity, less corruption, less inequality between men and women, and so on. In this regard, we can observe one of the most important differences vis-à-vis of the protests in the rest of Arab countries where the revolution started.

Another difference, concerning Islamist movements, including the radicals among them, lies in the deep nature of the Moroccan politic system.

The Monarchy is very old in Morocco, being founded on a sense of historical legitimacy. It is also founded on a strong religious respect vis-à-vis of the king/sultan/roi. The King is “Amir Al Mouminin” and for a part of the population, he is the “Representative of God on earth”.

These two considerations make it possible that the medium class didn't contribute to the protests and also that a part of the Islamist movements, not only didn't walk with the protesters, but did support the King and condemn the protests. It's particularly the case of the PJD (The Party for Justice and Development, the brother of the Tunisian movement, Ennahda) which is rolling the Government in Rabat since the beginning of 2012. It also the case of the “Boutchichi” association, a very strong Soufi organization based in the Eastern part of Morocco, which organized a great street demonstration calling to vote for the Constitutional reform as proposed by the King on June 2011.

At that stage, when radical movements are taken into account, their opposition is directed more towards “Social deviations” and impious foreign powers/governments than towards the Monarchic system and the King, as that most of these movements are considering the latter the “Protector of Islam”.

2. Demographic and socio-economic background, a potential base for radicalization

The number of Moroccans was multiplied by almost 3 times between 1961 and 2019¹, as shown in the table below, passing from 11.89 million to 35.67 million in 58 years.

Figure 1: Evolution of the Moroccan Legal population by area of residence (1960-2019)

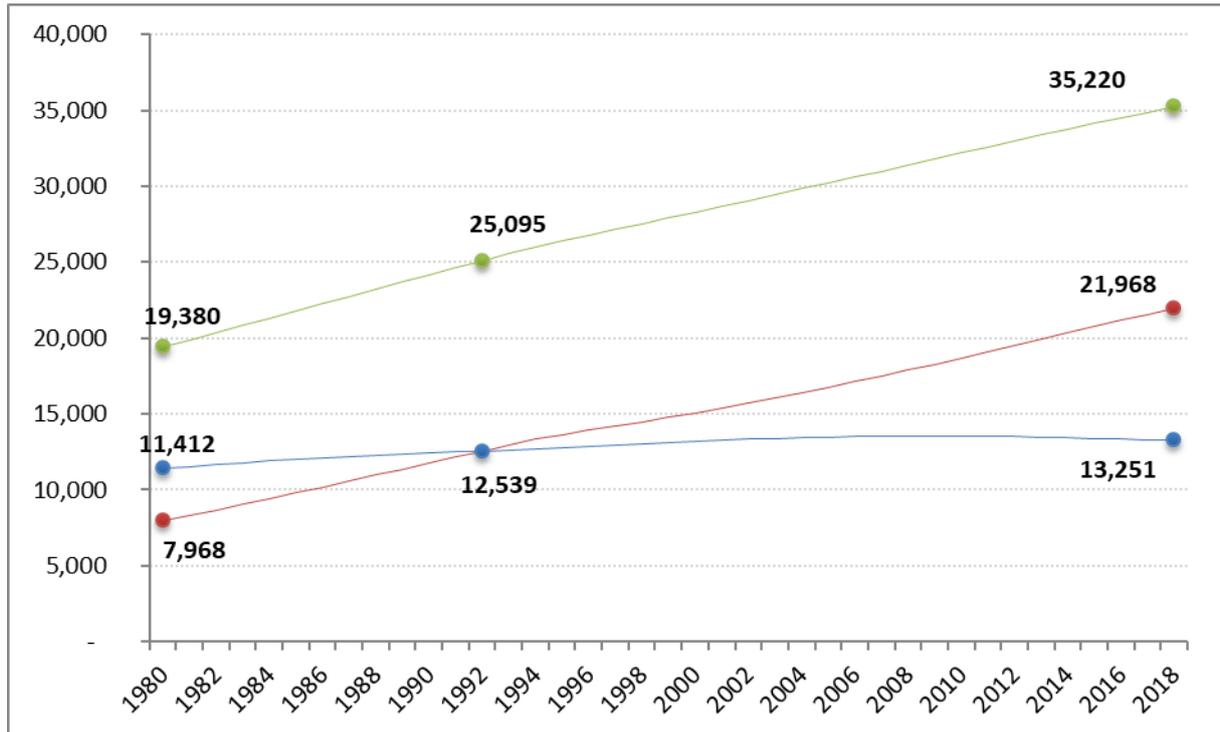
Year	Total	Urban	Rural	Urban population/ Total %
1961	11.897	3.547	8.350	29.81
1971	15.379	5.409	9.969	35.17
1982	20.419	8.730	11.689	42.75
1994	26.073	13.407	12.665	51.42
2004	29.891	16.463	13.428	55.07
2014	33.848	20.432	13.415	60.36
2019	35.675°	22.439	13.236	62.9

Source: Haut Commissariat au Plan, Rabat, Morocco:

https://www.hcp.ma/Population-du-Maroc-par-annee-civile-en-milliers-et-au-milieu-de-l-annee-par-milieu-de-residence-1960-2050_a677.html

The birth rate, after peaking at over 2.7% between 1969 and 1972, has started to decline since then. It reaches today the rate of 1.25%, one of the lowest in Africa. However, if the growth rate of the population as a whole has been reduced, that which relates to the urban population has strongly increased leading to the multiplication by 6.32 times of the latter's number, as shown in the table 1 below and the figure hereafter.

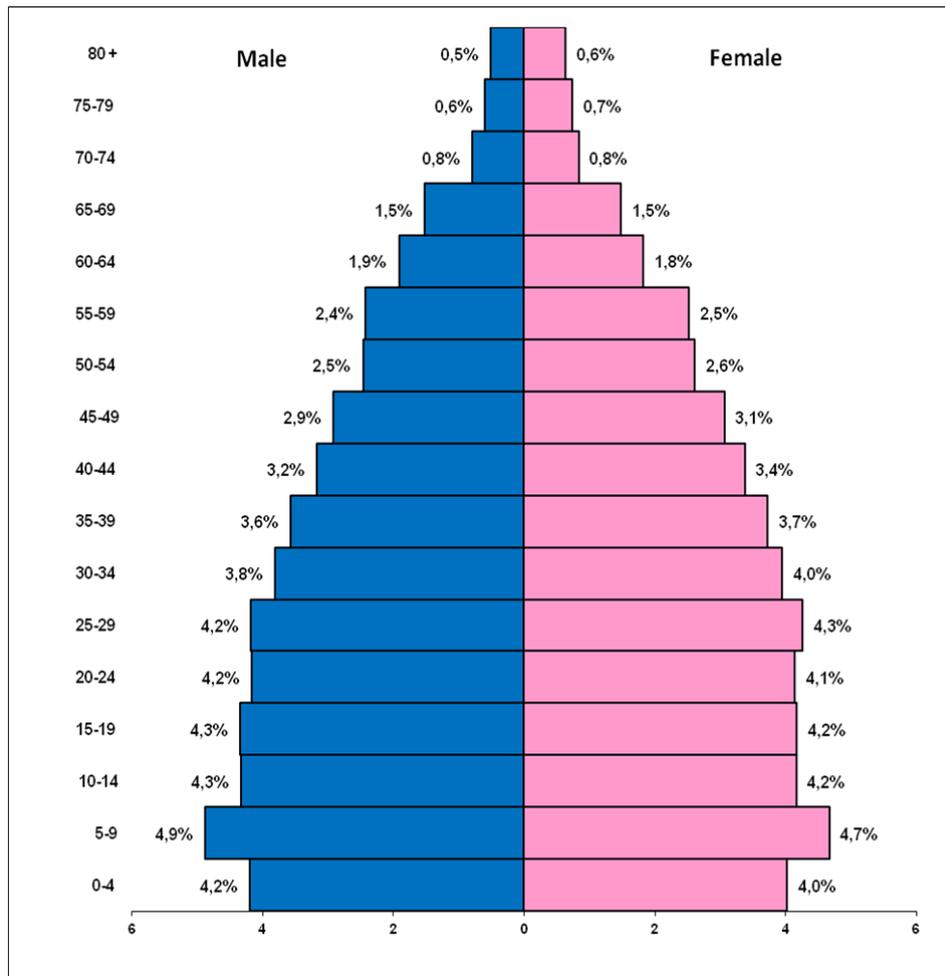
¹ The data for 1961 and 2014 are from a back projection on the basis of the results of the general census of population and housing of 1961, 1971, 1982, 1994, 2004 and 2014. From 2014, it is the updating of population projections based on the results of the Census 2014.

Figure 2: The Evolution of Urban and Rural population (1980 - 2018)

- Total population
- Urban population
- Rural population

Source : Haut Commissariat au Plan, Rabat, Morocco. www.hcp.ma

This means, in particular, that the main important issues such as housing, unemployment, security or migratory pressure would now be concentrated in the cities. On another side, Morocco is a demographically young country with 27% of its population under the age of 15 and 18% between the ages of 15 and 24, 42% between 25 and 54 years, 7% between the ages of 55 and 64 and just 6% 65 years and older. The median age of Moroccans is just 29 years old as of 2018, with a life expectancy of about 75 years of age.

Figure 3: The Evolution of Urban and Rural population (1980 – 2018)

Morocco – 2019. Population: 35.67 million.

Source : www.hcp.ma

In addition to the 35.67 million Moroccans listed in the table above, nearly 5 million Moroccans are living abroad today, including nearly two thirds in Europe.

When it comes to the foreigners living regularly in Morocco, in 2014, year of the last general census in the country, they were 84,000 foreign residents of whom 33,615 Europeans, including 21,344 persons from France and 22,545 sub-Saharan Africans. Beside this population, in late 2013, Moroccan authorities estimated that there were more than 45,000 irregular immigrants living in Morocco immediately prior to the start of an “Exceptional Regularization Process”, which was conducted in the framework of a New Migration Policy decided on the same date by the Moroccan authorities (M. Lahlou, 2018).

There is no census, and there have never been any field surveys in Morocco on ethnic or religious background. However, the most commonly held estimates suggest that About 99% of Moroccans are supposed to be “Sunni Muslims” religiously or culturally. The numbers of the Jewish minority have decreased significantly since the creation of the State of Israel in Palestine, in 1948. Today there are about 3,000 Moroccan Jews inside the country. There is a small, but apparently, growing minority of Moroccan Christians

made of local Moroccan converts. There is a small community of “Shiaa” Muslim converts and Bahais, but of unknown numbers.

Among the major challenges posed by the structure of the Moroccan population, that is to say mainly its youth, there is unemployment, in addition to the low level of national income and the high level of illiteracy among adults.

Concerning these last elements, the available Socio-Economic data show that Morocco, and its population, can be considered in a situation of relative poverty, including within the Arab world.

Indeed, with a total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 103.61 billion US\$ (estimate 2018), the income per capita equals 2,832 US dollars.

Considering the Index of human development (IDH), Morocco has been ranked 123rd in the UNDP 2018 report among 189 countries, down from 122 in 2016. Thus, Morocco is ranked “medium” in human development group with an HDI of 0.667 out of 1 (0.598 for women and 0.713 for men) after Egypt (ranked 115), Palestine (ranked 119), and Iraq (ranked 120). Also, after Algeria, ranked 85th with “high” levels of human development with an HDI of 0.754, Lebanon (80); Tunisia (95); Jordan (95); and, despite its conflict, after Libya (105) also ranked “high.”

This ranking also takes into account the fact that the rate of illiteracy in Morocco continues to be high, since it still reaches nearly 32% of the adult population, one of the highest rates in the Arab world.

When it comes to the situation on the labour market in Morocco, the highest unemployment rates are still the lot of young people, women and graduates, living in urban areas, according to the High Planning Commission.

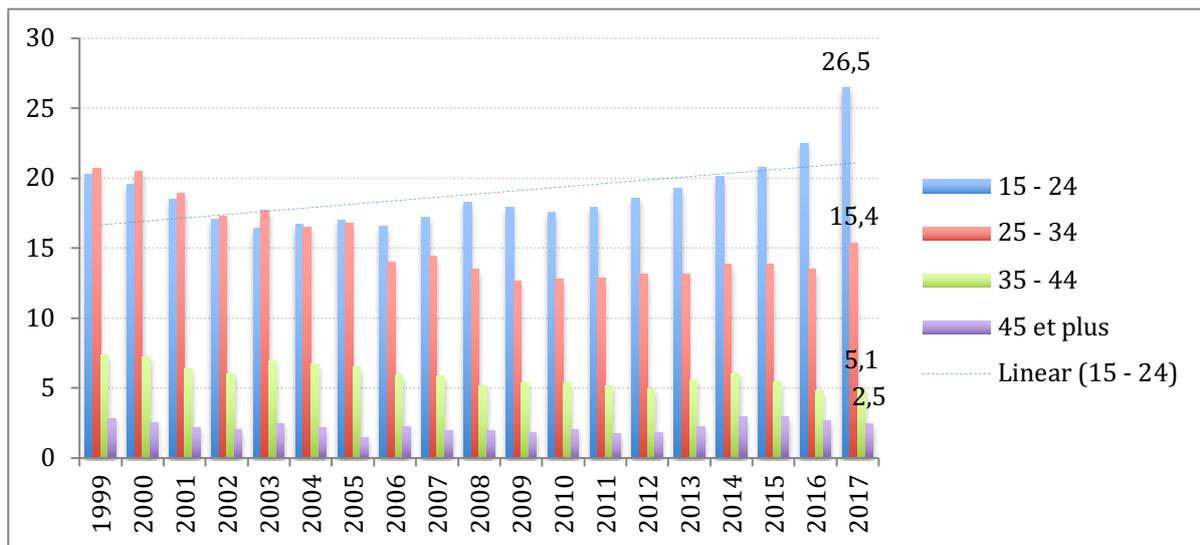
Thus, unemployment rate reached 26.5% in 2017 among young people aged 15 to 24 (see figure 3 below) and 43.2% among urban dwellers of the same age group.

Unemployment affects women more than men, with prevalence of 14% and 8.4%. This finding is more noticeable in urban areas where the unemployment rate reached 24.3% for women against 11.4% among men.

The unemployment rate increases with the level of qualification. It happens, and 3.4% among those with no qualifications to 17.2% for graduates. It is 14% for middle school graduates and 23% for those with a higher degree.

It remains relatively higher amongst certain categories of graduates including particularly the holders of advanced degrees awarded by the faculties (25.9%), certificates for professional specialization (24.2%), technicians, diplomas and middle managers (23 %) and professional qualification certificates (21.4%).

Figure 4: The evolution of un-employment rates among different categories of Moroccan population



All the elements mentioned above - which will be developed later, in particular taking into account social and spatial inequalities in the distribution of income and access to basic social services - objectively constitute a basis for religious radicalization, in the absence of other modes of political expression aimed at improving the access of the least well-off social categories to a better standard of living.

3. Historical background of state-organised religion relations and current institutional structure for governing religion and religious diversity: Central role of the King

Any analysis of the politico-religious field in Morocco, and in particular of the relatively late emergence of Islamist players in the Moroccan political and social sphere must take into account the importance of the long term.

We are indeed tackling a phenomenon taking place in a country that has been ruled since the sixteenth century by a dynasty claiming to be a descendant of the Prophet, and whose existence is based on an arbitral religious power between the different components of the Moroccan society.

This dynasty was at the origin of certain “modernization” attempts in the nineteenth century, and in 1912 it accepted the French protectorate under the pressure of the colonial system and then used this new situation to establish its legitimacy over the entire territory (as the Sultan's/King's authority was exerted only partially throughout the territory). The legacy of this past consists of a certain form of religious legitimacy, to which was added a new form of legitimacy due to the commitment of the monarchy alongside the nationalists.

Moroccan Islam is officially Sunni, but historical Islam is a complex and diverse religion, and has the capacity to adapt to social demand and particular context of the country.

Since its independence in 1956, Morocco has made the choice to build its own reference of a nationalized and territorialized Islam. This ideological construction, reinforced by the very early religious public policy, refers to “Malikism” (linked to Imam Malik) as the unique rite, unlike other Arab-Muslim countries where many rites coexist.

The choice of the Malikite rite is not a newly made choice, it is based on a long historical maturation that resulted from the combination of the know-how of Andalusian clerics settled after the Reconquista and the Amazigh (Berber) puritanism known to be pragmatic and rigorist.

As a result, the current political approach insisting on adopting a national project of “Moroccan Islam” based on “Malikism” to protect it from international Salafism does not come from nowhere.

It is based on three historical reasons:

- The Moroccan dynasty has been in power for 12 centuries since it started by a descendant of the Prophet who came from the Levant at the request of local Berber tribes;

- The unique situation of Morocco as the only Muslim country not to have been conquered by the Ottoman empire;

- Early relations with Europe thanks to its geographical and historical proximity which had a lasting impact on the Moroccan cultural substratum and constitute a key element of this Moroccan “exception”.

Another characteristic that defines the nature of the Moroccan monarchy and its religious legitimacy is that it holds both a Dynastic and a Religious legitimacy, which corresponds to what the German-born American historian Ernest Kantorowicz calls the theory of “The two bodies of the king” (E. Kantorowicz, 2016).

These two bodies combine the human, the divine and the Caliph at the same time. Therefore, the Monarch will not only be “chosen” by the grace of his own personal virtues, but also because he is a member of a sacred prophetic filiation that makes him different from the others.

Besides, the concept of “Cherifism” - to be a descendent of the prophet and to make of it a title of sovereignty -, means that power is not just a matter of secular governance and personal qualities, but is also a matter of legitimacy and diffuse sacredness (Omar Saghi, 2016).

In the aftermath of the independence of all the Maghreb countries, the new states had to face new challenges to meet multiple expectations, by adopting an approach that corresponds to their own historical path. For its part, Morocco has suffered little from the “hormonal imbalances” of colonization, compared to the Algerian neighbour.

After the independence of Morocco, the Monarchy -characterized by a complex legitimacy- was put under the stress test of the profane reality: “to connect the political power of the historical time to the prophetic power of the sacred time”.

The 1980s were decisive in the organization of the religious space in Morocco. In fact, in 1984 the public powers initiated the reorganization and control of the religious field.

Thus, in an international context particularly marked by a return of the religious aspect incarnated by an unprecedented event in the history of the Islamic world, namely the Iranian revolution and the establishment of a fundamentally Shiite state that controls the entire society by imposing a total religious order, a mobilizing religious frame of reference has popped up all over the Islamic world. This religious frame of reference was determined to supplant “militant ideologies” that marked the world in the twentieth century, to replace them with a religious order that aims to undermine the dominant political and ideological system, and substitute it with a pure religious model.

Morocco did not escape this “spectrum” that haunts the Muslim Arab world.

To better understand this unprecedented mutation, its modes of expression and its management by the Moroccan monarchy – which was anxious to remain the central producer of the political order and its values-, it should be appropriate, within the framework of this study, to make an inventory of the permanence of the religious question in Morocco, its modes of expression, its supervision by the public authorities in the light of the emergence of the Islamist player in the political arena.

The Dahir of 1984 -under the rule of the late Hassan II- and the Dahir of 2004- urged by King Mohamed VI remain the two legislative frameworks in force.

But, more important than the laws of all kinds, it is important to note the role of the king in religious matters, with particular reference to the powers conferred to him by the constitution on the subject.

In this sense, the preamble of the constitution, which was adopted in July 2011 by 95 % of the voters, proclaims that, as “A sovereign Muslim State, attached to its national unity and to its territorial integrity, the Kingdom of Morocco intends to preserve, in its plenitude and its diversity, its one and indivisible national identity. Its unity is forged by the convergence of its Arab-Islamist, Berber and Saharan-Hassanic components, nourished and enriched by its African, Andalusian, Hebraic and Mediterranean influences. The pre-eminence accorded to the Muslim religion in the national reference is consistent with the attachment of the Moroccan people to the values of openness, of moderation, of tolerance and of dialog for mutual understanding between all the cultures and the civilizations of the world”.

As to the article 3 of the same constitution, it states that “Islam is the religion of the State, which guarantees to all the free exercise of beliefs”.

Concerning the administration / management of the religious sphere, it falls entirely within the authority of the king, who is also, according to the constitution, the head of the Executive power, the President of the Judicial authority and the Commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Thus, according to the article 41 of the constitution, “The King, Prince (Commander) of the Faithful (Amir Al Mouminine), sees to the respect for Islam. He is the Guarantor of the free exercise of beliefs.

He presides over the Superior Council of the Ulema (Conseil superieur des Oulema), charged with the study of questions that he submits to it. This Council is the sole instance enabled to comment (se prononcer, in French) on the religious consultations (Fatwas)

before being officially agreed to, on the questions to which it has been referred and this, on the basis of the tolerant principles, precepts and designs of Islam.

The attributions, the composition and the modalities of functioning of the Council are established by Dahir (or a Royal Decree). The King exercises by Dahirs the religious prerogatives inherent to the institution of the Emirate (the Principality) of the Faithful which are conferred to him in exclusive manner by this Article. Under this umbrella, the Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs exerts full authority over official mosques and other religious institutions, and on all religious activities and similar events in the country.

4. Violent religious radicalisation challenges

Morocco has seen, since the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, a rise of conservatism and a process of radicalization of a part, more and more visible, of its (young) population in connection with a set of international events, and in parallel with domestic economic, social and political developments (as partially stated above).

Among the external events, it is possible to mention all those for whom Moroccans, as Arabs and Muslims, have a very strong sensitivity.

In this regard, one should mention the wars of Afghanistan, from the 1970s and still ongoing. The war in Afghanistan against the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was initially seen as a war between Islam and communism. From 2001, and the American intervention in that same country, the Afghan wars started to be seen as a confrontation between the West, represented by the USA, and Islam.

Another relevant event was the Bosnian War, which began in 1992 and lasted until 1995, and led to the deaths of around 100,000 civilians and soldiers, among which at least 25,000 Bosnian Muslims. Within this war, the massacre in Srebrenica (11/16 July 1995) and its 8,372 dead, all Bosnian civilians, had an immense impact in the Arab-Muslim world, including Morocco.

To the effects of these wars, one must add the consequences on the Arab (and Muslim) public opinion of the Intifadas of 1987 and 2000 in the occupied Palestinian territories, of the wars in Iraq (from 2003) and in Syria (from 2011).

These external events were amplified inside Morocco (as in several Arab-Muslim countries) by the conjunction of socio-economic and political elements, making a large part of the population, and especially young people, more sensitive to the arguments of the supporters of "Political Islam", for whom all that the Muslims suffering lies in their distance from the "true values of Islam" and in the hatred of Westerners towards them. Among those elements, it is possible to stress some which are of economic and social nature such as widespread poverty and a great imbalance in the distribution of national wealth, youth unemployment, a high level of illiteracy and a great weakness of the health system. Others are of qualitative, intangible, cultural and political nature, such as the school failure or the progressive weakening of "traditional" political parties, including left-wing parties.

All this led first - during the 1980s and 1990s - to the strengthening of Radical Islamist currents, under the influence of trends related to Saudi "Wahhabism" or to the Muslim Brothers "brotherhood".

After that, young Moroccans will be involved in or will commit various terrorist actions in Europe and in Morocco, and hundreds will join the war fields in the Middle East, starting from 2011.

In Europe, Moroccans (migrants or children of migrants) were involved in the train attacks in Madrid (11 March, 2004), where the blasts killed 191 people and wounded 1,841, or in the Paris attacks (13 November, 2015) that killed 130 people and wounded hundreds more, as well as in the Brussels Airport and Metro attacks (22 April, 2016), when 32 people were killed and many more injured, and also in the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks (17/18 August, 2017), where a driver, within a group of 12 Jihadists, killed 16 people and injured more than 100.

As for the terrorist attacks on the Moroccan soil itself, the chronology below indicates an acceleration of the radicalisation since 2003. During this year, in particular, Morocco experienced its most serious terrorist attacks, when five simultaneous terrorist suicide bombings hit tourist and religious sites in Casablanca.

Before that date, however, a first attack - conducted by French nationals of Algerian origin - took place during the summer of 1994, totally altering the political relations between Morocco and Algeria.

Chronology of attacks claimed by radical Islamists in Morocco since 1994

- On August 24, 1994, a first bloody attack is committed in the front of the hotel Atlas Asni, in the tourist district, in Marrakech. There will be several victims, including a 34-year-old Spanish woman. The three terrorists have been sentenced to death and are still in central Kenitra prison. This attack resulted in a major political conflict between Morocco and Algeria, a conflict that caused the immediate closure of land borders between the two. Even today, with the exception of the border between the two Koreas, it is the only passage that remains closed, in times of peace, between two countries.
- On May 16, 2003, the Casablanca suicide bombings struck five places in the Moroccan economic metropolis, with a heavy toll: 33 dead in addition to 12 suicide bombers. Salafia Jihadia, linked to Al Qaeda, was the sponsor of these attacks. 2,000 radical Islamists had, in the wake, been arrested following these attacks.
- On March 12, 2007, an attack on a Casablanca cybercafé resulted in one death and four injuries. Thirty people were arrested and brought before the courts of several cities in Morocco.
- On April 14, 2007, two kamikaze brothers operated explosive belts near an American cultural center in the center of Casablanca.
- On April 28, 2011 in Marrakech, an attack, known as the Argana coffee bombing, left 17 dead and 20 wounded of various nationalities. The author of the attack, which took place in Jamaâ El F'na, tourist center of the city, is from Safi - a city that has lost much of its once flourishing industrial activities in the canning sector sardine, and where there is a high level of unemployment - and comes from the Salafist movement. He was sentenced to death.
- On 17 December 2018, near Mount Toubkal, in the High Atlas, in the village of Imlil, in the region of Marrakech, two young tourists, a Norwegian and a Danish,

were murdered in their sleep. This terrorist crime, carried out on the eve of the festivities of Christmas and New Year's Day, aimed in particular to strike a blow to the tourism sector in all of Morocco, and particularly in this region run at this time of year by thousands of tourists from both Europe and Morocco.

5. Policies and practices addressing radicalisation

Under the supervision of the king, Prince (Commander) of the Faithful, as specified in the constitution, the management of the religious sphere, and thus the preservation of a "Moderate Islam", in the Moroccan way is first conducted through the Public religious education which is mainly under the influence the Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs.

The Public religious education

In Morocco, this education is under the official supervision of the Ministry of National Education and Higher Education, but is oriented under the real influence of the Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs. The Ministry of national education is in charge of systematic Islamic training and education, throughout the different stages of modern education system, whether it is public or private, from pre-school till university; including elementary, middle and high school. The ministry of Habous contributes to the religious education sectors by training specialists in this field.

The Ministry of National Education and Higher Education controls multiple structures of religious education, from koranic pre-elementary education till specialized university training. It is also in charge of the organization of a specific learning called « original education ». It's a two level curriculum, primary and secondary. This kind of education results in receiving a baccalaureate's degree in « Original literature » paving the way to access university. In addition, primary and secondary modern schools provide a general and mandatory religious education for all students regardless of their level and orientation. The manuals of religious education clearly include ideological content more than cognitive/ educational one. At the level of higher education, religious education has been set up since the academic year of 1979-1980 in the framework of a specific department called « Islamic studies ». This department exists now in the fourteen faculties of literature and humanities of the country.

Moreover, at the level of higher education, the ministry of national education controls *Dar al Hadith al Hassaniya* institute, founded in 1965 by the late king Hassan II, and *Al Qarawiyyne university*, with its five faculties: Sharia faculty in Fes, Arabic language faculty in Marrakech, Oussoul Addine faculty in Tetouan, Sharia faculty in Agadir and Sharia Sciences faculty in Smara. In 2015, a new reorganization annexed *Dar al Hadith al Hassaniya* to *Al-Qaraouiyyine University*.

The academic staff of these new departments of "Islamic Studies" was made of Arabic language professors who were reconverted into theology and of theologians who did their training in the countries of the Arab Orient including Saudi Arabia, more specifically in the Wahhabi universities that were wide open to students from Muslim countries thanks to scholarships of the Saudi government. Moroccan *Ulamas* (Religious

scholars), who graduated from traditional theological institutes (i.e. Al Qarawiyyine University and *Dar al-Hadith al-Hassaniyya*), have not been involved in implementing religious education in modern faculties. Classical religious knowledge was thus abandoned under the pretext that it had become sclerotic. It has been replaced then by a new type of religious discourse intended to encompass and respond to contemporary world issues in the economic, political, social and philosophical fields. From then on, a new type of clerics emerged in Morocco who are more focused on ideological controversy than on theological exegesis (El Ayadi, 2004).

All university courses within these different structures of religious education aim at training specialized staff in different fields including religious science, Islamic law and Koranic exegesis, etc. These courses are specialized. They are intended for a part of the Moroccan school population. This population has not ceased to increase in number with the creation of new departments of Islamic studies. These departments enabled many of their graduates to obtain teaching posts of a new discipline called “Islamic education” introduced in schools curriculum at the end of the seventies - under the orders of the late King Hassan II who wanted to reduce the presence of Marxist/socialist streams in the Moroccan university. This discipline was the only subject making part of the school curriculum from the first year of primary school to the final year of high school. Thus, it has taken over the place of other subjects like philosophy and social sciences. It was therefore generalized, with a significant number of hours and coefficient, to all pupils in public and then private schools, without any consideration to different school grades or courses. Its main purpose was then the religious socialization of the entire school population. The textbooks of this subject praise Islam and speak willingly of the development of the “Islamic conscience” and the reinforcement of the attachment to Islam among younger generations called to claim loudly and clearly their Islamic identity against “the threats and dangers” of the cultural invasion (*al-Ghazw al-Fikri*), the destructive thinking (*al-Fikr al-Haddam*) and the Western intrusive thoughts (*al-Fikr al-Gharbi ad-Dakhil*) (Mohammed El Ayadi, 1999). This defensive and inclusive religious discourse on Islam has been widely disseminated through this subject. It became hegemonic in Moroccan Schools, and subsequently has had significant effects on the mentality, beliefs and behavior of school youth (El Ayadi, 1999).

The ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs

The ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs – a real State within the State – controls, for its part, six key areas:

- The structures of religious education covering the Koranic education, called renovated education, of which the ministry has been in charge since 1964;
- Schools said to be traditional, which are former centers of religious learning, scattered throughout Morocco, and whose mission is to train junior clerics such as preachers, muezzins and imams of mosques. According to the census of the Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs conducted in the school year 2017-2018, there are 286 traditional schools. 50% of these schools are located in the regions of Souss-Massa (the birthplace of the current prime minister) and Tangier-Tetouan-Al Huceima (the region from which many Moroccan fighters left

between 2011 and 2016 towards the Syrian and Iraqi war fields). 99.56% of these schools are annexed to a mosque and 71.68% are run by associations;

- The religious science Chairs held by the *Ulemas* (religious scholars) appointed by the ministry in the main mosques of the country;
- An Islamic center for the training of religious managers. It was founded in 1974 and was autonomous before being taken under the wings of the Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs in 1985.
- Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, *Morshidin* (male religious counselors) and *Morshidat* (female religious counselors) in Rabat. This institute was founded in 2004 and then opened its doors to foreign students in 2015. In 2019, it had more than 1,300 students from 11 countries, including 150 women, alongside Moroccan students. Foreign students come mainly from sub-Saharan African countries, including Mali, Guinea Conakry, Ivory coast, Senegal, Chad and Niger. In accordance with an official French Moroccan agreement signed in 2016, about fifty French students join the institute each year. These students follow a three-year course devoted to Islamic sciences, humanities, Jewish culture and the introduction to Christianity.
- The Mohammed VI Foundation of African Ulemas. It was founded in June 2015 and designed to bring together Muslim scholars of the continent to “take any initiative to integrate the religious values of tolerance in any reform that development actions in Africa are subject to”.

The aim of this paragraph, which will be developed further in a subsequent phase of the project, is to understand foundations of the religious teachings in the curriculums of different educational sectors in Morocco. Understanding these religious teachings sheds certainly the light on one of the most determining factors in the emergence and development of the Islamist radicalization phenomenon within the Moroccan society. In fact, we feel that people who have adopted the sectarian religious ideology of “jihadist Salafism” and who are radicalized in Morocco were, in their vast majority, influenced by the Islamic teachings provided in the different public and private educational systems throughout the country (we will come back to this point when analysing the curricula followed in these structures as well as the school books attached to them).

6. Some concluding remarks

All the elements - which will be developed later - and which were introduced in the paragraph on “Violent religious radicalisation challenges” as well as the Chronology of attacks claimed by radical Islamists in Morocco since 1994 show that a large number of Moroccans, young people in particular, have become radicalized over the past 30/35 years, and have started violent actions - both in Morocco and abroad - over the last twenty five years.

This happened (is happening) despite:

- The role of Commander of the believers devolved by the Constitution to the King;

- All the legislative arsenal tending to “protect” Moroccan society against religious radicalization;
- The political discourse seeking to accredit the idea of a moderate and open Moroccan Islam on its international humanist environment;
- The control exercised by the Ministry of Habous and Islamic affairs on the majority of mosques in the country and on large parts of the educational system
- The political (and often financial) control over public and private media.

However, if the reality of the ground on the front of radicalization does not seem to correspond to what the Moroccan rulers want - or say they are wishing - is that powerful factors are acting within Moroccan society as in some of Morocco's International relationships.

In Morocco itself, it is possible to mention:

- The strengthening of conservative currents within society, in cities as in rural areas, in relation with the reforms introduced in the Moroccan educational system since the 1970s. Additionally with the penetration, since the 1990s, of Arab satellite televisions, easily accessible to illiterate women as well as to the most disadvantaged social strata, as it is one of their very few distractions;
- The socio-economic situation, as presented succinctly above, marked by a high level unemployment, among young people and graduates in particular, a high precariousness of a large part of the population as well as the difficulties of access to basic public services (of which school, health or water and sanitation);
- The high level of illiteracy still prevailing among the population, and the fact that the official and private media play no role in the education of society and in its possible openness to the principles and universal human values;
- The difficulties of organization and expression in (normal) political parties and also the impossibility of controlling the economic or political decisions engaging society. This gives rise to a fatalistic approach in many people, especially the poorest, who rely on God to solve their problems. Hence the great effect of the slogan “Islam is the solution”, very often heard during the demonstrations/protests organized by Islamist currents.

As regards to the role of Morocco's international relations in the process of radicalization of part of its population, it should be noted that the important influence of some Gulf countries (particularly since the 1980s and the crisis of the debt that Morocco experienced in 1982/1983) on Moroccan domestic politics as well as on the religious orientations of the society, have gone hand-in-hand with the funding that countries like Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and, above all, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are giving to Morocco in parallel with their own enrichment.

At this level, it seems obvious that if Morocco had sufficiently developed its economy, it would have had no need for foreign aid - including that coming from Arab countries - and from that, it would not have been submitted to any external ideological or religious influence.

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Project name:

Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing Together European and Asian Perspectives

Project Acronym: GREASE

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November 2019

Document series reference: D2.1 Country Reports



This document can be downloaded from the publications section of the GREASE website at <http://grease.eui.eu/>

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The GREASE project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement number 770640