

Abstract

Elections take place in most states around the world, both in democratic systems and in authoritarian regimes. In the last two decades, the participation of Islamic movements in elections increased, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. It would certainly be no exaggeration if we would argue that the real opposition all over the Arab World was limited to the Islamic opposition, not least because it was the only opposition that proposes a political vision competing with the policy of the regime. Based on this empirical background, we decided to undertake a study of this new opposition, including the question that based on their participation in elections that take place under the rules of “Neopatrimonial” regimes they would most probably have to undergo changes in their program and their behavior.

Working with the theory of democratic transformation, many researchers and political observers would argue that that some of the political and economic changes undertaken by the present authoritarian regimes in the region, all of them going into the direction of political and economic liberalization, are good indicators for at least some progress towards democratic transformation. In contrast to this argument this study tries to show that this approach does not really help us to understand the behavior of the Moroccan regime. We argue therefore that all measures of liberalization undertaken by the regime are only introducing some modern aspects to the tools available to a traditional regime. The goal is clear: the regime attempts to avoid internal and external pressure while making use of the so to speak “cover” of democracy. At the same time it keeps all the threads of the game in its hand, which enables it to control all parts of political life, while also leaving the choice open to go back to the traditional tools of rule and control and of oppression if deemed necessary. This obviously leads to a central question as to what the real

motives are/were behind the decision of the Moroccan Islamic political opposition to opt for political participation: Do they aim for real democratic transformation through their involvement in political life, through participating in the election process and through their change into an internal opposition? And how do they deal with the realities of political developments in the last years and until today which clearly show that they have not been able to achieve a real political representation, to turn into a real political force, not to speak of bringing about real political change?

This study will try to answer all these questions by making on the one hand an in-depth analysis of the mechanisms of the “Neopatrimonial” regime in Morocco, and the tools it uses to perpetuate its rule, and on the other hand by trying to understand the frame in which the PJD works, by demarking the space available for it to participate in a potential process of democratic transformation, and by asking the question if its political participation and its participation in the elections might not simply throw it back to the status of an irrelevant force in Moroccan politics.

We conclude in this study that the “neopatrimonial” regime in Morocco benefited from introducing elections and allowing an Islamic opposition to participate in the elections. As a result the king's power increased, he could reinforce his role as the only force capable of playing out political rivals and of playing the role of mediator between them. In short, it provided him with a great amount of flexibility for successfully managing and controlling the political game, not least because competition takes place below the king and because he is in a position of controlling this competition according to ways he sees best suited for his goals.

At the same time, the regime benefited from political participation of the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) by reinforcing the legitimacy it relies on, while at the same time painting it with a modern touch. On the other hand, this reinforced the regime's strategy of introducing a

superficial and purely formal measure of political pluralism. Also, with working for pluralism in this context, the regime succeeded in fragmenting and weakening all opposition parties making it easier to control them through playing the role of arbiter between them, short by implementing the classic policy of divide and rule.

The transformation of the PJD into an internal opposition participate increased the fragmentation of Moroccan Islamic parties. The regime was able to use the PJD as a tool to defend its policies of confrontation against other Islamic parties, especially the radicals. One example for this successful strategy of the government is the defense by the previous secretary general Sa'd Aldeen Alothmani of the family code (*Mudawana*), as introduced by the government, a code which does not conform in many aspects with the Islamic ideology of the party.

It is therefore concluded that the party has throughout its participation in the election game avoided confronting the palace and aims mainly to maintain its survival under the existing conditions. It has therefore remained under the control of the king despite its considerable success in elections.

The Moroccan regime as a strong “neopatrimonial” regime combines both traditional as well as modern methods of rule and legitimization. It does not use a fixed ideology, it successfully plays on the fragmentation of the opposition, it is characterized by a personal model of authority and rule, with a high amount of flexibility when having to confront political and economic crises. It would therefore seem that short of deep-going changes in the success of this kind of regime when confronting different kinds of crises and challenges, the chance of being able to start a process of democratic transformation, especially when undertaken by a weak opposition, is very remote indeed.