

📖 Topic Page: [Morocco](#)

Definition: **Morocco** from *The Macquarie Dictionary*

1.

a kingdom in north-western Africa on the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea; divided into a Spanish and a French protectorate before independence in 1956; southern territory of Western Sahara is occupied by Morocco but disputed by Mauritania.

458~730 km² Arabic, also Berber, Spanish and French Moroccan dirham Rabat

French Maroc

Moroccan *noun adjective*

Moroccans



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Summary Article: **Morocco**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Country in northwest Africa, bounded to the north and northwest by the Mediterranean Sea, to the east and southeast by Algeria, and to the south by Western Sahara.

Government Under the 2011 constitution, Morocco is an Islamic state with a hereditary constitutional monarch. It has a two-chamber legislature comprising a directly elected lower house, the chamber of representatives (Majlis al-Nuwab) and an indirectly-elected upper house, the chamber of counsellors. The chamber of representatives comprises 395 members directly elected for five-year terms under proportional representation, 305 in multi-seat constituencies and 90 in national lists in which two-thirds are reserved for women. The chamber of counsellors was established following a referendum in 1996. It has 270 members serving nine-year terms, with 162 elected by local councils, 81 by chambers of commerce, and 27 by trade unions. Under the 2011 constitution, the king is obliged to appoint a prime minister from the party which wins most seats in the chamber of representatives' elections, and the prime minister is head of government and has the power to dissolve parliament. The king has a veto over legislation and controls the police, army, and foreign policy. The lower house may dismiss the government through a vote of no-confidence and the upper house can force its resignation by a two-thirds majority vote. The 2011 constitution guarantees freedom of expression, the independence of judges, and civic and social equality for women.

History Originally occupied by Berber tribes, the coastal regions of the area now known as Morocco were under Phoenician and then Carthaginian rule from the 10th to the 3rd centuries BC. Both the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians used their bases on the Berber coast for their trade with the Iberian Peninsula.

When the Romans began to expand their territory in North Africa in the 1st century BC, they first took the Mediterranean ports and did not penetrate inland, but the later province of Mauritania Tingitana

extended south of Fès. The Vandal invasion in the early 5th century largely bypassed Morocco as it headed for the fertile region that is now Tunisia, and Morocco reverted to rule by Berber chieftains. There was a further invasion, this time by Visigoths, in the 6th century.

The coming of Islam Islam, brought by Arab invaders, reached the far west of North Africa in AD 684, and the converted Berbers played an important part in the Islamic conquest of Spain. The schismatic doctrine of Khawarijism, which denied the purely Arab nature of early Islam, caused much internal strife in the mid-8th century.

It was not until Idris I (a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatima and the Caliph Ali) sought refuge from Baghdad that Morocco was subjugated to a single ruler. The Idrisid dynasty, which he founded, lasted from 788 to 986, coming under increasing threat in its last years from the Umayyad dynasty of Spain and the Fatimids of the eastern Maghreb.

Almoravids and Almohads Conquest came from another direction, however. The religious zeal of a powerful Berber leader from the region between the Senegal and Niger rivers (in modern Mali/Mauritania) persuaded him to lead a jihad (holy war) against the heretics to the north. As these Almoravids (*al-Murabitun*, people of the frontier fortresses) moved north in the 11th century, they spread their empire into Morocco, Algeria, and Spain, where they halted the Christian Reconquista (reconquest from the Moors). Under the Almoravid dynasty medieval Moroccan culture reached a peak, for example in the founding of Marrakesh.

By the early 12th century, however, the Almoravid dynasty was waning, to be superseded by another religious movement, stemming from the Atlas Mountains. These were the Almohads, (*al-Muwahhidun*, unitarians). Led by a Mahdi (messiah), they conquered Tunisia and as far east as Cyrenaica (in modern Libya), and held Muslim Spain. The Almohads' empire began to break up with their defeat in Spain by the Christians at Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, and gradually the eastern regions established independence.

Morocco from the 14th to the 18th centuries The Merinid dynasty that followed was incapable of holding back the Bedouin tribes that swept across North Africa, so that the Arabization of Morocco began from the mid-14th century. By 1500 the Spanish and Portuguese had taken several enclaves on the coast of Morocco, including Ceuta, Tangier, Ifni, Arcila, and Agadir.

Resistance to this encroachment came from the revival of sharifian leadership (a *sharif* is a descendant of the Prophet, and Morocco is still styled 'the Sharifian kingdom'). The Portuguese were defeated and the sharifs withstood pressure from the Ottoman Turks, who had established their presence in Algeria. It was a time of prosperity, and the Moroccan court established contact with many countries in Europe, including England.

In 1664 the Alawi sharifs came to power, and their rule has continued since. Moulay Ismail (1672–1727) brought Morocco to another high point of unity and influence, and it was he who first showed preference to France.

European rivalry over Morocco After the French conquered Algiers in 1830, Morocco helped the Algerian resistance leader, Abd al-Kader, realizing it might be next in line for conquest. In 1860 a brief war with Spain led to the cession of Ceuta and Ifni, small enclaves on the north and west coasts. But by the turn of the century European interest in Morocco had intensified beyond the power of the sultan to withstand. In 1904 Britain agreed to give up its influence in favour of France, in return for a reciprocal

arrangement in Egypt, and within months Spain and France had agreed to 'share' Morocco: Spain would dominate the northern zone, and France the southern.

The Germans objected to the spread of French influence in Morocco, ushering in the first of the Moroccan Crises of 1905. This was diffused by the Algeiras Conference in 1906, at which an 'open door' policy was agreed by the European powers. However, this failed when Germany sought to force territorial concessions from France in 1911 by sending a gunboat, the *Panther*, to Agadir. The Agadir Incident ended in a Franco-German pact: Germany recognized France's pre-eminence in Morocco in exchange for territorial concessions in the Congo. In 1912 most of Morocco became a French protectorate, but the Spanish held on to part as a protectorate, and the international zone of Tangier was established in 1923 by France, the UK, and Spain.

Resistance to French rule The first French resident-general, Gen Byautey, virtually ruled Morocco 1912–25. He was responsible for much modernization and for subjugating almost all of the country, notably by quelling the Riff revolt (1921–25) led by Abd al-Karim. The 'pacification' of the country was completed by 1934.

Nationalist parties and movements in the towns developed just as the last tribesmen were defeated. The most significant, the Istiqlal (Independence) Party, was formed in 1943, after Morocco had shown its support for the Free French movement in World War II. It was joined in its demands for constitutional government by the sultan, Muhammad bin Yousef (Muhammad V), who had been sultan since 1927. However, internal antagonism from the Berber tribesmen under Thami al-Glawi, the pasha of Marrakesh, who sought to resist all Western intrusions, brought the alliance to nothing. The sultan was forced into exile between 1953 and 1955, during which time there were demonstrations and terrorist incidents.

Independence achieved The sultan was brought back by the French in triumph and in March 1956 the 1912 protectorate agreement was annulled, and Morocco became independent under Sultan Muhammad V. The former Spanish protectorate joined the new state, together with Tangier, which had previously been an international zone. The sultan was restyled king of Morocco in August 1957.

The struggle for independence in Morocco was shorter and less harrowing than in neighbouring French Algeria, where the revolution was well under way by this date; this was partly because Morocco's colonial ties were much looser, and partly because Moroccan independence involved no substantial change in the form of government.

Morocco after independence After independence the radical wing of the Istiqlal broke away to form the Union Nationale des Forces Populaires (UNFP) under Mehdi Ben Barka. This move in effect strengthened the role of the monarchy by splitting the opposition to the growing power of the royal court. Muhammad's son succeeded to the throne as King Hassan II in March 1961, and after Hassan's accession a new constitution was introduced. He set up an elected chamber of representatives, but this failed to rectify the situation, and the Istiqlal and UNFP both suffered political repression.

The poor state of the domestic economy aggravated unrest, and in June 1965 Hassan declared a state of emergency, assuming full legislative and executive powers and proceeded to rule autocratically until 1977, when a chamber of representatives was re-established. In 1965, Ben Barka was kidnapped and shot in Paris by Moroccan agents, with the aid of the French secret service. Hassan's chief of security, Gen Oufkir, was wanted for arrest in connection with the disappearance, and several lesser henchmen

were tried and sentenced in Paris.

Hassan's personal rule The king's rule faltered on, sustained chiefly by the external diversion of the Arab–Israeli conflict and internal repression. Various further constitutions have since been formulated in an attempt to balance personal royal rule with demands for greater democracy. The 1970 constitution was approved by 98% of the population (despite widespread opposition and boycotting) and a new legislative assembly was elected.

The real threat to the king came from the army, however. In 1971 an unsuccessful coup was staged at the king's birthday party at his Skhirate palace. Executions and purges followed. In August 1972 another, mid-air, attempt on his life was made, apparently under the direction of his confidant and defence minister, Gen Oufkir. Nevertheless, the regime continued to harass and imprison opposition party members.

In the early 1970s King Hassan won prestige in international affairs through his chairmanship of the Organization of African Unity, hosting an Islamic conference, and his military involvement in the October 1973 Arab–Israeli War. After the attempted coups, he initiated a programme of Moroccanization of business and land ownership, and with greatly increased prices of phosphates (Morocco's chief mineral product) he was able to stimulate industrialization.

The Western Sahara dispute In 1975 King Hassan won acclaim at home by securing, following a lengthy campaign, the phosphate-rich northern sector of Spanish Sahara (Western Sahara), which was seen as historically Moroccan. This occurred when Spain agreed to cede Spanish Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania and they divided it, with Morocco taking the northern sector, and Mauritania the southern sector.

However, the inhabitants had not been consulted and they rebelled. Their independence movement, the Polisario Front, waged guerilla war against Morocco and Mauritania and received support from Algeria. They set up a government in exile in Algiers, the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), which prompted Hassan to sever diplomatic relations with Algeria in 1976.

In 1979 Mauritania agreed a peace treaty with Polisario, and Morocco annexed the part of Western Sahara that Mauritania had vacated. Polisario reacted by intensifying its operations. The Organization of African Unity mediated a ceasefire in 1983 but it failed to hold. The war was costly for Morocco and left it isolated as the SADR gained wider recognition. But Hassan sought to capitalize on the patriotism it generated in his country.

In 1984 Hassan unexpectedly signed an agreement with Moamer al-Khaddhafi of Libya, who had been helping Polisario, guaranteeing economic and political cooperation and mutual defence. And in August 1988 a United Nations peace plan was accepted by Morocco and the Polisario, calling for a referendum to permit the area's inhabitants to choose independence or incorporation into Morocco. Full diplomatic relations with Algeria were restored in 1988, and with Syria in 1989. In 1991 the UN brokered a ceasefire agreement between Morocco and Polisario, with a UN peacekeeping mission (MINURSO) established, pending the holding of a referendum on the territory's fate. The referendum was originally planned for 1992, but disputes over who should be allowed to vote led to it repeatedly being postponed. In 2009 MINURSO remained in Western Sahara and the referendum had still not been held.

Morocco in the 1990s In 1990–91 Morocco officially opposed Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, although there was much popular support for Iraq. In 1993, as part of the Middle East peace process, a peace

accord was signed with Israel.

Domestically, the government became concerned at growing Islamic fundamentalism in the region. In August 1992 King Hassan appointed the veteran politician Muhammad Lamrani to head a government of independents. A new constitution was approved in a national referendum in September 1992, but it fell short of the democratic advances demanded by the king's opponents. The ruling centre-right coalition held on to power after parliamentary elections in 1993 and Abd al-Latif Filali replaced Lamrani as prime minister in May 1994.

The November 1997 assembly elections were inconclusive. But after further elections in March 1998, Abderrahmane Youssoufi formed a centre-left coalition government and became prime minister.

Reform under King Muhammad VI King Hassan died in July 1999 and was succeeded by his son Muhammad, who became King Muhammad VI. In what was seen as an early indication of a willingness to accept some political liberalization, Muhammad sacked Driss Basri, who, for 20 years, had served as the country's all-powerful interior minister. In February 2000 King Muhammad embarked on social and political reform to strengthen the rights of women and improve their status in what was a male-dominated society. Around 40,000 women marched in the Moroccan capital, Rabat, in support of these reforms, but there were even larger counter-demonstrations in Casablanca, involving hundreds of thousands of Muslims, many of them veiled women.

In October 2002, Driss Jettou, a non-party businessman was appointed prime minister, leading a coalition based around the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP). In December 2002, the king lowered the voting age in elections from age 20 to 18. The USFP-led coalition lost the September 2007 parliamentary elections, with the conservative and monarchist but secular-oriented Istiqlal finishing as the largest single party, with 52 of the 325 chamber of representatives' seats. The Istiqlal leader, Abbas el-Fassi, became the new prime minister.

Under King Hassan, private investment was encouraged and the tourist sector continued to grow. However, despite economic growth, which reached 8% in 2006, rates of unemployment and poverty remained high.

Foreign relations and terrorism In July 2002, following an occupation of the uninhabited rocky outcrop of Perejil in the Strait of Gibraltar in July 2002 and the subsequent recapture of the islet by Spanish forces, the Moroccan and Spanish governments declared a truce in their ownership dispute under an accord brokered by the USA. However, the government continued to claim a number of other Spanish-held territories, including the north African city-enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.

King Muhammad supported the USA in its 'war on terror' after the 11 September 2001 al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on New York. But Morocco found itself targeted by Islamic extremists for terrorist attacks, including coordinated suicide bombings in Casablanca in May 2003, which claimed 30 lives, and further bombings in Casablanca in March–April 2007.

Reform protests in the Arab spring of 2011 In February–March 2011, Morocco was affected by the wave of pro-democracy protests that swept across north Africa and the Middle East, but King Muhammad remained popular and escaped the fate of the toppled rulers of Egypt and Tunisia. On 20 February, tens of thousands protested peacefully in Rabat, Casablanca, Tangier, and Marrakesh, calling for constitutional reform, freedom of expression, educational reform, and against the rising cost of living. The king responded by setting up a Social and Economic Council to oversee constitutional

reform, the granting of new civil rights, and increased price subsidies. Demonstrations in Casablanca on 13 March were broken up by riot police, but more widespread protests on 20 March passed peacefully, without police intervention.

In July 2011, the public overwhelmingly approved a referendum on changes to the constitution, which included increased powers for the prime minister, including to dissolve parliament, the requirement that the prime minister be drawn from the largest party in parliament, and making Berber an official language alongside Arabic. However, the changes still left the king with an effective policy veto and control over the police, army, and foreign policy.

Morocco's first Islamist prime minister Parliamentary elections were held in November 2011 and the moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) finished in first place, winning 107 of the 395 seats with 27% of the vote. A PJD-led broad coalition government was subsequently formed, which included three parties from the preceding government, including right-wing Istiqlal, and the left-wing USFP.

PJD leader Abdelillah Benkirane became Morocco's first Islamist prime minister, but his government gave emphasis to economic and social issues, setting out a goal of raising economic growth to 5% a year (which was achieved in 2015), reducing unemployment (from 9% in early 2012), and improving relations with the European Union. Morocco's security forces also launched a drive against Islamic extremism, dismantling in 2015 a network of militants linked to the terrorist Islamic State (IS).

In May 2012, trade unionists protested in Casablanca at the slow pace of reform, with unemployment failing to fall. In July 2013 Istiqlal left the government, leading to several months of uncertainty until the centre-right National Rally of Independents (RNI) agreed to enter the ruling coalition.

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