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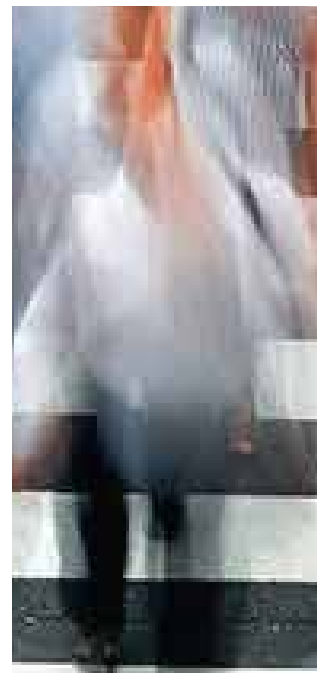
National Approaches to Extremism

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COUNTRY REPORTS ON NATIONAL APPROACHES TO EXTREMISM

Framing Violent Extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans

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Overview

Morocco is no stranger to violent extremism. This has become more apparent since the terrorist attack in Casablanca on 16 May 2003. This is not the first manifestation of violent extremism in its terrorist form in Morocco; there have been signs of urgency regarding suicide terrorism. Ever since, the threats of violent extremism have weighed heavily on the Kingdom's security policy. We will present this report in two parts. The first part will be an overview of the country and the context of violent extremism, as well as the literature on the subject in Morocco, which shows the difficulty of defining violent extremism. In the second part we will address all the points related to the state's strategy to combat violent extremism. This will enable us to see how Morocco has implemented *wasati* Islam ("centrist or mainstream Islam"). In Morocco, the politico-religious functioning is based on the figure of the King, Commander of the Faithful, who combines spiritual and temporal authority. The religious approach is based on a moderate Islam, commonly known as *wasati* ("Islam of the golden mean") to combat fundamentalism. *Wasati* Islam makes an interpretation of the *Sharia* that is adapted to the context as stated in the preamble to the 2011 Constitution. It is a question of reconciling the "pre-eminence granted to the Muslim religion" with "attachment to the values of openness, moderation, tolerance and dialogue." This *wasati* Islam is also reflected in practice with the reform of the Moudawana, the Moroccan Personal Status Code in the Family Law in 2003, a reform that aimed to give more rights to women based on the principle of a *wasati* Islam.

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COUNTRY PROFILE

Government system

Morocco is a country in North Africa. It is located between the Atlantic coast and the Mediterranean Sea, and is characterised by its Berber, Arab and European influences. The Alaouite dynasty has ruled the country since the 17th century, and it is one of the oldest dynasties in the world. Its king is an omnipresent one, holding a central position in the political system despite the change of Constitution in 2011, following the events of the Arab Spring, and the rise of the Islamists to power in that same year. The uprising in the region, particularly in Tunisia, triggered a broad political protest led by the 20 February Movement, a movement formed by young people and linked by the extreme-left Nahj party and the Islamist Al-Adl wal Ihsane (Justice and Spirituality) movement (a group banned in Morocco). The main slogan of the movement was: "No to the combination of political and economic power" and was a message to the King. In order to confirm the exceptional status claimed by the monarchy, the King withdrew his investments in the food sector. Al Mada is a private Moroccan investment fund whose main shareholder is the royal family and that operates in several activities including distribution, banking, real estate, mining and construction, telecommunications, energy and insurance. It is present in 24 countries, particularly Africa, and is enhanced by a solid financial fund estimated at EUR 6 billion. The King very quickly proceeded to a political reform which resulted in a new Constitution in 2011 (Hibou, 2011). The PJD (Party of Justice and Development) was the big winner because it knew how to set up its political chessboard by claiming its support for the 20 February Movement, while serving the palace. It finally turned its back on the Movement just after winning the elections. The PJD is the only party that embodies social legitimacy and has an electorate that votes. The PJD has been an important element in stirring up anger on the streets.

Thus, since 2011, the constitutional regime of the Kingdom has been founded on the collaboration of the powers between the King and the Head of Government (Mouna, 2016). The King appoints the Head of Government from within the political party that wins the elections for the House of Representatives, and with a view to their results. The King can, on his initiative, and after consultation with the Head of Government, appoint the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Religious Affairs, and the Interior. These three ministers are called the ministers of sovereignty¹, because they embody the power of the state. The Islamists prefer to leave much of their constitutionally guaranteed power to the monarch whereas what matters to the ruling PJD is bringing it closer to the monarchy (Bendourou et al., 2014).

Population

Out of the thirty-six million people (Haut Commissariat au Plan Maroc, HCP) of the population in Morocco, Muslims represent 99.9%, and only 0.1% are Jewish (Pew Research Center, 2012). Morocco has undergone a rapid demographic transition by bringing in a relatively short period of time a large decline in fertility, which today stands at 2.38 children per woman. The Kingdom has been divided into 12 regions since the 2011 Constitution. These regions are supposed to be autonomous in their management but this autonomy does not exist in reality, and the central state continues to exercise full power over them. The population is dominated by young people, particularly in their 20s and 30s, which is not only the result of a population imbalance but also an imbalance in terms of population distribution by region. We can thus see that most of the population is concentrated on the Atlantic side or in centres of great economic activity, such as fishing and industry, as shown in this table.

TABLE 1.

1	Casablanca-Settat	6,861,739	19,448 km ²
2	Rabat-Salé-Kenitra	4,580,866	18,194 km ²
3	Marrakech-Safi	4,520,569	39,167 km ²
4	Fez-Meknes	4,236,892	40,075 km ²
5	Tanger-Tetouan-Al Hoceima	3,556,729	13,712 km ²
6	Souss-Massa	2,676,847	53,789 km ²
7	Béni Mellal-Khenifra	2,520,776	41,033 km ²
8	Oriental	2,314,346	90,127 km ²
9	Drâa-Tafilalet	1,635,008	132,167 km ²
10	Guelmim-Oued Noun	433,757	46,108 km ²
11	Laâyoune-Sakia El Hamra	367,758	140,018 km ²
12	Dakhla-Oued Ed Dahab	142,955	130,898 km ²

Own production. Source: Pew Research Center, 2012

This regional distribution of the population is followed by a great unevenness in terms of regional participation in the national GDP (Gross Domestic Product). It is especially noteworthy that the regions of Casablanca, Rabat-Salé-Kenitra and Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima contribute 58.2% of the national GDP. We also learn that four regions, Fez-Meknes with 9%, Marrakech-Safi with 8.8%, Souss-Massa with 6.7% and Beni Mellal-Khenifra with 5.6%, have generated 30.1% of GDP.

¹ Ministries of sovereignty are namely Ministries of the Interior, Religious Affairs and Foreign Affairs.

At the linguistic level, according to the 2014 General Census of Population and Housing (RGPH), Darija (Moroccan Arabic) remains the first language used in Morocco (91% of responses collected). The Amazigh languages, Tachelhit, Tamazight and Tarifit, occupy secondary positions behind Darija.

TABLE 2. Local languages used in Morocco (non-exclusive)

Indicator	Urban	Rural	RGPH 2014	Total RGPH 2004
Darija	96.3	82.7	90.9	89.8
Tachelhit	11.5	18.2	14.1	14.6
Tamazight	5.1	12.2	7.9	8.8
Tarifit	3.8	4.4	4.0	4.8
Hassania	1.2	0.3	0.8	0.7

Own Production. Source: RGPH 2004 and 2014

The interesting fact about the linguistic mapping of Morocco is that Tachelhit and Tamazight have clusters of speakers outside of their historical territories in many parts of the country due to spatial mobility. Data from the RGPH 2014 indicates that Rif Tarifit is far less widespread outside the Rif region.

Main ethnic/religious groups

Morocco is an Amazigh country with Arab, Andalusian and European cultural diversity. However, after independence in 1956, Arabic became the official language of the country. Amazighity was excluded or even fought against. It was not until 2001 that the Amazigh language was recognised through the creation of the IRCAM (Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture). It is only with the new Constitution that the country has introduced Amazigh as an official language. According to the 2014 census, the percentage of Moroccans who express themselves in Amazigh went from 28% in 2004 to 26.7% in 2014. This decrease has been contested by Ahmed Boukous, President of the IRCAM, and the Amazigh movement in Morocco (Benlarbi et al., 2018).

The Jewish community is estimated at 5000, most of them have left Morocco to live in Israel (Mdidech, 2007), this exodus followed the aspirations of Casablanca in 2002, which targeted the Synagogue (Bladi.net, 2016). Certain information sites speak of 800,000 Moroccan-origin Jews living in Israel, stating that “to better understand the figures, we must first mention the criteria taken into account. Thus, for the Ministry, a Moroccan Resident Abroad (MRE) is a person who has left the country since independence but maintains a close link with his or her country of origin. This may therefore be the first, second or even third generation.”

CONTEXTUALISATION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND RADICALISATION IN THE COUNTRY

Overview of radicalisation and violent extremism

On 24 August 1994 Morocco experienced its first assault at the Atlas-Asni Hotel in Marrakech, a continuation of the fratricidal war in Algeria. It resulted in the closure of the borders between Morocco and Algeria. Judging that the young Frenchmen of Algerian origin who committed the attack were working with the Algerian regime, Morocco decided to close its borders. It was not until 2003 that Morocco was hit by a second more deadly attack, this time in Casablanca, which killed 33 civilians and 12 jihadists. On the night of 16 May 2003, 14 terrorists launched a series of suicide bombing attacks on various hotels, restaurants and community centres in Casablanca. These attacks targeted mainly the European community and the Moroccan Jewish community.

The suicide bombers are young members of Salafia from the poor neighbourhoods of Casablanca, particularly Sidi Moumen., a group that is reminiscent of Al-Qaeda. The bloodiest attack occurred in the Casa de España restaurant, where several customers were dining or playing bingo. Twenty people were killed. The May 2003 attacks are the most serious acts of terrorism in the history of Morocco. One week after the events, Parliament passed a law that expanded a person's legal detention time from eight to 12 weeks, without going before a court. Following these terrorist attacks, 200 arrests were made.

Although these were not the first manifestations of violent extremism in their terrorist form in Morocco (Dialmy, 2005; Alonso and García Rey, 2007), there were signs of suicide terrorism. Ever since, violent extremism threats have weighed heavily on the Kingdom's security policy. The currents that were present in Morocco, such as Sirat al-Mustaqim/"the True Path", and "Excommunication and Exile/*Al-Takfir wal Hijra*", as well as "Salafism of *Jihad/Salafiya Jihadiya*", were at the origin of the bombings that took place at five sites in Casablanca in May 2003. Since the war in Syria, Morocco has experienced a new wave of extremism, outwardly oriented towards a globalised radical Islam.

Citizens reported to have joined ISIS and other violent movements inside and outside the country

According to the Directorate General of Studies and Documentation (DGED) data, more than 1,500 Moroccan citizens left the country to join jihad in Iraq and Syria until mid-2017. This number is supplemented by between 1,000 and 2,000 nationals or bi-nationals residing abroad. The figure comes from the DGED's external information in 2014. According to the head of the DGED, at least 251 of them died (219 in Syria and 32 in Iraq). Some Moroccan jihadists hold positions of responsibility within the "Islamic state" (Justice, Finance, Interior), the most emblematic figure being the Amir who was in charge of the Torkman region (nicknamed Sham al-Islam/the arrow of Islam), as well as Ibrahim Benchekroun, alias Abu Ahmad al-Maghribi, who operated in the vicinity of Latakia. They were known to be tough in battle but had a very low level of education compared to the Iraqi and Saudi jihadists. But, why are the Moroccans radicalising? For Rida Benotmane, a former Islamist prisoner, now a blogger and an expert on the jihadi movement, we have to go back several years to better understand the attraction exerted by ISIS on a certain Moroccan youth. "The authorities have prepared the ground," he explains. For years, they allowed wahhabist thought to develop, which advocates a literalist Islam, especially in the North. In the name of a certain political equilibrium, this current was not only tolerated but also promoted, encouraging some Moroccans who find themselves more in a stricter and more combative Islam to take the plunge (Larbi, 2014). Morocco is leader in the fight against terrorism, with more than 200 jihadists returning to Morocco, detained and brought to justice by 2018.

Between 2002 and 2018, 183 terrorist cells were dismantled by elite Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation (BCIJ) units, preventing 361 planned attacks, said Abdelhak Khiame, Director of the BCIJ, and 62 of the 183 cells dismantled were directly linked to ISIS. These arrested felons have all pledged allegiance to ISIS. These are not local terrorist groups but rather individuals who organise themselves, appoint a leader and pledge allegiance to Islamic State. Most of these cells have ties with ISIS members back in Morocco.

Presence of radical and violent groups in the country

Violent radicalism is distributed as follows: Tangier 16%, Fez 15%, Casablanca 14%, Tetouan 13% and Salé 9%, of the radicals going to join war starting in 2011 (Masbah, 2019: 189). The cities of Tangier and Tetouan

alone account for 29%. Thus, Tangier provides 18.5 jihadists per 100,000 inhabitants, while Tetouan provides 28 per 100,000 inhabitants. This is explained by structural factors:

- the massive and uncontrolled urbanisation that characterise both cities;
- the predominance of illegal activities (drugs and smuggling);
- the high unemployment rate among youth;
- the rooting of wahhabism in these two cities since the 1980s;
- and, finally, the proximity of the enclave of Ceuta, which is a major hotbed of radicals who played an important role in the departure to Syria.

The term jihad is contextually twisted to the *Salafiya* movement wherever the behavioural factor is at stake. The economic, social, cultural, political and psychological dimensions are also important factors in understanding and explaining the phenomenon (although these factors are not made explicit and are taken for granted). All these dimensions are considered on the basis of the distinction between the theoretical-ideological, organisational/financial and executive levels. Such a position is justified as follows: “Moroccan terrorist Islamism must be considered as a total social fact. For it is not only an exchange of violence [...] but the dynamic form of a phenomenon that involves all the wheels of society” (Aboulouz, 2013: 3). Seen from a procedural perspective, the integration of a terrorist group is interpreted as the culmination of a process of de-conditioning and repackaging (Aboulouz, 2013: 10). The organisations studied in this framework are the following: Al-Takfir wal Hijra, Salifiya Jihadiya and Sirat al-Mustaqim.

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Moroccan Islamism (Dialmy, 2000) is analysed from the same perspective. This time, Islamism is understood in relation to the rules of the game established by the political regime in the aftermath of independence. All forms of Islamism are understood as an Islamist movement (brotherhoods, associations, ulema, Sufism, etc.). Several works have attempted to look into the archaeology of radicalism in Morocco, returning to the radicalism of the 1970s (Zeghal, 2005). Thus, the assassination of one of the figures of the left on 18 December 1975, Omar Benjelloun, was the first manifestation of violent extremism motivated by religious ideology.² What is highlighted is the ideology, the evolution and the leaders of the three organisations of Islamism, which are Shabiba Islamiya (Islamic Youth), Al-Jamâ'a al islamiya / Harakat al-Islah wal Tajdid, and Al-Adl wal Ihsan (Fadil, 2018). The official support of wahhabism (Alonso and García Rey, 2007) since the 1960s would later produce a kind of boomerang effect. In other words, the wahhabist ideology supported by the political regime will constitute the main foundation for violent extremism.

It is said that violent extremism in Morocco is not a local phenomenon. It has transnational dimensions. Whether it concerns the procedures for carrying out terrorist attacks, such as those in Casablanca on the 16 May 2003, the funding resources or the emergence of Moroccan jihadists, violent extremism is a phenomenon that transcends national borders (Clément, 2006). Three factors are put forward to explain its emergence and evolution:

- the influence of international jihadism on potential Moroccan jihadists;
- the growing Islamisation of society;
- and the deterioration of the socio-economic conditions of the populations.

² The Islamist Youth, who was funded by Abdelkrim Motii (1969), was the main culprit in this assassination.

In addition to these factors, there are other elements that promote jihadism, namely: media propaganda and distribution of CDs, cassettes and paperbacks funded by wahhabism. Regarding of Abdessamad Dialmy's studies, the authors do not hesitate to point to the political regime of King Hassan II. What was supported and encouraged to confront the leftist forces (the wahhabist ideology) will become a challenge and a threat to the political regime.

Framing radicalisation and violent extremism

Scientific and academic state of the art

As a culminating point, research into violent extremism has posed one question: what is radicalisation? What are the reasons for this radicalism? Among the comprehensive typologies of violent extremism, El Mostapha Rezrazi has established nine based on the development of extremism in prisons, the framework of which was responsive to the country's political situation. Before presenting it, it must be said that this typology seeks to trace the historical evolution of radical Islamism of Islamic youth in Morocco starting in the 1970s.

- The first type is between 1975 and 1988 (the period between the assassination of Omar Benjelloun and the fragmentation of Islamic youth).
- The second covers the period between 1988 and 1998 (emergence of small jihadist groups and attacks on the Atlas Asni hotel in Marrakech in 1994).
- The third covers the period between 1998 and 2001 (return of Moroccan fighters from Afghanistan).
- The fourth covers the period between 2001 and 2003 (massive return of Moroccan fighters fleeing the US War against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda and the rise of small groups coordinating campaigns to encourage virtue and prevent vice).
- The fifth covers the period between 2003 and 2005 (attacks of 16 May 2003 in Casablanca).
- The sixth covers the period between 2005 and 2007 (events taking place in the cities of Casablanca and Meknes).
- The seventh goes from 2011 to 2012 (attack on the Argana restaurant in the city of Marrakech).
- The eighth from 2013 to 2017 (which happens to coincide with the decadence of Al-Qaeda and the birth of ISIS).
- And, the ninth begins in 2017 and corresponds to the return of Moroccan fighters to Syria and Iraq (Ibid).

These typologies map the historical transition from the secret movement of the Muslim Brotherhood to the jihadist movements. In summary, there is a transition from Islamic violence targeting left-wing leaders (killed or assassinated by Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups, as in the case of Shabiba Islamiya in Morocco) to mainstream violence attacking society and its way of life.

However, the 2003 attack was notable, launching the first report on terrorism in Morocco. Without seeking to find a definition, this study attempts to clarify the socio-economic motives for terrorism, leaving it up to the state to include legal interpretations, which can be seen in the following pages (Dialmy, 2005). The latter is defined as "all the small groups which, in the name of Islam and through the use of physical violence, challenge the Islamity of the so-called Muslim societies and states, struggling for an international order defined as anti-Islamic" (Aboulouz, 2013). What is considered Moroccan Islamism is understood as a total social phenomenon. Otherwise, Islam alone must not be admitted as the sole cause of terrorism. A specific ideological linkage between "Salafism" and jihad ought to be mentioned at the outset. The movement starts and remains almost

centred around the spiritual and dogmatic willingness to limit both the Islamic creed and laws to the only authentic versions inherited from the past. The distance caused by the Western cultural impact and policy has contributed to the framing of a recursive historicity, which prunes the legacy to the detriment of the present age.

Prominent studies

Following studies conducted on Moroccan combatants abroad (in this case Syria and Libya), Mohamed Masbah (2015) uses the theory of “push and pull” factors to explain this phenomenon. Masbah distinguishes between political, logistical, sociological and ideological factors: a) Political factors: these refer to the attitude expressed by the Moroccan political regime with regard to the revolution in Syria. It supported the Syrian opposition by hosting the fourth meeting of the group of friends of the Syrian people (December 2018). This event was interpreted by the Moroccan jihadis as a sign favourable to their posture; b) Logistical factors: these are explained by a relatively easy trip to Syria and the expenses related to it (Mohammed V airport in Casablanca, Istanbul airport, Syria); c.) Sociological factors: these are explained by socio-economic conditions. With the statistics of a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Northern Morocco in support, the author explains that two thirds of the young people who joined jihad (foreign Moroccan fighters) are under 25. In addition, three-quarters of them come from the underprivileged social strata living in shantytowns in medium and large cities (Masbah, 2015: 3). The fact that the majority of Moroccan jihadis (foreign fighters) belong to the cities of the north is explained by their massive and uncontrolled urbanisation in recent decades, as well as youth unemployment; and d) Ideological factors: these are justified by the *fatwas* of the *Sheikh* that have incited jihad against the regime of Bashar Al-Assad, as well as the obligatory coming to the Sunni for help.

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Jihadis establish religious and non-religious arguments to justify their recruitments. For religious arguments, they see Syria as the place of the last battle between believers and non-believers. And the non-religious arguments are rooted in frustrations related to corruption and the semi-authoritarian character of Morocco, which they blame for being too close to Western countries.

In the same context, the author provides another study to understand the motives and stages of recruitment of Moroccan combatants abroad (Masbah, 2019). In this regard, he shows that these motives are psychological, ideological and behavioural (Masbah, 2019: 187). Each of these motives is associated with a phase of recruitment: psychological motives are related to the phase of sympathy with extremist groups and it is considered a “rite of passage”; ideological motives are related to the phase of identification with the ideology of Jihadism and behavioural motives are related to the action that results in the journey to Syria for jihad (Masbah, 2019: 188).

However, before presenting the results of these studies, it is important to point out the following concerning this work:

1. Despite the absence of a definition, these studies tend to show violent extremism as being of a foreign origin, especially in the Gulf countries. As a result, Moroccan Islam is represented as tolerant and non-violent/Islam *wasati* Islam. Thus, wahhabist extremism is perceived as threatening the cohesion of the Ummah/Moroccan community, where the notion of Ummah and the state merge into each other, especially during the attacks.
2. These works are either study reports or journalistic investigations, such as the analysis conducted in specialist reports (Houdaifa, 2017), or occasionally both.

3. Most of these studies tend to be assimilated into the state discourse, which has classified terrorism as any form of attack on the security of the state and of individuals.

We have seen that these works have essentially centred on a macro approach, with a neglect of the place of women in violent radicalism. The only work on women was carried out by Najat Bassou (2019) as her PhD thesis is centred on female radicalism. Bassou has tried to use individual trajectories to capture the attitudes and desires that help shape the radicals' choice of life. She distinguishes three projects that have led to the radicalisation of girls: the first refers to the search for a social position. These are girls who have gone through a situation of anomie, have a strong personality, and are looking for recognition. For these girls, radicalisation presents an escape route and a means of acquiring social status, and it is in this context that ISIS appears as a model of achievement. The second project concerns girls with attitudes of altruism. The images of children and civilians massacred are psychological reasons among others leading them to justify their jihadis engagement. Bassou shows that these girls have already experienced the trauma of death and long-lasting mourning. For her, this could explain their conversion. And the third project comes from a desire for marriage and the little love stories behind it. In the Moroccan context these girls are trying to escape social misery through marriage. Some girls are attracted by the idea of becoming wives of fighters, future martyrs.

This thesis manages to understand radicalism through individual processes and trajectories and concludes that the problem of radicalisation is rather political. Radicalisation can only be perceived through individual trajectories; these trajectories are marked by suffering and make it possible to see the social, familial, educational and also political disengagement that pushes to radicalisation.

Main research and knowledge producers

Indeed, the work highlighted is characterised by general analyses and conclusions, and many aspects of disarticulation are noticeable, namely between the advanced methodology and the analyses and conclusions developed (especially in the case of the work of Abdessamad Dialmy). The reader might have the impression that condemnation and value judgments, based on the existence of underlying ideological preferences, take precedence over the neutral and in-depth sociological analysis of the organisations studied. Thus, the process of radicalisation is sometimes understood in a mechanical and caricaturist way (compared to more detailed studies on the same phenomenon). A simplistic prototype of violent extremist can be identified: poor young individuals, with a low level of education, who have to some extent integrated violent extremism, sometimes unaware of their ideological situation. The researcher claims that people are sometimes subjected to a process of indoctrination in the houses of the Sheikh-Shuyukh by means of audio cassettes or in mosques, etc.. In addition, this work is broadly based on data relayed by newspapers or security services. This could even be the reason behind its weakness in terms of analyses and development. It has aimed to produce a stereotypical image of religious radicalism, a rather constructed cultural ideal type far away from real world dynamics.

In the Moroccan context "cognitive radicalisation" differs from "ideological radicalisation". In fact, those who engage in violent acts represent a very small percentage compared to those who sympathise, adopt or embrace radical ideologies. The first inclination could be heuristically described as "DIY" radicalisation and it is widespread in the Moroccan social context (Filali, 2019). One could term a "radicalisation of

consciousness” as one that faithfully reflects the case in Morocco; this radicalisation has been reinforced by the images of children killed in Syria. This takeover has long been connected to the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, especially in the books of the two Egyptian leaders Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. Around the time, this movement was simply called the Sahwa Islamiya/Islamic Awakening. This ideological awakening has become a jihadist activity since the war in Afghanistan, which began in 1979. This portrayal of defeat in the face of the tragedy is accentuated by the two wars in Iraq and the Israeli violence in Gaza. The depictions revealed by the newspapers, however, fostered this Islamisation of consciousness, where the departure to Syria is viewed as a heroic act by the community.

Defining violent extremism and radicalisation

Violent extremism remains difficult for the perpetrators in Morocco; it is linked to a global context of globalisation. In the difficulty of finding a local definition, and probably even a lack of interest in the definition, the work on the subject has sought to explore the regional origins of this violent extremism (Masbah, 2015).

This literature seeks to provide models of extremism. It is tempting to provide many patterns to understand the motivations that drive individuals to join violent extremist groups. For instance, motivations can be traced back to the local characteristics of the regions to which the extremists belong (Pargeter, 2009). The next step is to understand why violent extremists often belong to particular regions; particularly the Tangier-Tetouan-Al-Hoceima region in the case of Morocco.³The objective is to see whether there is a relationship between localism and Islamist activism. Thus, the history of this region and the socio-economic characteristics of its populations are mobilised to provide some elements of a possible answer. Their Amazigh character, their complicated history with the central power and their marginalisation during a long period of time by the central power (Mouna, 2018) are all reasons behind their radicalism.

In a similar perspective, the integration of violent extremism (in its jihadist form) is explained by socio-economic, political and identity factors. In a first case, the focus is on youth unemployment, lack of opportunities and social injustice. In a second case, there is an emphasis on corruption. In a third case, the identity crisis among young people is considered (in this case young girls). This is due either to the feeling of being underestimated in one's family or in society in general (Ennaji, 2016).

Definition targets

The definition given to the extreme violence only refers to the Salafist movement, this definition does not include the violence of the extreme left in Morocco, especially in the academic world. This definition of violent extremism concerns only the actors of *salafiya jihadiya*, it excludes all forms of violence that exist within the university, whether it is that of the extreme left or the Amazigh movement.

Methodologies employed to study violent extremism and radicalisation

The studies mentioned previously were essentially based on a diachronic reading of the evolution of the Salafist movement in Morocco. Most of them have been reports sponsored by institutional actors, including transcripts of interviews with former members of the Moroccan Salafist movement. However, violent extremism

³ The cities of Casablanca, Fez and Salé are also known for the existence of violent extremism.

has not been the subject of research in Morocco in the sociological sense of the term, probably due to the difficulty of access to the field. The methodology remains dependent on a descriptive approach to the evolution of jihadist and wahhabist ideology in Morocco.

Strategies to counter/prevent Violent Extremism and Radicalisation (C/PVE)

C/PVE INITIATIVES

Mapping of C/PVE actors

Since the 2003 attacks, the state has attempted to counter radicalisation by returning to what is called the Moroccan Islam, an Islam that is tolerant and open to the world. This strategy has also been accompanied by a broad repression of the Salafism circuit in Morocco. Hundreds of Salafists were put in prison between 2003 and 2008 and this clean slate practised by the country triggered a broad protest against Law 03-03 on the Fight against Terrorism. With this law, Morocco announced the end of the policy of laxity (Bras, 2007; Tamburini, 2018). It describes terrorism as any act that has a deliberate association with “an individual or collective enterprise with the aim of seriously undermining public order by intimidation, terror or violence. Although violence and terror are materialised acts, the notion of intimidation remains ambiguous; it requires the judge to identify all acts that are not acts of aggression or terror as acts of terrorism. To reinforce its anti-terrorist legislation, on 14 January 2015 Morocco passed Law 86-14, which completes Law 03-03, which aimed to harden the pursuit against the acts of violent terrorism, and to punish the fact of joining or wanting to join a terrorist group, even if the terrorist acts do not aim to harm Morocco and its interests, in order to fight against the departure of jihadist to Iraq or Syria. The law also penalises any form of apology for terrorism.

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Public policies and programmes

In order to control the influence of radicals, the Moroccan state has put in place several programmes and initiatives, summarised next:

1. The religious and institutional aspect: The religious factor refers to the nature of the political regime, of which the high religious authority is also the high political authority (the King is the Commander of Faithful/*Amir al Muminin*). Moreover, the reform of the religious domain plays a considerable role in the prevention of violent extremism. This level of reform is also called the institutional level. In a second phase, the state has carried out a reform of the religious fields, in particular by strengthening the role of religious authorities at the local level but also by institutionalising the role of the imams of the mosques. Thus, imams and Friday sermons are supervised by the Ministry of Habous/Religious Affairs, and no one has the right to speak in mosques without the permission of the authorities. The repositioning in the religious field has resulted in the creation of several institutions:
 - The Higher Council of Ulemas, created on 8 April 1981;
 - Rabita Mohammadia, created in 2006, an interest association that promotes an open and tolerant Islam;
 - the Moroccan Council of Ulemas for Europe, created by Dahir n°1.03.300 of 22 April 2004;
 - the restructuring of *Dar El-Hadith El-Hassania*, one of the most renowned religious teaching institutions in Morocco;
 - the Mohammed VI Foundation for the Promotion of the Social Works of Religious Officers, established on 23 February 2010;

- the Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, *Morshidin* (male religious counsellors) and *Morshidat* (female religious counsellors), created 20 May 2014;
- the Mohammed VI Foundation of African Ulemas, created on 13 July 2015;
- the School of Islamic Sciences under the Foundation of the Hassan II Mosque, reorganised by Dahir No. 1.16.159 of 14 September 2016;
- *Jamia Al Quaraouiyine*, created 14 September 2016.

The objective of these institutions is to control the evolution of Islam not only in Morocco and Europe, but also in West Africa, where Morocco exerts an important religious influence. These institutions aim to control both the religious discourse and the religious learning. Actors trained within these institutions have become the spokespersons of Moroccan Islam in the media. Such a strategy is taken to underline the legitimacy of the state as a source of theological information and as a major actor in the religious field.

2. Educational aspect: The state has also proceeded to regulate the educational field by closing hundreds of Quranic schools and by implementing a reform in 2008 that recognises the *taelim attiq*/authentic teaching. Through this religious training the state has set up a religious training that ensures the seizure of power over the religious. At the level of so-called modern education, the state has reviewed all the literature on Islamic education, with the introduction of the values of the Moroccan Ummah, with an Islam: *Maliki Sunni*, *Junaydi* and *Ashari*, an Islam close to Sufi practice than to wahhabist orthodoxy.

3. The socio-economic level: the National Human Development Initiative was created in 2004. The aim of this initiative was to combat the socio-economic factors that accentuate radicalisation (CESE, 2018). Despite the mixed results of this initiative, it has succeeded in limiting the scope of violent extremism. This initiative was stopped in 2008, and the King set up a new commission to make a new proposal for a new socio-economic programme.

4. From a legal and security perspective: since the attacks of 2003, Morocco has passed Law 03-03 (on the Fight against Terrorism). But since 2015 Morocco has set up the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation (*Bureau Central d'Investigation Judiciaire*, BCIJ), a high-level service that has since managed to unravel hundreds of dormant terrorist cells. In the same context, until 12 October 2018, approximately 183 cells have been dismantled. The total number of "devastating projects" envisaged was approximately 361. The number of extremists arrested was 3,129. On the basis of such a total, 292 persons had a criminal record. The number of arrests made in the context of operations ordered by the BCIJ was approximately 902. Among them were 14 women, 29 minors and 22 foreigners. On 27 October 2014, the Kingdom launched the Hadar ("Precaution") system, a surveillance system designed to secure the country's most sensitive points (airports, public squares, etc.) and protect citizens and foreign visitors through the deployment of joint units.

5. Revision programme *Musalaha*/Reconciliation: the interest is not only in the process of radicalisation but also oriented towards the process of de-radicalisation. The latter is divided into three stages: personal initiatives to revise extremist ideas (commonly known as *mouarajaat*); peer educator programmes initiated by the Rabita Mohammadia of the Ulemas; *Musalaha*/reconciliation. The official decreeing programme brought together former jihadi members tried in connection with the 2003

Casablanca attacks. These former extremists declared their submission to the king as the Commander of the Faithful. The aim of this policy was to recruit former jihadis into the state's ideology.

6. Media: in 2005, Morocco launched Assadissa, a television channel dedicated specifically to the religious sphere. The aim is to respond to the religious questions raised on the Middle Eastern channels that propagate the wahhabist discourse. In parallel to the television channel, a radio station is also being launched at the national level. Television also broadcasts courses and sermons from the mosques as part of a programme to combat illiteracy, presented by female guides/*Murshidat* mainly for women.

Official definitions of violent extremism and radicalisation

The Moroccan Government uses a broad definition of terrorism to convict hundreds of people suspected of belonging to terrorist cells. Many are held in secret for weeks and are subjected to torture. As a result, there is no definition of violent extremism, the state speaks only of terrorist acts, and extremism does not come under the jurisdiction of the courts.

Civil society

It is important to remember that this case involves several tensions between the state and certain civil society actors, in particular, the human rights associations (Mouna, 2020). The latter rejects the state's management of radicalism files, considering it as a means for it to settle these scores with its adversaries, given that the definition of violent extremism is absent. However, we observe several initiatives made by the European organisations in Morocco, especially German. The lack of a civil society recognised by international organisations has hindered the latter to set up awareness-raising initiatives for civil society participants, as well as research papers on the role of young people. Such papers give rise to meetings, most often held in Rabat. In our view, these programmes fail to represent a step forward in terms of knowledge on the subject, with almost no direct effects on young people. Elsewhere, the only association confronting the state is the Moroccan Human Rights Group, which is opposing Law 86-14, which it sees as a means to settle accounts for those who reject the political and economic decisions of government. Throughout that confrontation with the state, the government has banned the rental or leasing of premises to the Association Marocaine des Droits Humains (AMDH), which has found itself in its own premises to plan events (Mouna, 2018).

Religious communities

Morocco is a predominantly Muslim *Sunni* country, pluralism does not exist. Islam is the religion of the state, as shown by the 2011 Constitution and its predecessors. During the visit of Pope Francis to Morocco on 30-31 March 2019, King Mohamed VI of Morocco gave a speech on the religious openness of the Kingdom. He referred to the respect for religious practice of Moroccans, namely Islam and Judaism, and the respect for freedom of worship for foreign Christians living in Morocco. This discourse does not consider that Christian Moroccans exist as the King's subjects are either Muslims or Jew, and Christians appear to be only foreigners. It is interesting to note that some websites mention the number of 8,000 Christian Moroccans; and we even found their website. But, in general, the Christian Moroccan community is not very visible and this has put the Christian faith under the threat of Article 220 of the Moroccan Penal Code, which criminalises the undermining of the faith of a Muslim. It is thus important to point out that there is no work on religious pluralism in Morocco. This is a new area that does not appeal to the interests of researchers for the time being. On the other hand, the state's report is based on a security approach. What is said about Christians is also said about Shiites. The

adoption of Shiism began in the early 2000s with the success of Hezbollah in its war with Israel. Three months ago, Morocco allowed for the first time the Shiite community to celebrate, publicly, the Ashoura festival in Tangier. In 2015, they were allowed to open their first foundation in Tangier. However, although the authorities tolerate their beliefs, they demand that they are not expressed publicly. They are also banned from the mausoleum of Moulay Idriss Zerhoun, in the Meknes region, who they consider their “spiritual father”. Finally, Shiites are notably absent on social media networks in Morocco, and communicate very little about their activities (Jaabouk, 2015).

Methodologies

In the 1980s, the state used religious groups to combat the Left's influence. This formula had been successful for 10 years, yet its social cost was immense, causing the state to rethink this strategy. The Government's reinforcement of Islamism has changed the social morphology, and the state has lately noticed the evolution of Islamic ideology within society through violent radicalism in its discourse on individual freedom, women, and so on. Thus, the state religion distanced itself from closed approaches, reviving the Sufi tradition of Islam advocated by Mohammed VI that is meant to be peaceful, social and open. And, indeed, in the Arab-Muslim region the nation is cited as an example in terms of spiritual governance and religious area management. Nowadays, the Tunisian, Libyan, French, Malian and Guinean imams are trained by and in the Kingdom.

This is the religious diplomacy of the Cherifian Kingdom. It is not the financial cost that counts, the state spreads out these qualitative victories. The objective of this policy is to control the processes of radicalisation within the country, but also to export the politico-religious model. The writings that criticise this approach put forward the use of religion in state affairs, which does not bother those in charge because Morocco is a country based above all on religious values. The King himself vehemently approves this policy, especially with the creation of the Institute for Training Imams in Rabat, Morocco, which is cited as an example of an effective tool for de-radicalisation in many countries. The practice of religion in this country is open and moderate, and the Institute, which has just expanded, intends to train imams who will apply this philosophy. Created in 2005, this institute now trains hundreds of imams and *murshidin* and *murshidat* (women) per year. However, initiatives to prevent radicalisation among the young are rare. Through this policy of de-radicalisation, Morocco seeks to impose an Islam of the *Wasatiyyah*/middle, an Islam that seeks to reduce the leverage of the countries that keep allowing entrances whether to Morocco or to the diaspora.

While these strategies have succeeded in reducing the ground for violent extremism, in 2018 the country faced a terrorist act in the small village of Imlil, in the Moroccan High Atlas 64 km from Marrakech in December 2018. This event claimed the lives of two young tourists aged 24 and 28 from Denmark and Norway. This incident touched the governmental security policy in Morocco. It caused the loss of 30 places in the ranking established by the International Terrorism Index. In 2018, the ranking reached 132 places out of all the countries concerned (138) with a score of 0,038/138 (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2018: 9). In 2019, out of the total number of countries covered by the ranking (138), 92 were had a score of 1,215/138 (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019). On the other hand, in 2017, Morocco was ranked in 122nd place with a score of 0.077/138 (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2017). The country is among the top five countries of origin of recruits from ISIS in Iraq and the Levant (Banque Mondiale Région Moyen-Orient et Afrique du Nord, 2016) although it is less affected.

SPECIFIC INITIATIVES ADDRESSED TO WOMEN AND YOUTH

Since 2003, the Kingdom has put in place a double policy, regarding both security and religious affairs to deal with violent extremism. However, this policy does not target a specific social or age group. This is probably due to the absence of civil society, which has not sufficiently adhered to these initiatives, or to the fact that the state reserves this area for itself because it is so sensitive. Thus, apart from the fighting against illiteracy activities carried out in the mosques for women, which at the same time teach them some notions about Moroccan Islam, no initiative specifically targets women. In 2005, two years after the attacks in Casablanca, King Mohamed VI launched an initiative that was innovative and ambitious: the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH). The King described this initiative as “part of the overall vision that constitutes the matrix of our societal project, a model built on the principles of political democracy, economic efficiency, social cohesion and work, but also on the opportunity given to everyone to flourish by fully deploying their potential and abilities” (Royal speech, 18 May 2015). Morocco believes that it is the socio-economic conditions that are at the origin of the extremism, so the project has tried to create a balance to cope with the causes of violent extremism in order to deal with the wahhabist propaganda.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this report intends to shed light on the question of radicalism in Morocco, looking into its local origins and subsequently into its link with the global context in order to delve deeper into the phenomenon of violent extremism in the Moroccan context.

If Morocco is perceived today as a model in terms of the fight against radicalism, with both an institutional and a political approach, one observes, however, the absence of an evaluation system involving CVE-PVE, the absence of a role for civil society, as well as the absence of specific initiatives addressing women. The data provided on violent extremism does not only come from government institutions, reflecting the extent to which survey-based data and fieldwork are needed to expand the scope of research as an independent source of academic research on the issue. Thus, linked by its multidimensional approach, both qualitative and quantitative, it will allow for a better understanding of the issue. In order to do this, in the context of Morocco, it is necessary to focus on the following points at a local and national level:

- Give priority to the local system, especially the religious councils of the provinces and regions.
- Pay heed to the country's religious policy training and research institutions: Rabita Mohammadia, the Jamia Al Quaraouiyine, the Mohammed VI Institute for Training Imams, etc.
- Speeches by civil society actors, in particular human rights associations.
- And work on the content of the media, in particular the Assadissa, promoted by the King.

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What drives youth to violent extremism? How can they turn from being “the problem” into “the key” for a solution? By engaging youth in the research, CONNEKT will raise young voices to become stakeholders in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism.

CONNEKT is a research and action project which analyses seven potential radicalisation factors among youth aged between 12 and 30: religion, digitalisation, economic deprivation, territorial inequalities, transnational dynamics, socio-political demands, and educational, cultural and leisure opportunities and evaluates them on three levels: transnational/state, community and individual.

Its aim is to establish a multi-dimensional map of drivers of extremism among youth in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Bulgaria, and to identify the interplay between them. Based on the empirical research findings, the project will end up recommending tools and measures for the prevention of violent extremism from a social and community perspective both for the regions of study and the European Union.

Under the coordination of the European Institute of the Mediterranean, (IEMed), the project gathers a multidisciplinary Consortium involving 14 partners from MENA, the EU and the Balkans.



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