

Access to Rabat: De Jure Policies and De Facto Realities in Moroccan Newspaper Coverage of the February 20 Movement and Constitutional Reforms, 2011–2012

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This article observes Moroccan newspaper coverage surrounding the February 20 movement and subsequent constitutional reforms. Taking various aspects of the media landscape into account, I examine the similarities and differences in three newspapers' patterns of coverage concerning these two important historical events. The study relies on framing theory and notions of the public sphere to inform a descriptive content analysis of newspaper coverage. Findings indicate that the papers treaded carefully in the early days as the movement coalesced; that there was an oppositional voice developing; and that coverage quickly shifted toward the king's speech, which offered up constitutional reforms —providing a safer focus for which the newspapers could then offer a forum and which they could more carefully cover. One newspaper associated with the monarchy, *Le Matin*, never mentioned the February 20 movement in its coverage of events during this historic period.

Keywords: Morocco, newspapers, February 20 movement, constitutional reform, Arab Spring, Le Matin, Attajdid, Al Massae

Much has been written by Western media and later by media scholars about the Arab Spring and the role of the media during these events (Aday et al., 2013; Huang, 2011; Khondker, 2011). In considering the events more closely, traditional print media deserve attention for their important role in crafting the first draft of history. Newspapers, which serve as a valuable archive of history, often hold positions of tremendous importance to the public spheres in the societies to which they belong and are often utilized in studies by mass communications researchers (Trenz, 2004). How they operate and the ways they are constrained can tell us a great deal about the country in which they exist. The current study investigates national newspapers in Morocco during the time of the Arab Spring to offer insights into how history's first draft was unfolding in this specific case.

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Date submitted: 2016-05-17

¹ The author acknowledges the valuable research assistance from Carol Moufarrej, Philippe Jardak, Dana Marai, Chaimae Mechtaly, and Amira Imoulouden. This research was part of a grant project between the Middle East Center at the London School of Economics and the Mohammed Bin Rashid School for Communication at American University in Dubai.

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It is becoming increasingly difficult for governments to realistically constrain the traditional media when news and information are readily available via new media. What we see are various attempts by governments to foster the appearance of greater press freedoms while maintaining certain “out of bounds markers,” “red lines,” or “untouchable topics” that allow the government to retain veto power over journalists and newspapers (El Issawi, 2016). In Morocco, press laws loosened during the Arab Spring, but criminal codes remained on the books for use by the authorities (El-Rifae, 2016).

We cannot presume to know the exact motivations of every government and its relations with every media outlet in the Arab world. In Morocco, the press’s ability to write on one topic versus another has changed over the decades (Tayebi, 2013). With the ascension to the throne of Mohammed VI, there was an initial period when newspapers felt freer. Albeit with some constraints under the heading of “national security” or otherwise, we know that issues regarding freedom of expression and freedom of the press have been given a lot more attention since 2011 (Tayebi, 2015).

The goal of the current article is to examine the treatment of certain issues within three Moroccan newspapers to offer insights into the role of the press during the historic Arab Spring period of 2011 and 2012.

Literature Review

To understand the key concepts involved, a review of the literature was undertaken with the purpose of providing background to the players and events in Morocco of the past few years: the government, the monarchy, the events of 2011, and the situation of the press. Also, there is a need to qualify the theories informing the analysis of the coverage.

Moroccan Politics

Morocco is officially a constitutional monarchy, ruled by King Mohammed VI. The country’s government has also been referred to as a parliamentary monarchy; a parliament does exist, and it is generally presided over by the king. The king has wide-ranging powers in Morocco as both head of state and as commander of the faithful. When he ascended the throne, following his father Hassan II’s death in 1999, Muhammed VI vowed to make the political system more transparent and decentralized, allow greater freedoms (of expression and press), and enact more equitable economic reforms (Darif, 2013). He has also been an advocate for women’s rights—a position that has drawn disfavor from Islamic fundamentalists. Regarding the press, there is no doubt that journalists felt freer in the immediate post-Hassan II era than during Hassan II’s reign. Njoku (2006) wrote, “Since 1999, Morocco’s private press has gradually engaged in free debate on a number of previously taboo issues, including social problems” (p. 51). These freedoms were not formally codified, however, and though we have seen instances of greater freedom in reporting, we have also seen the reverse.

To a large extent, the king is considered to be a just ruler. While there are certainly reports to the contrary in the media, many foreign press articles also indicate a genuine popularity and reverence for King Mohammed VI (Charai, 2014; Lewis, 2011). Much of this popularity stems from the stability that the

country has enjoyed, especially in relation to its neighbors. The king does not rule entirely alone, and this was certainly true following the events of 2011. A parliament containing a House of Representatives and Councilors exists, with individuals elected directly and indirectly (Hoffmann, 2013). There is a Council of Ministers appointed by the prime minister, ostensibly with advice from the king (Benchemsi, 2012; Molina, 2011). There are other political entities, from political parties and their associated leaders to the entirety of the system or all those involved in the bureaucracy or monarchy's patronage—the civil servants and such, often referred to in general as the deep state, the establishment, or *makhzen*, which serve to maintain the status quo and temper the pace of any reform (Daadaoui, 2011). Although beyond the scope of the current study, much has been written about the *makhzen* and its activities within the Moroccan sociopolitical landscape (see Hoffmann, 2013; Sater, 2016).

The February 20 Movement

Much has been written about the Arab Spring of 2010 and 2011 (Dabashi, 2012; Willis, 2014). Morocco's experience with this period culminated in protests against the king's government by various factions in society that coalesced on February 20, 2011 (Beinin & Vairel, 2013). It is well known that the protests were not as stark as those that occurred in Tunisia and Egypt (Anderson, 2011). It is perhaps not difficult to understand why, because the groundwork for potential reforms had already been promised by King Mohammed VI following his ascendancy to power in 1999. Therefore, there was an early inoculation of sorts, by a few years, against strong reformist tendencies and protests. In addition, the regime was able to adjoin a moderate Islamist political party to deflect some of the frustrations that were linked to protestations associated with religious rationales and the Justice and Development Party, known by its French acronym, PJD (Wegner & Pellicer, 2010). Such measures released the pressure in small amounts in the years prior to 2011 (Hashas, 2013). Thus, the kettle did not come to a boiling point; there was not a strong feeling of needing to protest, and the eventual numbers in 2011 (and since) would seemingly bear out this viewpoint (Maddy-Weitzman, 2012; Ottoway, 2011; Pelham, 2012; Salhani, 2014). Nevertheless, the king moved rapidly to introduce constitutional reforms that sought to address directly many of the concerns raised by the protest movement, and in the process mitigate any potential for rising public discontent.

Constitutional Reforms

A referendum on constitutional reforms took place in July 2011. The king announced amendments that were based on several key elements of reform: expansion of individual freedoms, granting the judiciary more independent power, promoting democratization and checks and balances, a parliament of free and fair elections, an elected House of Representatives, appointment of a prime minister based on a party securing a majority of votes, invigorating the role of political parties in a pluralistic-regionalized system, and allowing parliament to grant amnesty and recognizing Amazigh/Berber as an official language alongside Arabic (Maghraoui, 2011).

Although a large-scale assessment of all the activities is not within the scope of this article (for more, see Desrues, 2013, 2016), the results of the king's actions regarding societal change have been hotly debated in the popular press (both within and outside the country) as well as in many academic

treatises on the subject. Parliamentary elections were held in 2011, but the country's first local and regional elections since then took place only in September 2015, providing even more fodder for debate.

The Moroccan Press

In Morocco, print journalism represents one of the most influential mediums (Gershovich, 2013; Tayebi, 2013), though to be fair, this influence may best be considered in tandem with the social groupings and ideologies that the paper supports (and vice versa). The numerous newspapers in Morocco represent different language groups, political parties, and social groups. There are dailies and weeklies. There are broadsheets and tabloids. There are partisan (including royalist) papers (e.g., *Le Matin*, and *Assahra al Maghribiya*) but also independent newspapers (e.g., *Al Massae*). There are Islamist newspapers (e.g., *Attajdid*), and there are secular papers (e.g., *Al-Ahdath al-Maghribia*). These categories are neither mutually exclusive nor monolithic; there may even be slight variances within the pages of any given newspaper. Similar to other media markets, newspapers have appeared and disappeared. Finally, online news websites feature Moroccan news as well (e.g., moroccantimes.com, hespress.com, lakome2.com).

The French influence is marked in the Moroccan context. To protect their culture from excessive outside influence, France enacted a quota system regarding foreign content in the media. French colonialists in Morocco imposed mandatory use of the French language, at one point outright banning Arabic-language papers (Jaidi, 2000, as cited in Zaid, 2009) and sought for a long time to inhibit the Arabic-language press of its neighbors from gaining access to any part of the Moroccan market (Tayebi, 2013). As in France, Moroccan newspapers traditionally have served as a "mouthpiece of particular political or ideological expressions" (Zaid, 2009, p. 4). Furthermore, Ibahrine (2006) stated that "most are associated with political parties or politically motivated organizations" (p. 60). The issue of multilingualism "affects the sociocultural life" (Ennaji, 1991, p. 7) of Morocco and is reflected as well in its media landscape. Thus, a small minority of papers are written in Spanish and in the local language known as *Amazigh*, which is spoken by the large, indigenous non-Arab populations. Although Amazigh has been widely spoken among locals, a group that has historically been referred to as "Berbers," it is mainly a spoken language, thus one reason for the paucity of newspapers in this language.

While the Arabic-language press is part of the media landscape today, the idea of maintaining some separatism from the Arab world still exists in Morocco, because the country considers itself unique. Moreover, ample evidence suggests that this is indeed the case. This can help to explain partially why the Moroccan people did not rise up and feel a great need to participate in the Arab Spring of 2010 and 2011. Other researchers have posited reasons that Morocco did not get caught up in the Arab Spring, from the "above the fray" (Hamid, 2009, p. 121) position and promises of a new king to, ultimately, it can be argued, the acquiescence of the country's press.

The degree to which the press has enjoyed freedom has varied over the years, but recent times have seen greater freedom than earlier periods as various publications have tested the limits, red lines, and boundaries (Smith & Loudiy, 2005). The Press Codes (of 1959, 1963, 1973, 2002, and 2007) have been used to set and curtail press freedoms when the red lines have been deemed breached (Douai, 2009). These topics have been outlined over the years in laws concerning the press and in actions against

journalists who “are considered patriotic citizens who must be mindful of their social responsibility to the public” (Zaid, 2009, p. 7). The three main topics to be declared off-limits were writing anything prejudicial to Islam; being critical of the king or the monarchy; and territorial concerns—that is, anything having to do with the Western Sahara region (Bendourou, 1996). Other forbidden topics added in more recent times include sex, insulting dignitaries, and anything that would negatively impact “public order.” As one might guess, interpretations of exactly what and where the red lines are is a matter of discussion and debate. On this, Gershovich (2013) wrote, “The lack of consistency in suppression of some stories but not others remained a major concern for champions of a free press in Morocco” (p. 102); furthermore, “the delineation of these boundaries remains vague and inconsistent” (p. 105). However, not up for debate are the penalties that are imposed if the lines are deemed to have been crossed. Fines, incarceration, and being barred from practicing journalism (in the country) are available as deterrents for journalists who fail to engage in “responsible” reporting, which usually involves the practice of self-censorship. By examining what is covered and how certain issues are addressed in the daily newspapers, we gain insights into how topics are raised and referred to in the media, if at all.

Three daily newspapers were selected for analysis: *Le Matin* (The Morning), *Al Massae* (The Evening), and *Attajdid* (The Renewal). These three newspapers were chosen because of their prominence in the country and for the varied viewpoints and interests that they represent. Two other newspapers were proposed to be included—*Al Ahdath al Maghribia*, and *Al Bayane*—however, there were difficulties in obtaining access to the articles for the entire time period examined, and so the study moved forward with the analysis of three newspapers to which access was obtained.

Le Matin du Sahara et du Maghreb, based in Casablanca, is one of the oldest newspapers in Morocco as the successor to the 1925 French colonial paper known as *Le Petit Marocain*. The switchover occurred in 1971, and since then, it has been known for its progovernment stance. Since 2004, the paper has had a Saudi owner, though the operations are maintained in Casablanca. The paper is written in the French language and is said to be “royalist” in that it supports the monarchy and its official positions in its coverage of the news.

Also based in Casablanca since its founding in 2006, *Al Massae* is considered an independent Moroccan newspaper. Although circulation numbers are difficult to ascertain, the paper is deemed to be both widely known and read in the country. This newspaper is written in the Arabic language and does not have direct ties to the government or any other parties in the country. It is said to be part of “a second wave of independent newspapers” seeking “to broaden the margin of freedom” for the print media by writing about “sensitive issues” (Douai, 2009, p. 7).

Attajdid represents an Islamic perspective in its reporting and is associated with the socially conservative Movement of Unity and Reform (Maghraoui, 2015), which is not a legally recognized political party (Shahin, 2004). The Movement of Unity and Reform has close ties to the Justice and Development Party, which holds a large number of seats in parliament and has presided over a coalition government since 2011. Operating from Casablanca since 1999, *Attajdid's* news coverage is generally thought to represent a conservative Muslim stance. This newspaper is written in the Arabic language and, again, is religiously oriented.

Framing and the Public Sphere

This study is based on a comparative content analysis of the coverage of French and Arabic dailies in Morocco on the issues related to activities that occurred in 2011: the February 20 movement calling for attention to many social, economic, and political issues and for changes to be made in the country to address these matters, and the subsequent package of constitutional reforms announced (March 9) by the king to address the protestors' concerns. There are certainly many other news items that appear in the daily newspapers; however, it can be argued that during the past few years, these two issues—the February 20 movement and the subsequent constitutional reforms—have been two of the most important for the state. It is reasonable to assume that writing on these topics could warrant careful concern; writing anything with a negative tone as it concerns the king or monarchy is a red line. Yet it is also important for journalists to keep readers apprised of the state of affairs regarding reforms, and “the so-called democratic transition” (Hoffmann, 2013, p. 158). Thus, a few bodies of work in the communications literature come immediately to the fore that we can call upon as reference for the current study: framing and the public sphere.

Framing theory provides a basis to better understand how examination of daily newspaper coverage, when undertaken over a period of time, can allow observations of patterns that might not be as apparent in the immediate period of the material's release (de Vreese, 2005). Galtung and Ruge (1973) suggested that the end product of newspapers usually favors the status quo of societal leadership and relies heavily on a mixture of journalistic procedures and commercial realities. Framing theory focuses on journalistic procedures and suggests that journalists have the ability to infer, based on the manner in which they write on a subject, how information will be perceived and interpreted by readers. It is acknowledged that framing is often “difficult to define. The specifics of measurement will differ for each topic of discourse” (Tankard, 2001, p. 96). In many ways, frames can set the parameters for public discussion and debate about a topic of societal importance.

Other theories are closely related to framing. For instance, much debate and discussion in the literature addresses agenda setting and priming and how these theories may be thought of in relation to framing (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Weaver, 2007). Adding the element of time, we might also reference the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) to understand how readers will ultimately digest the information they read. The elaboration likelihood model is most closely tied to the public relations and advertising industries, but it also has applications in the writing and absorption of news, especially in markets where the print media feel constraints on its freedoms.

Based on the literature, we are advised that what a newspaper covers and how it covers it, first, leads to an awareness among the public (agenda setting) and, second, indicates how readers may come to think in a particular way about a topic (framing)—and ultimately, through elaboration of thought (the elaboration likelihood model), may come to make a judgment or judgments about it. Previous research suggests different kinds of frames. Goffman (1974) highlighted “natural” and “social” frames. Iyengar (1990) discussed “episodic” or “thematic” frames. Lee, McLeod, and Shah (2008) referenced “value frames” versus “strategy frames” as they “presented participants with news stories in which policy

conflicts were described as either a clash of underlying values and principles (i.e., a value frame) or as a clash of political interests and strategies (i.e., a strategy frame)" (p. 695).

The framing categories that seemed to best fit the current study were from Jasperson and El-Kikhia (2003). Their study outlined three frame categories: *official*, *military*, and *humanitarian*. Given the Moroccan context, the official and humanitarian frames made sense, but the military category did not. Therefore, the military frame was replaced with an *oppositional* category, which would include aspects of coverage that would reflect viewpoints of oppositional political/social parties in Morocco. The official category refers to coverage that supports the king and the national government, and the humanitarian frame refers to coverage that focused on aspects related to the citizenry and their plight, including religious aspects to a story (although in some cases, religion could be used in an official frame given the king's position). However, during the protests and subsequent announcement of reforms, religious frames tended to lean away from the official frame. Hoffmann and Koenig (2013) commented on this shift, stating that "frames that involve religious aspects have played a more important role in campaigns against the top-down constitutional reforms" (p. 10). Thus, three frame categories were used for coding: official, oppositional, and humanitarian. In some cases, the frames for the articles contained passages that touched upon two or all three frames; if a dominant frame was not clear, the coders also had the ability to choose "undetermined."

Finally, we must note the literature surrounding the concept and theory of the "public sphere" (Habermas, 1962). The public sphere has many varied definitions, but its basic premise is that of a forum or space (real, imagined, or virtual) that exists within a society which allows citizens to discuss things freely. This idea is relevant to the current study, because Habermas suggested that a credible local newspaper was a necessary key element to inform the populace. Thus, the public sphere literature as it concerns the Moroccan context is indeed valuable in a discussion of this study's topics, because much is written about the general Arab public sphere (Ayish, 2008; Graioud, 2007; Lynch, 2003, 2005). In this regard, two mediums have come to take on increased importance in the Middle East and North Africa region: satellite television and the Internet. A full discussion is not within the purview of this study (for more, see Lynch, 2013; Phillips, 2014); however, we note that Habermas "situates the public sphere as an intermediate system between citizens, on the one hand; and policymakers, on the other. Opinions crystallized through public discussions are for Habermas signs for a new legitimacy" (Lachhab, 2013, para. 2). Thus, we may consider the degree to which a Moroccan newspaper functions as an intermediary, as a mouthpiece, or as an oppositional voice to the government and how this advances or stifles the existence and health of a public sphere—an arena that, while debatable, many feel is crucial to democratization (Kellner, 2000; Sater, 2007; Tayebi, 2015).

With the preceding discussion in mind, the following research questions are posed to guide the analysis:

RQ1: How did the Moroccan press compare in their coverage, from 2011 to 2015, of the February 20 movement and the constitutional reforms of 2011 in terms of (a) total coverage, (b) tone of coverage, (c) frames, (d) sources, and (e) whether or to what degree certain actors (e.g., the king, political leaders) were included in the stories and how they were treated?

RQ2: *How did the Moroccan press compare in their coverage and treatment of the main actors involved in these historical events: (a) the king, (b) the makhzen, (c) the coalition government (PJD), and (d) any other party (e.g., Istiqlal, PAM, etc.)?*

Method

This study employs a content analysis approach to explore the newspaper coverage, representations, and portrayals, of the February 20 movement and the king's constitutional reforms of 2011. The analysis uses a quantitative, descriptive approach to certain variables to examine the interplay between media and politics and how media is contributing to, and shaping, the political understanding of audiences by processes of framing (David, Atun, Fille, & Monterola, 2011; Entman, 1993; Iyengar, 1991). Content analysis of print media coverage has a long, effective history in mass communications research (Macnamara, 2005), and it need not always be strictly quantitative in nature. Eskjaer (2012) used a both a qualitative and quantitative approach for exploratory purposes (in turn, citing Bryman, 2008) and explained that the study was "less concerned with testing theoretical assumptions than investigating patterns of news reporting" (p. 4). The print media are represented by the three aforementioned newspapers: *Le Matin*, *Al Massae*, and *Attajdid*.

Selection and Retrieval of Articles

Gaining access to the newspapers was not a simple undertaking. None of the papers are fully archived in an online digital format—a dilemma for many publications in the Middle East. Thus, gathering the materials had to be done in person. This task was achieved by visiting the newspapers offices and obtaining limited access to the printed material for the time period 2011 to 2015. Because it was not possible to work from two-constructed weeks' sampling frame, as would have been ideal (allowing a more strictly quantitative approach), issues of the available newspapers were examined. Whenever an article appeared that contained one of the keywords (see Table 1), it was reviewed for analysis. If it was determined that the majority of the article was concerned with the study's two main topics (February 20 and constitutional reforms), it was gathered for inclusion in the study.

Table 1. Keywords Used to Search for Relevant Articles; Arabic and French Reflecting the Languages of the Newspaper Articles (With English Translation).

Arabic keywords	French keywords	English translation
الاستثنائية المغربية	L'exception Marocaine	Moroccan exceptionalism
الربيع المغربي	Le printemps marocain	Moroccan spring
الربيع في المغرب	Le printemps du Maroc	Morocco's spring
20 فبراير حركة	Le mouvement du 20 Fevrier	February 20 movement
الإصلاح الدستوري	Le reforme constiutionnelle	Constitutional reform
ثورة هادئة في المغرب	Revolution calme au Maroc	Quiet revolution in Morocco

The print archives were manually searched, starting from 2015 and working back to 2011, in the weeks prior to and immediately following specific dates (February 20 movement date; March 9 king's

speech; July 1 reform date)—to give the best chance of capturing the relevant articles. The assumption was that these dates would most likely reveal articles for further examination. However, it was discovered that the newspapers had few articles dealing with the topics (based on the keywords) in 2015, 2014, and 2013. The search then continued further back to 2012 and 2011. In this manner, it was possible to uncover the relative newsworthiness of the topics over the years—and exactly what the newspapers were printing at those times.

Thinking that the method of searching using a handful of key dates may have been too restrictive, especially given the paucity of results in the later years, it was decided to conduct a manual keyword search on all available editions throughout the years. It should be noted, though, that due to the nature of archival materials, many dates and editions were missing; and because the searching was done manually, it is probable that articles were missed in the process. Although the interpretation of the findings has to take into account that some information may have been missed, the overall findings of the way the events were portrayed continue to represent what has been reported in the three newspapers.

Coding the Articles

The coding sheet allowed the coders to score each newspaper article based on a number of variables. The first few decisions were fairly simple in terms of merely noting the year of the story and the number of words that the article contained. Other coding decisions were a bit more difficult in that they required a detailed assessment of the article. For example, although the article was selected based on the keywords shown in Table 1, and so we already knew the topics covered in the piece (February 20 movement, constitutional reform), the coders needed to assess and make a qualitative decision about whether the article's overall tone was favorable, neutral, or unfavorable. The coder would then make a notation about he or she arrived at this decision. Also, we coded for whether a particular political actor was mentioned and whether he or she was treated favorably. We also coded based on the sources used in the articles and whether a photo was included with the story. Lawrence (2010) previously found: "Many issues and events that citizens encounter in the news have been framed by political actors, particularly government officials" (p. 265). Finally, the articles were coded as to the major topics that were covered in the text.

The period originally specified for the study, 2011 to 2015, was meant to cover the range of years since the momentous activities of 2011. However, it quickly became apparent that newspaper articles dealing with the issues that were of critical importance in 2011 and 2012 were no longer being mentioned in the same way in later years. Of the 127 articles gathered for the study, most were from 2011 (see Figure 1), and a handful were from 2012. For a few, the dates were not recorded due to limitations in the search method already mentioned.

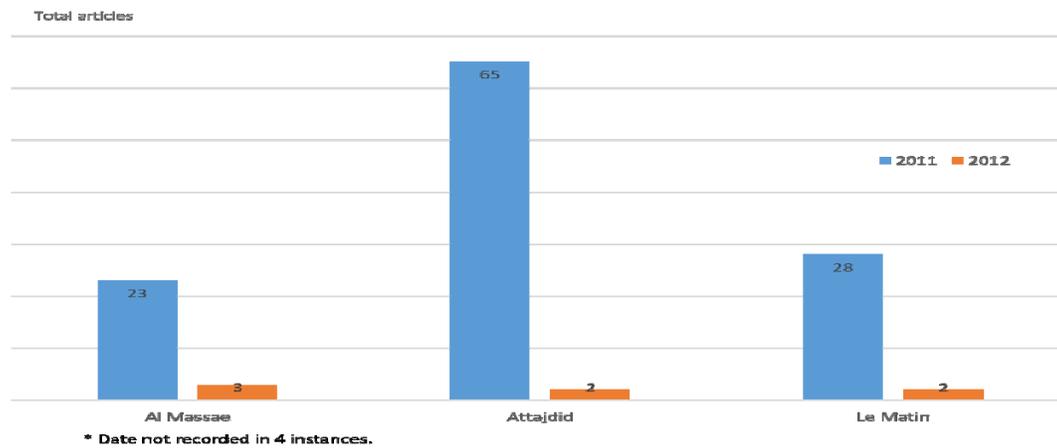


Figure 1. Number of articles containing the study's keywords in three Moroccan newspapers, 2011–2012.

Coding

Student research assistants, with the ability to read Arabic and French, were employed to read and score the articles. After a series of coding sessions using 10 articles randomly selected from the total gathered (representing nearly 8% of the articles), an agreement score over the minimum threshold as suggested by previous research, 80%, was obtained on all the variables. Thus, the coding was able to continue on the remaining newspaper articles. The 10 articles that were used for intercoder reliability testing were returned to the study's sample, because each article was deemed essential. In addition, the only metric for agreement was straight percentage agreement. Because the sample was not random and no statistical claim is being made about the sample of articles (as generalizable to the rest), there was no perceived need to test intercoder reliability further. Our goal was to gain an exploratory insight into the articles that were gathered. The results are primarily descriptive in nature.

Basic Profiles of Stories

The selection of these three specific newspapers obviously has a bearing on the subsequent findings. This is because the newspapers are understood to align with certain societal power structures. However, this cannot always be assumed to affect coverage all the time, and content analysis can test this assumption more thoroughly. While we were investigating the frames that the newspapers took with regard to the two primary topics, we were also able to discern the degree to which the newspapers toed the company line, so to speak, in their coverage. Given what we know about how newspapers operate, and the influences on media content, individual journalists might have had an effect on the coverage in a

story. There are different levels of influence, and ultimately the pattern in coverage helps to paint the overall picture for the paper over time.

Answering the Research Questions

RQ1 contained five main variables that were coded for in the analysis of the newspaper articles: (a) total coverage, (b) tone of coverage, (c) frames, (d) sources, and the (e) inclusion of certain actors in the stories. A definitive result for the total amount of coverage cannot be reported, because our method of obtaining the articles was purposive, the archives were not complete, and ultimately we cannot be confident that our collection is a census of all the articles printed on the subject. That being said, it is strongly felt that the articles obtained are representative of the corpus.

Findings

The total number of articles gathered from each newspaper for the years covered is reported in Figure 1. For the remaining variables, analysis was conducted on the articles gathered.

To ascertain the tone of coverage, coders were asked to score articles on whether the text was favorable, neutral, or unfavorable to the February 20 movement and the constitutional reforms. The results are shown in Figures 2 and 3. The general view is that the print media were cautious about and neutral in their reporting in early 2011; however, as momentum built and reforms were announced, the coverage increased, and the tone shifted toward greater favorability (for the reforms). Initially, the February 20 movement was not mentioned (not at all in *Le Matin*); however, the term was found in *Al Massae* and *Attajdid*. In *Al Massae*, the movement was covered, but there was a decided neutrality in the coverage—when official sources were mentioned, they supported the call for reforms (and viewed them with favor); however, citizen voices (e.g., a religious leader was quoted in one article) tended to want even more to be done (and they were generally reported as not discussing the reforms favorably). In *Attajdid*, coverage toward the movement was neutral to favorable at first, but after the reforms had been announced, the coverage turned more unfavorable toward the movement and more in favor of discussing the reforms. In two articles, opposition party leaders were mentioned as not being in favor of the movement. The reforms quickly became the focal point for coverage, and they were covered favorably; however, while some of the coverage could be characterized as mixed in *Al Massae*, it remained mostly favorable in *Attajdid*, and absolutely favorable in *Le Matin*. The figures do not show the coverage over time, and this is due in large part to the limited number of articles that were available for review. As mentioned, the topic of the February 20 movement and the reforms receded over time, based on the difficulty in finding articles with the keywords after 2012. On a side note, one coder noted numerous Arabic spelling errors in the *Attajdid* articles.

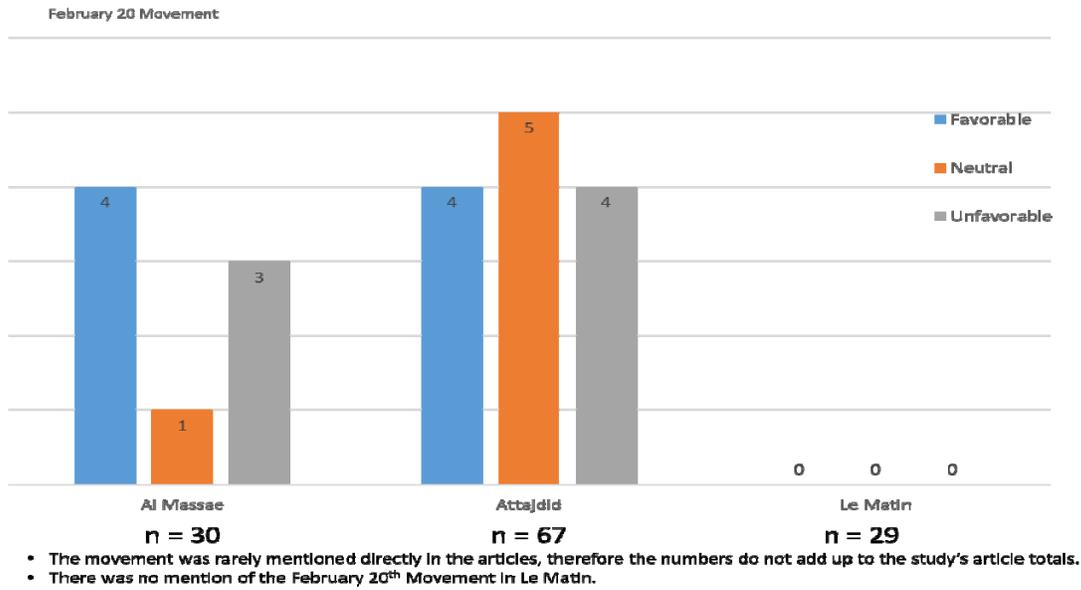


Figure 2. Tone of coverage of the February 20 movement in three Moroccan newspapers, 2011–2012.

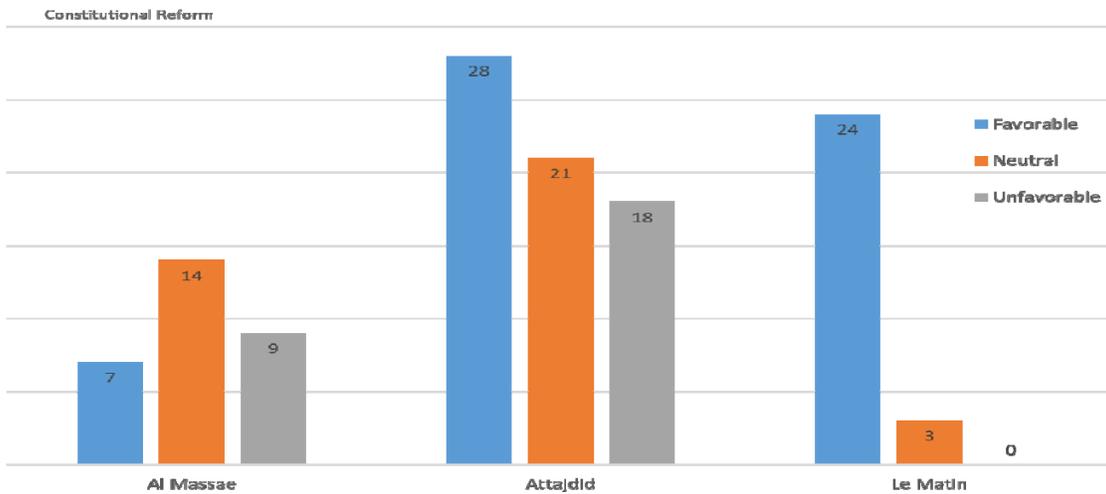


Figure 3. Tone of coverage of the constitutional reforms in three Moroccan newspapers, 2011–2012.

Another part of RQ1 was to ascertain the frames used in the articles. The framing categories were created at the same time the newspapers were selected, and the categories were based on previous

literature, but with a slight modification given the study's Moroccan context. The categories were official, oppositional, and humanitarian. It is, by and large, accepted that *Le Matin* is a royalist newspaper, and as such, its stories are written from the official viewpoint of the office of the monarchy. *Attajdid* is an Islamist paper and often has taken an oppositional stance toward some political parties, if not the government—though this changed with mixed coverage, somewhat as a result of the events in 2011. *Al Massae* is an independent print media outlet, and thus its viewpoints and coverage would be expected to reflect this. Figure 4 shows the results for the frame variable found in the articles. Only *Le Matin* is consistent with its "official" approach to the framing of stories, and this comes as no surprise given that this newspaper acts as the official mouthpiece of the monarchy. In the other two newspapers, no clear frame emerged from the articles that were examined. In many instances, the frames were mixed, leading the coders to make an indeterminate selection. There were only a few instances where the frames were clear enough to be coded as fitting into one of the three categories of the study.

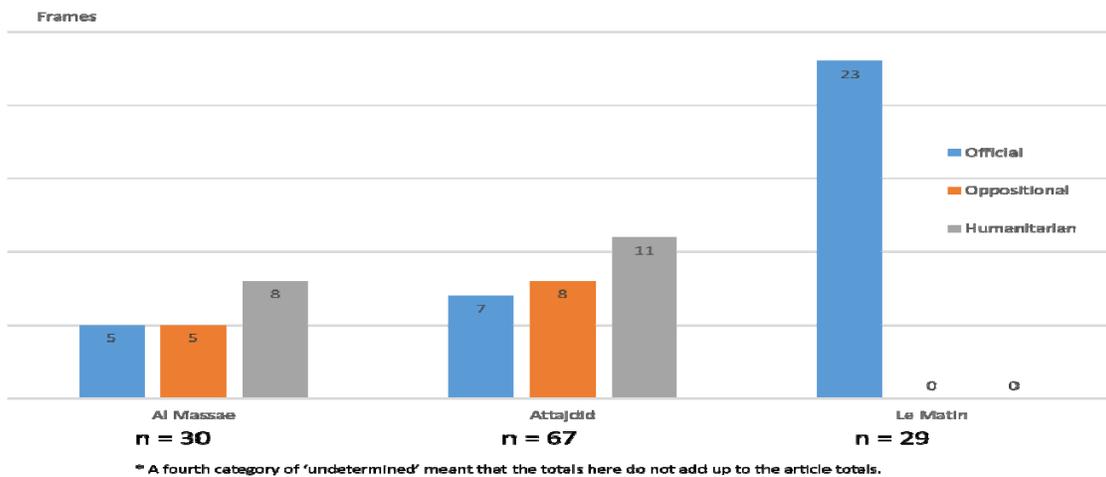


Figure 4. Frames used in coverage of the constitutional reforms in three Moroccan newspapers, 2011–2012.

In examining the sources of the newspaper articles, we were interested in both the bylines for the articles as well as the sources who appeared in the articles. For most of the 127 articles, the author of the piece was not known. However, there were many instances where officials and citizens were quoted in the stories. Regarding the bylines, in over half of the cases, stories had no attribution (69 of 127). The second highest total was for a combination of reporters to be mentioned. In only seven of the stories was there an easily identifiable newspaper staff reporter. In terms of sources cited in the articles, the results are reported in Figure 5. The variable had several categories; however, we show the data here most usefully in terms of the "king" and "all others." In *Le Matin*, the king is the most quoted source for the news items. In *Al Massae*, the king was quoted a few times, but coalition members and citizens were also cited. In *Attajdid*, the king received a few quotes, but citizens received the vast majority of quotes.

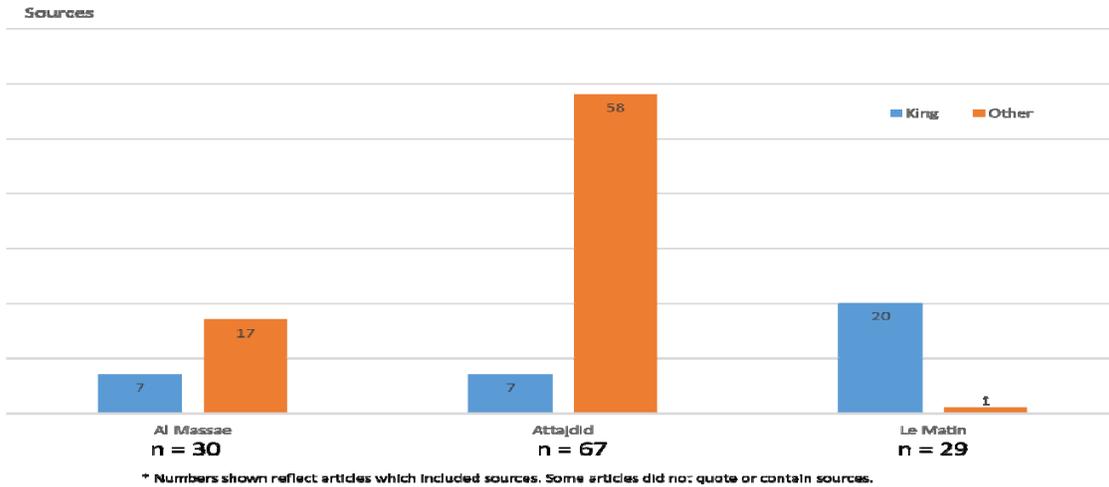


Figure 5. Sources quoted or mentioned in articles dealing with the February 20 movement or constitutional reforms in three Moroccan newspapers, 2011–2012.

Finally, articles were coded to determine which actors were mentioned in the articles and whether they were dealt with favorably, neutrally, or unfavorably. The king was the most referenced source, and in *Attajdid* and *Le Matin*, the coverage was always favorable. Only one article in *Attajdid* had neutral coverage of the king. This makes sense, because one of the red lines in Moroccan media is the treatment of the king. However, two articles in *Al Massae* were coded as unfavorable and four as neutral with regard to the king. This indicates that there are some instances when the print media's coverage may bump up against the red lines that have been so often mentioned with regard to Moroccan media. While coders were instructed about the case of the *makhzen* in regard to the Moroccan situation, reference to this entity occurred in only four articles, and there was a split of one response favorable, one response unfavorable, and two indeterminate, so the instances were too few to be of import. The Justice and Development Party was mentioned in 25 articles, with over half of the reports providing favorable coverage. Other opposition parties were mentioned in 15 of the articles; in those instances, eight of the references were scored as unfavorable and seven as neutral.

Discussion

The portrayals in stories across the three newspapers, while not exactly uniform, tended toward neutrality and caution in the case of *Al Massae* and *Attajdid* when reporting on the February 20 movement, while later neutrality to favorable frames was noted in coverage of the constitutional reforms. It is somewhat difficult to fathom that a widespread movement of the citizenry was not mentioned nearly as much as one might have thought in 2011 and 2012 in the pages of the Moroccan press, especially given the academic literature that has referenced the movement. In the case of *Le Matin*, the February 20 movement was never mentioned. However, the articles recognized movement forces and quickly began to shift coverage and the discussion toward the king's speech made on March 9, 2011. We see that the king's

speech was able to redirect the agenda-setting function of the news media by offering reforms (in reaction to protests, while never mentioning them)—and this allowed the monarchy to move toward greater control over the narrative, redirecting the forces of change that were building in the country. The subsequent discussions in the print media became about the reforms—and the different reactions among political and societal actors to these—rather than about the people’s movement or even the monarchy per se, and this allowed for coverage to continue along this path, as essentially set by the king’s office. The king never mentioned the February 20 movement during this critical period (nor has he since).

The framing of stories carries significant weight in terms of what the public will come to know about a particular topic—and even how they will think about it. In the case here, it seems that the newspapers did delve into more thematic issues surrounding what was happening with various groups in society that were coalescing around the February 20 movement. It was determined rather rapidly that the movement was not to be the focus of news reports, as the powers that be quickly redirected discussion from one involving societal actors to a political one dealing with the constitutional reforms. Again, from the available academic literature, we know that much was happening in society and behind the scenes at the newspapers, but the coverage did not reflect this. It is clear that different conversations were taking place, and many of them were never covered. There are different ways to view this shift in the news coverage of the time: On the one hand, it preserved stability and allowed a discussion to take place in the newspapers on the issue of the reforms. On the other hand, it perhaps curtailed discussions rather early surrounding the very basis on which the February 20 movement coalesced and on which arguments for its existence were based. In theory, the media can act as an outlet or forum for these discussions to take place, but if allowed to continue without any real direction or focus, it is also true that uncertainty and instability could grow—to what end we do not know. Thus, the role of local media within society is always being decided and shaped—often by the various forces that are shaping society itself, with some powers clearly having a greater say in the process—for better or for worse (or neither).

News values are rooted in the dominant ideology of a country, and as such, news media in Morocco, it seems, have learned to favor the status quo, only occasionally testing the boundaries of what can be printed—and perhaps often unknowingly so—while also staying alert so as not to cross the red lines. During the critical time period of 2011–2012, similarities among the print media were noticeable in that coverage of the February 20 movement rarely mentioned the movement by name, and in most cases, coverage swiftly shifted to the king’s speech on March 9 and the subsequent reforms promised. This gives us some indication that Moroccan print media—or these newspapers at least—are operating within certain constraints, as has been noted elsewhere, and are perhaps unable therefore to fulfill the role that Habermas suggested for a healthy public sphere. In the case of *Le Matin*, its role is seen clearly in its very design—as that of a mouthpiece for the monarchy. This analysis shows that the one-way directional message-making of some mass media is alive and well.

This study represents an exploratory snapshot of a moment in time—albeit an important time. The study examines newspaper coverage of a significant movement in Morocco and the subsequent reaction by the leader during the period now known as the Arab Spring. A number of print media stories from a convenience sample were examined from three Moroccan newspapers that were dealing with issues brought to the fore by the February 20 movement and the subsequent king’s speech and reforms on the

matter. The study provides some basic micro information about the type and kind of coverage that the newspapers were producing. It does not uncover the degree to which the macro movement was successful; nor does it reveal the extent to which the reforms have been successful. Other studies, no doubt, will address these issues from their appropriate contexts and vantage points. For now, these issues have not been resolved. What the study does reveal is perhaps the tendency of the Moroccan print media at the time to tread cautiously during a period of great upheaval in the region on the issue of the February 20 movement and the important questions that the movement was raising. More studies are needed to expand and assess more content of the Moroccan media during this time period, and on which citizens still must rely for their daily news and information. In this way, we can discover whether, and the degree to which, the media are fulfilling their public service role to society, or merely transmitting the biddings of a powerful elite.

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