

# Morocco protest movements in the post-constitutional reform

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## Abstract

The research describes and explains the wave of protest movement in the Kingdom of Morocco, one of the Muslim countries in the Western Arab, in the post-2011 constitutional referendum. The constitutional reform was carried out as a response to the large and massive people protest. Unlike the cases in other neighboring states where “Arab Spring” took place, the Moroccan movement receded without neither the fall of the regime nor massive casualties. However, intense protest kept taking place, especially in Muhammad V Street leading to the Parliament Building. Some interesting questions arise, including what the nature of the current protest is and why people still protest after the vast popular agreement toward the constitutional referendum. Based on library research and intense observation for forty days, and interviews, this study found that, to some extent, the Morocco protest has the same nature as that of the Arab Spring. The protest has “hidden agendas” although there are evidences that they dissembled in “smaller and partial issues because of some reasons”. The author holds that Morocco is an important lesson for political reform in the current turbulent Arab world and, to a broader context, in the Muslim world.

Penelitian ini mendeskripsikan dan menjelaskan gerakan protest di Kerajaan Maroko, salah satu negara Muslim di Arab Barat, paska referendum konstitusi tahun 2011. Reformasi konstitusional di Maroko telah dilaksanakan sebagai respon terhadap protes rakyat dalam skala luas dan massif. Berbeda dengan yang terjadi di negara-negara “Musim Semi Arab” yang lain, gerakan protes itu surut tanpa disertai jatuhnya rezim dan jatuhnya korban dalam jumlah yang besar. Namun, Maroko masih diwarnai gerakan protes yang cukup intensif hampir setiap hari (kendati skalanya lebih kecil) khususnya di Jalan Muhammad V sampai depan gedung parlemen. Pertanyaannya adalah apa sesungguhnya karakter dari protes-protes yang masih berlangsung bahkan hingga saat ini? Mengapa mereka masih melakukan protes pasca persetujuan secara luas rakyat Maroko terhadap reformasi konstitusi? Penelitian yang dilakukan dengan cara studi kepustakaan yang didukung oleh observasi di lapangan sekitar 40 hari, berkesimpulan bahwa karakter protes itu adalah “Arab Springs” (mengarah pada penjatuhan rezim) kendati itu tak dinyatakan secara terbuka. Mereka memiliki agenda terselubung itu dan tidak mengemukakannya dengan berbagai alasan. Penulis berpendapat, Maroko adalah pelajaran penting bagi reformasi politik di dunia Arab yang sedang bergolak saat ini, bahkan mungkin pula untuk dunia Islam.

Keywords: *Protest movement; Constitutional reform; King’s popularity; Arab Springs*

## **Introduction**

The Morocco protest is unique in the context of the vast and massive protest movements in the Arab world known as the Arab Spring. In Moroccan case, the protest had begun much earlier than the first Arab spring movement in Tunis did. The protests that called for the various demands especially political and economic reformations had run since the 1990s. The “usual” protest, then, escalated rapidly before the resign of Zein el-Abidin ben Ali from Tunisian presidency due to the massive people protesting against his regime. The “usual” Morocco protest movement was influenced and strengthened by the Tunisian revolt and the spread of popular movements against their regimes throughout the Arab world. The movement became more complex, as it did not only demand the reformation on special issues, but also demanded the fall of royal regime just as in

the other Arab states. The movement, according to some media reports confirmed by some key informants,<sup>1</sup> involved more than a million people approximately. Of course, it was the biggest popular protest movement in Moroccan history. Many analysts claimed that the fate of the Morocco regime will be similar to that of the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes.

The other uniqueness of the Morocco protest is the fact that the massive and large protests “found” its peaceful solution. The protest resulted in neither massive casualties nor massive destructions of infrastructures and social relations as in four “Arab Spring countries” (Syria, Libya, Egypt and Yemen).<sup>2</sup> The peaceful solution was achieved in the 2011 constitutional reform and the referendum on the new constitution. The new constitution (2011) includes a partial curbing of the King’s power while strengthening the parliament, and supports “democratic governments” and other democratic institutions.<sup>3</sup> However, the King still has the full authority in defense, religious and foreign affairs.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the massive and large dem-

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<sup>1</sup> The author interviewed some Morocco figures like ASB one of prominent thinkers, BHS a political analyst, LEM a researcher, and many other figures. They generally described the Morocco situation at the timewas very dangerous, but in the end the Moroccan people found the peaceful solution through constitution’s referendum July 1, 2011. Of course, Moroccan newspapers like Ahdats June 27, 2011 and other newspapers placed this crucial Morocco events as headline.

<sup>2</sup> The terminology of Arab spring countries refers to Arab countries in which authoritarian rulers or regimes were overthrown by people protest movement, known popularly as Arab spring in the West and Arab people revolt (al-Tsaurat al-Arabiyyah al-Sya’biyyah) in the Arab world. See Ibnu Burdah, *Islam Kontemporer: Revolusi dan Demokratisasi*, Malang: Intrans, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> In addition, the new constitution recognizes Tamazight language and cultures as official languages other than Arabic. It also stipulates the state to protect the heritage of Hassaniya language and culture. Until recently, both languages and cultures were marginalized so that causes to rise of various protests. Edisoft, *Dustur al-Mamlakah al-Maghribiyyah ma’amulhaq binataijistiftayuliyu 2011*, Rabat: Edisoft, 2012, 29-56.

<sup>4</sup> Edisoft, *Dustur al-Mamlakah...*, 29-36. The Current Moroccan King, Muhammad VI, is well known more liberal and “democratic” comparing to the Hasan II or Muhammad V. Annemarie Iddins, “Debating Darija: Telgual and Language Politics in Modern Morocco”, *Media, Culture, and Society Journal*, Vol. 37, No.2 (2015), 289.

onstrations in various cities in the Kingdom stopped and almost 100% of the people agreed with the new constitution in the relatively free referendum despite the strong campaigns of pro-government media.

However, another new wave of protests began. In this protest movement, the author witnessed, observed, and was inside the protest movement concentrated in King Muhammad V Street, especially in front of the Morocco Parliament Building from 10 November to 20 December 2012. Unlike the “massive protest”, the new protest likely has a “usual” nature.<sup>5</sup> The protesters did not explicitly demand for a regime change, but merely demanded some “small issues”, such as job and direct integration of graduate students”.

The research questions on the “new demonstration waves” that guide this study include what the nature of the protest movement is, whether the protest has Arab spring in nature or a “partial movement with specific demand such protest movement long before the explosions of Arab spring, whether it is similar in nature to the massive protest in the pre-constitutional referendum era, why they still make protest movements even after the “significant reduction in King’s authority” and the strengthening of the various democratic institutions and the vast agreement of the people.<sup>6</sup>

### **The nature of the protest movement**

The phenomenon of popular protest in Morocco after the constitutional referendum is similar to that before Arab springs broke out. It means the

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<sup>5</sup> By “usual protests”, I mean the long and continuing series of people protest done several years before the spread of Arab spring. The Author saw the demonstrations almost every day and they call for *al-indimāj al-mubāshir* (job), and I didn’t listen from them the calling for fall of the regime publicly. The slogan that they call is more *al-sha’b yurīd isqāt al-ḥukumah* (people want the fall of government). They avoid the old slogan *al-sha’b yurīd isqāt al-niẓām* “people want the fall of regime”

<sup>6</sup> The constitutional committee states that the number of people agreeing with the 2011 constitutional reform (vote for Yes/*na’am*) is 9,909,352, and that rejecting (vote for No/*Lā*) is 154,067, Edisoft, *Dustur al-Mamlakah...*, 95.

protests are continuation of the “old” protests in Morocco long before the massive Arab people movements demanding the fall of the authoritarian regimes. The old protests did not call for a resignation of the regime openly because such demand used to lead to the severe responses by the security forces, and finally to the insignificant results in political negotiations.<sup>7</sup>

What the author witnessed in the protests in November-December 2012 in front of the Parliament Building and along the Muhammad V Street in general confirmed that. The protests never voiced any demand to the regime (the royal family, especially the King). There were no such slogan, banner, or pamphlet as “*al-Sha’b yurīd isqāt al-niẓām*” (People want the fall of regime), or *irhal, irhal* (leave, leave the country) but “*al-Sha’b yurīd isqāt al-ḥukumah*” (People want the resign of Government), *Lā li al-zabuniyyah wa al-mahsubiyyah wa al-rishwah* (No for clientelism, nepotism, and bribery), and *idmāj mubāshir* (direct integration of Master and Doctoral degrees).<sup>8</sup>

The protesters were also less limited, most of whom were undergraduate students and master and doctoral graduates in various fields such as medicine, engineering, pharmacy, natural sciences, as well as social and Islamic studies. “Natural sciences” students were the majority, while those from political or social sciences were the minority. The protesters, many of them were women,<sup>9</sup> as the author asked some of them came from various cities in the Kingdom of Morocco especially the neighboring cities of Dar al-baydha (Casablanca), Marakesh, Tangier, and Fes. The

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<sup>7</sup> Abdurrahim al-Athari, *Dafātir Wijhat al-Nazjar, al-Ḥarakat al-Ihtijājiyyah bi al-Maghrib*, Rabat: n.p., 1997, 90-93.

<sup>8</sup> The author conclude this from brochures and also slogans that protesters call in the protest movement almost every day.

<sup>9</sup> The author observation in Morocco proved the conclusion that women has significant roles in the Arab Springs. They are not only participant but also the leader, speaker, and other significant roles. See also Rola El-Husseini “Is Gender the Barrier to Democracy? Women, Islamism, and the “Arab Springs”, *Contemporary Islam Journal* (April, 2015). I also witnessed the very significant role of student womens in the protest movement more than a month.

women protesters were more active than men protesters, with some even served as “field coordinators”.

Unlike the elements of protesters in the massive “Morocco spring protests” (after the Tunisian and Egyptian popular revolution and before 2011 constitutional referendum), there were barely lay people taking part in the protest, It was also clear that no political parties nor social religious groups participated in the protest, as long as the author saw and asked some of them. In the 20 February demonstration, as Al-Athari mentioned, protesters flied various flags of political parties, social religious groups such flags of *ḥarakah al-Tauḥīd wa al-İslāh* and *Jamā'ah al-Adl wa Iḥsān*, ethnic groups such Amazigh”, youth organizations, etc. The protesters also came from different professions, genders, social groups, and status.<sup>10</sup> These are something the author did not see in the new protest movement. These did not happen in the protest movements after the 2011 constitutional referendum, in which most protesters were graduate students.

The post-2011 protests were characterized as being very well-organized. The protesters – as the author saw- divided themselves into many groups; each consisted of twenty to fifty persons with a coordinator. Each group also had a specific banner, identity flags, and a simple amplifier system. They also had logistic “officers” who distributed food and drink for the protesters. In the beginning, they used to come to the assembly point next to the train station individually and do not show their attributes such as banners or pamphlets. They would come like ordinary people, but then began gathering in the “station field”. Shortly afterwards, many people amounting to more than a thousand participants joined, and then organized a long march heading to Muhammad V Street and concen-

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<sup>10</sup> Abdurrahim al-Athari, *al-Ḥarakat al-Ihtijājiyyah bi al-Maghrib Min Zamān Intifādah al-kubra Ila Ḥarakat 20 Shubbat/Februyir*, Rabat: 1997, 90-93, in Taufiq al-Madani, *al-Rabi' al-Arabiyy...Ilā Aina? Ufuq Jadīd li al-Taghyīr al-Dimuqratiyy*, Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-'Arabiyyah, 2012, 300-1.

trated in front of the parliament building. The two aspects, participants and organization, differentiate the protest from the “Arab springs” protest that involved people of diverse social classes in a more spontaneous move and poorer organization.

However, did the protest have no Arab Spring in nature, meaning no intention to demand for the fall of regime? The banners, brochures, pamphlets, and slogans, as well as the author’s observation and reading, do not have any demand to royal regime, not even a word. Their long orations did not call for any word about regimes. However, it doesn’t automatically mean that the protests had no intention to touch the regime, especially the King. Based on my observations and “secret interviews” with some protesters, I came to a conclusion that the protests had an “Arab Spring dimension”, that is, a popular movement to topple down the regime. In various long and relax conversations, the author got a clear hint to the question about the real agenda of the movement, which said by some of them in my interview is “*al-niḡām al-malaki yarasu kulla al-fasād*” (Royal regime leads every “corruption”).<sup>11</sup> Of course, the answer is not mainstream, but the situation had forced them (some of them) to hide their real agendas.

In short, the nature of the Morocco protests after the 2011 constitutional reform is a mixture of the Arab Spring and the old (pre-Arab Spring) Moroccan protests. It means that the target is a regime change, but they hide this real agenda, instead call publicly for other “usual” issues.

### **Half-hearted constitutional reform**

This section will deal with the explanation on the protesters’ insistence on launching the protests although they did not publicly demand the fall of regime as they did before. The protesters’ reasons to go back to streets

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<sup>11</sup> The most of the students that the author interview were not admitting that their real agenda is the fall of regime. However, two student from Rabat and Fas said to the author in a sacret way that their real agenda is regime.

were “the reluctance of the constitutional reform”. In the new constitution, the King has removed some of his own authorities such as to appoint prime minister and cabinet members, governors, ambassadors, etc. Seen from the letter of the law, the King has lost many of his authorities except in three areas including defense, religion, and foreign affairs, in which he has absolute control.<sup>12</sup> Practically, however, the King still controls considerable executive powers, among others, to nominate *rais al-hukumah* (prime minister as head of government) although he must nominate figure from the winning party in parliamentary election, and to nominate members of cabinets based on the recommendation of the head of government. The King also has the authority to nominate and to head the council of ministers (*al-majlis al-ilmī al-A'la*).<sup>13</sup> In addition, it is not easy to implement the new “rule” that curbs the power of the King. That is, because the implementation disturbs the interests of the King’s “inner circle”. Some parliamentary members and other important person whom the author interviewed said that it would take more time for such implementation to take place.<sup>14</sup> In short, the 2011 constitution reform merely makes partial changes to the power structure of the Kingdom while keeping the King at the center of power.

The protesters thought that the 2011 constitutional reform did not mean anything as there had been no real and substantial political changes from autocracy to democracy.<sup>15</sup> What happened was just a “pseudo” de-

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<sup>12</sup> Edisoft, *Dustūr al-Mamlakah...*, 29-36.

<sup>13</sup> Edisoft, *Dustūr al-Mamlakah...*, 29.

<sup>14</sup> The author did not mention these persons. However, among them are the very important person in the Justice and development party, lecturer in Muhammad V University, and Morocco Parliamentary member.

<sup>15</sup> This was also predicted by Yusep Waghid and Nuraan Davids in his article “Impossibility of Democratic Citizenship Education in Arab and Muslim World” although their research was merely based on the six Gulf Countries, *Studies in Philosophy and Education Journal*, Vol. 33 (2014), 343-344.

mocracy. The source of power is not people. People participate to determine the government and their legislative representatives, but in fact the “democratic institutions” is under the King’s domination, which is strengthened by clash and conflict among people or between people and governments, not between people and the King nor between government and the King forever. The King’s honor is protected by the new constitution as “amirulmukminin” (the spiritual leader of the believers) and the real political commander as stated in article 46 of the new constitution.<sup>16</sup> The students whom I interviewed stated this clearly and repeatedly.

Therefore, the protesters insisted to protest the government or parliamentary representative and avoided to protest the King. Police and security forces tolerated the movement because any protest directed toward government is considered legal and is protected by the constitution and law. However, any form of protest or even a comment about the King is considered illegal as it is a violation of the constitution and law, for which police and security forces could take measures. Criticisms to governments and legislative, no matter how bitter and unethical they are, are considered usual business, while any attempt to question the King, no matter how soft the words used is, is considered a very serious violation and must be eliminated by firm response.<sup>17</sup> In more than one month of observation, the author never heard of the protesters mentioning the king or his name or his family, except in the “secret” interview with some of the protesters.

More importantly, the 2011 constitutional reform did not solve the real problem of unemployment, widening gap in wealth distribution be-

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<sup>16</sup> Edisoft, *Dustūr al-Mamlakah...*, 31.

<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the King is highest commander of the Royal Armed Forces and, therefore, has highest authority to appoint military officials as stated in the new constitution article 53. In addition, the royal army is the most powerful force in the Kingdom. Edisoft, *Dustūr al-Mamlakah...*, 54.

tween the “royal circle” and the people, corruption, and the monopoly of the strategic economic modes. They believed the awkward enlargement and pseudo strengthening of “democracy” did not help to lift the root of the problem in Morocco. It is like a painkiller to relieve a pain, but it never reaches the real cause of illness.

Lay people believed in the sacred status of the King as he claimed as being a direct descendent of Prophet Muhammad,<sup>18</sup> but the protesters that constitute the younger generation and graduate students, challenged their fellow citizens’ old mindset. The education system and government financial support to the education in the Kingdom have helped to elevate the students’ critical opinion and attitudes. Education in the kingdom is free from elementary school to doctoral degree, and critical/influential lectures and studies in sociology, politics, cultural studies, and philosophy flourish in the country. The Moroccan education system is, in fact, more open than that in the Arab and Muslim countries. Many students have two or three diplomas, masters, or doctoral degrees, and such cases of dual degrees is a norm in the Kingdom. Therefore, “democratic” values develop very well among young Moroccans, which constitute “the most democratic society” in the Arab world before the Arab spring era. The young Moroccans are very well aware of the situation in their country and of the development of the Arab Spring in other Arab countries.

### **King’s popularity**

Despite the widespread dissatisfaction, protesters chose to hide their “real” agenda, that is, criticism to the King. The King is still the most famous and popular person in Moroccan societies either in the cities or in villages

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<sup>18</sup> The author’s journey in many villages point out that the King is still very popular. The author was not only ask some people but also among children. They still respected highly to the King.

and mountain areas, in the urban or in the rural society, in the *balad mahzin* or in the *balad shiba*. *Balad Mahzin* is urban and rural villages recognizing the legitimacy of the Kingdom from the very beginning, while *balad shiba* is periphery villages recognizing the Kingdom in the last minutes. Like what Ibn Khaldun, sociologist and historian pioneer, said, the *kabilah* or Arab nomad society in deserts, tend to be last group that give the recognition to the government in the last minutes, and they did that by perforce.<sup>19</sup> Hence, it is not easy for the protester to declare their criticisms to the King while King is still in his popularity.

Based on deep observation and interviews with people in Rabat (the capital city) Casablanca (the largest city), as well as in Marrakesh, Fes, Tangier, etc., it is sufficient to say that the King is so popular among people. As I asked to one or two peoples in these cities, the King is the protector, honor, and pride of the Moroccans. For them, Morocco is the King and the people. The images of the King among the people is represented as a religious man who loves his family and his people very much, supports the development of sciences and knowledge, strengthens the reforms and democracy in the Kingdom, and cares highly with religious activities.

The most important thing is that people believed in the King being a direct descendant of the Prophet through Hussein bin 'Ali bin Muhammad. Some artifacts, such as those in Hassan II mosque in Casablanca and other places, depicting the lineage from the prophet to the King are common. Such a belief makes them highly respect the King. The idea is also expressed in many religious rituals such as Friday praying (*shalāh al-Jum'ah*), communal prayers, and especially in the *maulid* (celebration and festival of Prophet birthday). The King as *amīr al-mu`minīn*, the historic title in the Muslim memory, is declared explicitly

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<sup>19</sup> Abdurrahman bin Muhammad Ibnu Khaldun, *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun*, edited by Ahmad Zagbiy, Beirut: Shirkah Dār al-Arqam bin Abi al-Arqam, n.a., 182-3.

either in the old or in the new Moroccan constitution. For people, it means that the King is not merely a state leader but also a religious leader that the obedience to him is part of their religiosity, and resistance to him would mean a resistance to the religion.

However, the simplest—and therefore the most widespread—evidence of the King's popularity is the portrait of the King and his family. It is the most vivid picture everywhere from the capital city to the most remote villages. One would never find a place in Morocco without seeing the vivid picture of the King. The pictures displayed in the important places is understood because of the "intervention of Kingdom and government, but its display in homes, very small shops in remote and isolated places is certainly due to other cause, that is, the King's popularity. This explains very clearly why protesters chose not to declare their real agenda toward regime.

On the other hand, there is no clear support from Moroccan political forces and social-religious organizations. Political parties, either governing or opposition, instead confirmed their commitments on the monarchy system. Almost all party leaders, intellectuals, and even religious clerics that the author interviewed asserted the uniqueness of the history of Morocco. The first uniqueness is the historical facts that the recent Morocco regime had existed and survived for about five centuries. It is the longest monarchy ever existed in the Arab world today. Second, the uniqueness of the Kingdom is the gradual historical changes. This is the most articulated argument to reject "Arab Springs" movements. According to most of them, there is no historical precedence that the political change in the Kingdom of Morocco is through people movement. Therefore, the 2011 constitutional referendum is a better way to Morocco in its path to democracy. Based on these reasons, most political party leaders do not give clear support to the people movements after the 2011 constitutional reform. However, their attitudes today are relatively different from those before the constitutional referendum.

For social and religious groups, the popularity of the King and the root of monarchy in Morocco are strong. *Ḥarakah al-Tauḥīd wa al-ʾIslāḥ* (Oneness of God and Justice Movement), one of Moroccan social religious groups, mentioned that the King and Kingdom is inseparable part of Morocco. The group is very close to both the governing party (*ḥizb al-ʾAdālah wa al-Tanmiyah*/Justice and Development party) and the royal family. The group concerns very much in social activities, and tends to support the policies of the current governing party and the Kingdom. The official statements of the group toward Tunisian and Egyptian people revolution, as well as to the 20 February Moroccan movement, send clear message that they support the regime and reject the street solution for the Kingdom of Morocco. They stated clearly that they chose gradual changes from the internal government, just as what had begun since the throne of King Muhammad.<sup>20</sup> The interviews with some members of this group strengthened this conclusion.

Another influential group is *Jamāʾah al-ʾAdl wa al-Iḥsān* (Justice and Charity group), which is a traditional religious group based on Islamic mysticism movement (*tariqah*). This group tends to oppose the King and the Kingdom. Therefore, its leaders and their activities are spied by the Kingdom apparatus although they never state publicly “their opposition”. Its members sometimes involved in the student movements in front of Parliament Building or along the Muhammad V Street. Based on their statements on the Tunisian and Egyptian people revolutions as well as on the 20 February Morocco movement, their attitude indicated that they wanted a “real change” that touch the Royal regime. Their slogan, *qabla fawat al-Awan* (before being late), clearly states that real changes such as

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<sup>20</sup> Bilal al-Talidi, *Al-Islāmiyyūn wa al-Rabiʾ al-ʾArabī: Al-Shuʾūd, al-Tahaddiyāt, Tadbīr al-Ḥukm Ṭūnīs, Miṣr, al-Maghrib, al-Yamān*, Riyadh: Namaa for Research and Study Center, 2012, 47-8.

those in Tunisia and Egypt is not limited to both countries.<sup>21</sup> It may happen in Morocco as the latter faces complex social, political, economic, and cultural problems. It may be the hardest internal statement toward Kingdom. However, other comments from political parties and social groups including *ḥizb al-'Adalah wa al-Tanmiyah*, the most popular party,<sup>22</sup> are firm that they support the gradual and peaceful (not through street) reform.

In addition, the tribal support to the protests is not present, which is really different from their total support in the rallies for Palestine and for condemning the Prophet cartoon that the author observed in Rabat. Buthalib's research also shows us that the Arab Spring is a momentum of *qabilah* awakening in social and political spheres in the Arab world.<sup>23</sup> In fact, tribal loyalty to the Moroccan regime is very strong, and the support for the people movement is nearly absent. In short, the King's popularity and the "absence" of support from political parties and social groups made the protest movements hide their real agenda of touching the kingdom, especially the King.

### **Precautious stance on the Arab spring**

The spread of popular protests in the Arab countries, and the success of several movements to overthrow the old regimes, gave additional spirit to the continuation of the Moroccan movement. The protests were not influenced by the Tunisian or Egyptian protests because the Moroccan protest movements started earlier than those in Tunisia or Egypt. However,

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<sup>21</sup> Bilal al-Talidi, *Al-Islāmiyyūn wa al-Rabi'...*, 58-9.

<sup>22</sup> It seems there is a special and close relationship between the party and the Kingdom regime. The role of the party for absolute win of "2011 King constitutional reform" for example is very high. The role of the party for political change is unique compared to the other Islamist parties in other Arab countries. See Ibnu Burdah, "Ittijahāt Jadīdah li al-Aḥzāb al-Islāmiyyah fi Dual al-Rabi' al-'Arabiy", *Aljamiah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 52 No. 2 (2014), 459-480.

<sup>23</sup> Muhammad Najib Buthalib, *al-Zawāhir al-Qabaliyyah wa al-Jihawiyah fi al-Mujtama' al-'Arabiy al-Mu'āṣir: Dirāsah Muqāranah li al-Thauratayn al-Tūnīsiyah wa al-Libiyah*, Doha: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2012, 16.

the escalation of the protest occurred just after the fall of the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes. The Morocco protests in this era were in the forms of rallies involving more than a million people in various cities in the Kingdom. The movement was also supported by Amazigh movement, and progressive journalist from Rabat to Casablanca.<sup>24</sup> The term *masīrah silmiyyah* (peaceful rally) was not known in the Morocco street movements before then but the terms they used were *tazāhur* (to demonstrate) or *iḍrab* (strike).<sup>25</sup> In fact, the protest movements in these days were massive and took place in almost all Morocco cities. The 2011 constitutional reform softened very much, or even ended, the movements, but then, several months after the 2011 constitutional referendum, the movements rose again in different degree. It is the author's conclusion that the protest movements in other Arab countries constituted one of the many factors for the rise of the "new" Morocco protest movements.

Many political elites and some intellectuals that the author interviewed rejected the conclusion. For them, the case of Morocco is unique compared to that of the other Arab countries. The roots of the Morocco protests, according to them, differ from those of the Arab Spring generally. In fact, the protesters and students declare the similar slogans used in Arab Springs although with "some revisions". The protest went without "definitive" leaders and ideologies like Tunisian and Egyptian protests did and used the similar social and information media, etc.<sup>26</sup> Some stu-

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<sup>24</sup> Sami Zemni, "Moroccan Post-Islamism: Emerging Trend or Chimera" in Asef Bayat (ed), *Post Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013, 149.

<sup>25</sup> Abdurrahim al-Athary, *al-Ḥarakat Ihtijājiyyah...*, 170.

<sup>26</sup> Moreover, based on data of Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, the internet user in the Kingdom of Morocco is very high, 33 percent of the population, or the second in the 22 countries of the Arab world. A Group of Researchers, *al-Infjār al-'Arabiy al-Kabīr fi al-Ab'ad al-Thaqāfiyyah wa al-Siyāsiyyah*, Doha: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2012, 195.

dents said that the real protest agenda involved critics to regime. For some of them, the Monarch was not merely obstacle for democracy but also a source of recent Morocco problems. In short, there are many similarities between the new Morocco protest movement and the Arab Spring. It means that the spirit of the protest movements could be strengthened by the protests movement in the other Arab countries.

However, the recent developments in the protest movement in Yemen, Syria, Libya, and Bahrain resulting in the large number of casualties and the physical and social destructions has caused some degrees of hesitation to the movement. Furthermore, the continuous instability in the Arab Spring countries such as Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia has disturbed the firm protesters. In addition, the geographical distances between Morocco and these countries are very close. In Egypt, political parties are unable to create a consensus in drafting constitution, government, parliamentary, and many other issues in the earlier, and finally we witness the failure of democracy. Meanwhile, social and religious groups are involved in hard conflict with one another and the government and security forces failed to control the situations.<sup>27</sup> In Libya, the capacity of the state is very limited to govern and manage the country. This is mainly because Libya seemingly constituted a “new state” that must be built from scratch due to the absence of constitution, political parties, and parliaments in the Moammar Qaddafi era.<sup>28</sup> In addition, guerilla groups existed, involved in conflict each another, and it was not easy to integrate

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<sup>27</sup> Abu Dauh predicted just after Egypt Revolution that the challenges for a better Egyptian future are very big and serious. See Khalid Kadhim Abu Dauh, “Tsaurah 25 qanūn Thānī/Yanayir fi Barri Mishr: Muḥāwalah li al-Fahm al-Susiyulujiy”, in Taufiq al-Madini et al., *al-Rabi’ al-Arabiyy: Ilā Aina? Ufuq Jadīd li al-Taghīr al-Diymuqatijiy*, Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-‘Arabiyyah, 2012, 222.

<sup>28</sup> Hasib said that the overthrow of Qaddafi regime is easier very much than to realize the dream of Libyan people revolution, Khairuddin Hasib, “Libya ilā aina...suqūṭ al-Niẓām al-Qadhafi... wa lakin...?”, in Taufiq al-Madini, *al-Rabi’ al-Arabiyy...Ilā Aina?...*, 276.

them into the Libyan Army or security forces. Meanwhile, Tunisia suddenly became an unstable country after the assassination of Syukri Belaid, one of the outstanding opposition leaders even after that they were able to consolidate. In short, new developments in the Arab Spring countries indicated that the people protest movements cause to the negative situations.

These developments in the neighboring countries are important in the development of the Morocco protest movement. Almost all people, intellectuals, religious men, students, and lay people that the author interviewed, were aware of the implication of such protest movements in the Arab countries. The Morocco protesters were fully aware of these development. They strived to organize the movement as best as they could to make sure that the movements were well-arranged. All of them asserted that the Morocco reform had to be carried out peacefully although there are many precedents that there had been violence in police response to the previous protest movements.

## **Conclusion**

The nature of Morocco protest movement in the post-2011 constitutional referendum contained the Arab Spring elements although it is imperceptible. The Moroccan movements come earlier than the beginning of the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt that stimulated the massive people protest movements in Arab countries. However, the Egyptian and Tunisian movements also escalated the Moroccan protest movement. The protests became massive and very strong, and involved various social elements. Yet, the success of the King's 2011 constitutional reform to appease "the fire" of the popular revolution as in the neighboring states was something unique in the recent history of Arab Spring and in the Muslim world. The protest receded for some time. However, students

continued their protest with more limited levels and used more hidden agenda strategy. They were dissatisfied with the limited constitutional reform in which the King keeps holding the center of power and authorities. But, they were fully aware that the King still has power and his influences remain in place until today, while the supports from political parties and religious-social groups for the movement were very low. Hence, students opted to go on with the movements by calling for such intermediate agendas as poverty, unemployment, corruption, etc., while avoid calling for the fall of the regime openly and directly as in the pre-2011 constitutional referendum. Morocco “protests” had existed long before the spread of Arab Spring, went on even after the Arab Springs (before 2011 constitutional referendum), and after it. However, how the regime made political reform through peaceful ways is something important in the Arab world today. Even when it is not ideal, it is suffice to say that the Moroccan experience in the political reform is an important lesson for political reform in the current turbulent Arab world today, and perhaps also in Muslim world in general.

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