

Challenges of Moroccan Public Administration in the Southern Provinces: Exploring the Administrative Resilience Throughout the Sahrawi Case

Zineb Guali

PhD Candidate (3rd year), Public Law and Political Science, University Mohammed 5th Rabat Morocco

Abstract

Morocco started advanced regionalization in 2015. Two of its 12 regions, respectively “Laayoune – Sakia Al Hamra” and “Dakhla-Oued Ddhab” are concerned by a dispute over territorial integrity with the North African neighbors.

The conflict over Sahara started after its colonization by Spain in 1884. The Kingdom ended up signing Madrid agreements to administrate the Sahara. The conflict in the Sahara compromises the implementation of Moroccan reforms. Albeit expensive for Moroccan Government, the execution of economic and social development programs in the Sahara is going on.

The study aims to address the question: What challenges does Moroccan Public Administration face in conflict-affected regions? The research seeks to enhance comprehension of administrative resilience amidst regional conflicts. The paper is qualitative with a case study of two conflict-affected regions: a status quo. The importance of this research stems from an attempt to show the reality of Moroccan Public Administration challenges in the Southern Provinces.

This academic paper shows that the strong socio-economic development dynamism in the Sahara is a major component of regional peace and stability.

Keywords: Sahara, Moroccan Government, Public Administration, Peace-keeping

Introduction

After it initiated an ambitious program of advanced regionalization in 2015, Morocco put great efforts to empower local authorities and promote regional development all over its territory. The kingdom has since then 12 regions: three in the north “Tanger - Tétouan - Al Hoceima”, “L'Oriental” and “Fès – Meknès”; six in the center “Rabat - Salé – Kénitra”, “Beni Mellal – Khénifra”, “Casablanca – Settat”, “Marrakech – Safi”, “Drâa – Tafilalet” and “Souss -Massa”; three in the south “Guelmim - Oued Noun”, “Laayoune - Sakia al Hamra” and “Dakhla - Oued Eddahab”.

The southern provinces constitute the Sahara territory, approximately two hundred sixty-six thousand square kilometers. At the border with Mauritania, Sahara territory had been a Spanish protectorate since 1884 and was recognized by the Berlin Conference in November 1884–February 1885. On November 14, 1975, the Madrid Agreement transferred “Western Sahara” back to the Kingdom of Morocco. Since then, it has been the focus of a territorial dispute between Morocco and the Popular Front for the Liberation of

Sakia-el-Hamra and Rio de Oro (Polisario), which is supported by Algeria. Rio de Oro is the actual Oued Eddahab. Since August 1979, Mauritania has given up any rights to the area (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2004).

The Sahara is a territory of 266 000 km² that contains significant phosphate and mineral deposits as well as oil reserves, which gives it a considerable geopolitical relevance due to its location between the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa. Fishing pacts between Mauritania, Morocco, and the European Union govern its seas, which are among the world's richest in fish. Additionally, the coast's potential for tourism or commerce is crucial. The Dakhla-Oued Eddahab region includes a coastal strip of 667 km in length and is one of the richest fishing areas in Morocco. The Laayoune-Sakia Al Hamra region is characterized by a developed mineral activity, related to the extraction of phosphates.

The kingdom of Morocco has since the decolonization the responsibility to look after its Sahrawi and to manage their affairs. When the state works for ensuring the development and provision of the vital public services, it requires configurations and components that may be difficult to gather if there is an on-going conflict. These challenges can hinder administrative resilience and sustainable development efforts.

Research problem and sub-problems

The study wants to answer the following question: Amidst conflict-related disruptions, how does administrative resilience in conflict-affected regions challenge Moroccan Public Administration?

The topic was broken down by responding to the following sub-questions:

- How do administrative structures adapt to ensure the continuity of the state and the legal frameworks despite conflict-related disruptions?
- In what ways does the government address socioeconomic disparities between conflict-affected areas and other regions?

Importance of the study

The purpose of the study is to explore the subject in order to become familiar with it. It is the result of the researcher's eagerness and thirst for deeper knowledge of the region.

The significance of this study arises from an effort to make a little contribution by illuminating the difficulties faced by Moroccan public administration in a region described as conflict-affected territory. The study aims to investigate how the ability of administrative systems to maintain functionality and adaptability in conflict-affected areas presents challenges for Moroccan Public Administration.

The objectives of the study are the following: to assess the actual situation in Southern Provinces and to determine the efforts of Morocco in maintaining administrative resilience and ensuring the continuity of state functions despite uncertainties and volatility. One other objective is to fill the gaps in existing research.

Limitations of the research

This work represents a first step in the evaluation in terms of achievements for the Moroccan administration and for the Sahara at the same time. This paper also allows to have a better understanding of the concepts and an identification of the institutionalization process. As every project, this work crossed boundaries. It is important to mention a limit at the theoretical level. The limitations reside mainly in the sources that have been used to constitute this research. The latter is based on the work carried out by practitioners and researchers who have all set limits to their studies.

Methodology

This study is qualitative. It focuses on the analysis of the documentation and the observations. Its design is descriptive, it is based on a theoretical framework to support the description of what is seen. The latter defines the problem and its perceptions, the solutions considered by Morocco, its implementation, and the current status of the region.

The selection of the research location was based on the area of conflict. Two provinces affected by the conflict were included, Laayoune-Sakia El Hamra and Dakhla-Oued Eddahab.

There are no numerical measurements used in the study. Various sources of information were acquired by applying document analysis (review).

Literature review

This section is based on –selected- previous studies to highlight information on the subject dealt with. The author picked some of the literature written in French and English to see what it is said by international authors.

▪ The Sahara and the conflict among its territory

Most researchers look into the origins of the conflict. Keltoum Irbah looks into the reasons that may explain the emergence and continuation of the Saharan conflict. She emphasizes that the societal, political, and economic factors are the ones responsible. The territorial dispute refers to various aspects: data prior to colonization, the principle of self-determination of people, the complexity of the political and economic forces prevailing in this region (Irbah, 2004).

Research comes back to the historical burden and the liabilities, trying to find the guilty party. A number of international academic papers condemn Morocco without any proof forgetting the ethical duties of academia. Some of them sympathize with the Sahrawi people, generalizing that they are victims, and try as best they can to identify them and speak in their voice. It is the case for Sophie Caratini that judges' recourse requests presented by Moroccans of improper and abusive. She talks about all Sahrawis as refugees. She affirms that the Sahrawis have created an active conception of exile that astounded everyone who visited the camps.

Some studies look into the status of the territory of Sahara. According to Kalicka-Mikolajczyk, the Article 73 of the United Nations Charter shows that the Western Sahara is a non-self-governing region undergoing decolonization, with the Kingdom of Spain continuing to serve as its administrative authority. This further implies that it is not covered by international law. Therefore, one cannot help but concur with the comment made by Advocate-General Melchior Wathelet, who stated that Western Sahara is not a region whose international status is not now defined: what is currently unknown is not its status, but its future (Kalicka-Mikolajczyk, 2020).

The actual study focuses on what Morocco has done to the Southern Provinces, which is not discussed in the previous academic and international studies.

Theoretical framework

This part of the study is more a “Definitions of Terms” part. It aims to define the principal terms that are used in this research, to ensure that readers understand the components the way the author presents them. That is to have a common ground.

▪ **Defining the administrative resilience**

Building functional, long-lasting states that can fulfill the fundamental requirements of modern statehood is the role of the state. This work entails charging and collecting taxes, supplying vital services including health and education, setting up a transportation and communications network, and managing the economy carefully. It also includes ensuring security against foreign threats and keeping internal order. The implementation of key administrative institutions, like those in the fields of agriculture, health care, and education, which, when properly considered, are more likely to produce the conditions and critical mass required for economic growth and development.

Administrative resilience can be defined as the capacity of a state's administrative institutions to adapt, endure, and continue functioning effectively despite various challenges, including conflicts, disruptions, and external pressures. In the context of governance, administrative resilience encompasses several key aspects (World Bank, 2017).

In a changing world, a nation's readiness to confront crises is a complex trait influenced by various factors, including economic, administrative, infrastructural, and institutional components (Ezzahid, Firano, Ennouhi, Laaroussi, & Anbari, 2022).

Strong administrative resilience allows a state to mitigate risks, manage crises, and maintain stability even in the face of challenges such as civil unrest, terrorism, or geopolitical tensions.

Furthermore, administrative resilience involves fostering adaptability and innovation within state institutions to address evolving societal needs and challenges. This may require reforms, capacity-building initiatives, and investments in human resources and technology to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness of administrative processes (Fukuyama, 2014).

"Resilient" here means that it confronts, adapts to, withstands, anticipates, and even integrates the uncertainties that may affect it (Sourzat, 2019).

▪ **An idea about Moroccan Public Administration**

According to Anwar, the state administration consists of a central administration and a local administration (which is only its territorial extension). This local administration is made up of representatives of the central administration at the local level: mainly the agents of authority and the decentralized services. The Constitution primarily determines the scope of authority of the executive authority. These authorities have political and administrative responsibilities; they guarantee the country's "supreme direction" via the missions of orientation and control. They oversee all residents' shared interests (Anwar, 2020).

The local state administration bodies, which represent various state administration departments across the national territory, carry out the administrative decisions made at the central level and the decisions regarding their execution across the national territory. The decree number 2.15.40 on February 20, 2015, established a new geographical division for the Moroccan territorial structure. Studies show that there is an importance of public administration in explaining satisfaction with democracy (Ariely, 2013).

Results

▪ **The rule of law and the state institutions**

According to official statistics of the Moroccan General Directorate of Local Authorities (attached to the Ministry of Interior), Laayoune-Sakia El Hamra's region and the region of Dakhla-Oued Eddahab represent around 38.1% of Moroccan national territory.

Since the return of the Saharan region to its motherland Morocco, qualitative observed changes followed. The Administration and the local authorities were installed and organized, promptly, in order to allow the Sahrawi citizens to benefit from the same rights than their brothers in the north of the Kingdom (CORCAS, 2022).

The Moroccan Constitution of 2011 defines the State Institutions and organizes their relations in the territory. It also defines the rights and duties of citizens as well as the organization of political powers based on the separation approach (legislative, executive, judicial). The article 31 of the Moroccan Constitution establishes the role of the State regarding the citizens. The southern provinces, -as part of the Moroccan territory-, were concerned by the organizational redrawing of structure in 2015.

For the time being, all of the country's administrative institutions exist at the Saharan region. All ministerial departments and public establishments have regional or provincial delegations in the region. For a matter of length, all the administrative institutions cannot be enumerated. Only major examples will be cited in the following.

Morocco develops healthcare in the Southern Provinces. For instance, in 2017, a unity inaugurated a dental medicine unit in Mersa, within the framework of the partnership between the Regional Health Department of Laayoune and the Municipal Council of Mersa, with an envelope estimated at more than 800 thousand dirhams (Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 2017). This unit will make it possible to bring closer health services -precisely dental health- and avoid to citizens having to travel to Laayoune.

In terms of education, Morocco tries its best to bring citizens' access to education closer. From the pre-elementary school to graduated school. As an example, the National School of Commerce and Management of Dakhla (Ecole Nationale de Commerce et de Gestion, ENCG) was founded in 2016. Its purpose is to train qualified senior executives in the fields of commerce and management (National School of Commerce and Management, 2020).

In 2007, the experts called to the creation of an office of the National Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Skills (ANAPEC). Today, two regional directorates are implanted in the Laayoune and Dakhla regions. In 2020, 841 jobs were promoted in Laayoune by the ANAPEC (data from a labor market survey conducted by ANAPEC Laayoune).

Another facet of the Moroccan Public Administration in the Southern Provinces is the building of the infrastructure; whether for water, electricity or mobile and internet network. The National Office of Electricity¹ (ONEE) is the sole Moroccan electricity supply operator in the country. Due to the scarcity of drinking water in the region, ONEE has carried out several drinking water and liquid sanitation projects in the city of Dakhla.

▪ **The economic and social rights**

The government has implemented a program in the Southern Provinces in the field of employment, economic integration and support for individual initiative. It comes in the context of presenting the employment programs 2021-2026 that the government came up with at the national level, which take into account all age groups and field specificities.

The program for the development of the Dakhla-Oued Eddahab region is what made up the contract's entire cost, which came to more than 22 billion Moroccan dirhams for about 149 projects. Moroccan

¹ Office National de l'Électricité (ONEE)

administration in Southern Provinces promotes investment. 1018 commercial entities were founded in 2018, according to data from the Regional Investment Center in the Dakhla-Oued Eddahab region.

Morocco laid the basic necessary infrastructure for the practice of fishing activity and for creating micro-poles for development that generate jobs in the space of the southern coast (Khyii, 2016).

Since it is located in a desert area, the Laayoune-Sakia Al Hamra region's road network is not large. The sand covers it easily. On the side aisles, bulldozers provided by Moroccan Government transpose sand from one side of the road to the other, twenty-four hours a day, for a length of eight kilometers (Laroui, 2022).

Laayoune is the most industrialized city of the region. This industrial superiority of the city of Laayoune is linked primarily to the infrastructure of its port. Marsa Maroc² lies at the center of a region that is seeing an increase in the establishment of industrial units to aid in the development of the southern region (Marsa Maroc, 2022). The state's support has allowed the emergence of 18 industrial units.

The Moroccan Public Administration is also interested in energy. The "Noor Laayoune I" solar power plant project is a component of the Moroccan solar initiative, which seeks to develop 2,000 MW of solar energy capacity by 2020. It was operated during 2018 (Ministry of energy transition, 2022).

In another stream of activity, the massive participation of the inhabitants of the southern provinces in the last elections of 2021 (a rate of 79%) sent an eloquent message of these populations attachment to the unity of the mother-homeland and their determination to adhere to national institutions capable of implementing the mechanisms of advanced regionalization (Maghreb Arabe Press, 2021).

Discussion

The challenges of Moroccan Public Administration in the southern provinces are numerous. Considerable amounts of money are spent in these territories to make them among the best places in the world in terms of attractivity. Nevertheless, intimidations from the neighborhood concerning this territory are multiplied. The Kingdom of Morocco is trying to make the daily lives of many Sahrawis better by offering them local services and social, economic, political and civil rights.

Many of the world's most pressing issues, including terrorism, poverty, transmitted diseases, the collapse of democracies, and drug trafficking, are the result of weak or failing governments. This is why, the reinforcement of existing governmental institutions and the development of new ones, is a significant topic on the international stage. It is the solution to the actual ailments yet the country has to give itself the means to achieve this growth. The international community must also not put a spoke in the wheel of the state trying its building process. The most difficult thing for an administration or a state is to take one step forward, two steps back. The indicators of progress become obscured due to experiences that result in falling further behind than when improvement was achieved.

The development of the Sahara is very much linked to the transferring of strong institutions. This is what the Kingdom of Morocco tries hard to make possible. Morocco became skilled at moving to the Southern Provinces, people, money, and technology. The institutional perspective makes us aware of the advantages of having a state ruling the provinces under clearly defined borders. However, the Kingdom also needs to transfer the habits of thought to preserve its territorial integrity. There is a requirement to instill certain values, attitudes, and ways of thinking among the population that prioritize and support the goal of maintaining the nation's territorial boundaries and sovereignty.

² Morocco's market leader in running port terminals.

Moroccan Public Administration does everything it can to facilitate the stay of international organizations. There are jobs created to coordinate and help the international entities so their journey can be pleasant. As an example, the Moroccan Ministry of Interior has a position of governor in charge of the coordination with the MINURSO.

Parallel diplomacy or the action of civil society is important to help the Moroccan administration. Never how, it should benefit from training to improve its qualification. It does not need to be institutionalized. It just needs a framework or “perceptiveness” if it can be named this way, to note the role of the Moroccan government in the southern provinces and see the challenges faced. Civil society can help in supporting public policies. The possibility of such gains might positively affect the decision to resolve unresolved disputes. It may strengthen the arguments for ongoing stability.

The international community needs to highlight the work done by Moroccan administration in the conflict-affected area. Making development in such conditions is not an easy thing. The results accomplished in a short period should be applauded.

Conclusion

In conclusion, research on the relationship between Moroccan Public Administration, Southern Provinces, and administrative resilience has led to a richer understanding of the ways in which territorial development leads to improved conditions in a conflict environment. The threat of a continuing conflict or the aggravation of the on-going one impedes economic integration in so many ways.

This study is an introduction to this topic. Further studies with different approaches can give a better understanding. Research can be realized by doing some fieldwork and conducting some interviews.

Bibliography

1. Al jirari et al. (2012). Desert culture: orbits of identity and belonging (in Arabic). The work of the Second Forum of Thought in the Moroccan Sahara, 17-18 February. Boujdour.
2. Anwar, M. (2020). L'organisation administrative. *REMALD, Collection Manuels et travaux universitaires*, 53- 131, pp. 53-81.
3. Ariely, G. (2013). L'administration publique et la satisfaction des citoyens par rapport à la démocratie : Observations transnationales. *Revue Internationale des Sciences Administratives 4 (Vol. 79)*, pp. 801-821.
4. Caratini, S. (2001). Les Sahraouis : Un peuple sans terre. In Cambrézy et Lassailly-Jacob, *POPULATIONS RÉFUGIÉES : De l'exil au retour*.
5. CORCAS. (2022). *Découpage administratif*. Retrieved from Sahara développement: <http://www.sahara-developpement.com/Sahara-Occidental/DecoupageAdministratif-67.aspx>
6. Dinnen, S. (2007, January). The Twin Processes of Nation-Building and State-Building. *SSGM Briefing Note 1*, pp. 3-5.
7. Economic, Social and Environmental Council . (2013). *Rapport sur le nouveau modèle de développement pour les Provinces du Sud*.
8. Ezzahid, Firano, Ennouhi, Laaroussi, & Anbari. (2022). Countries' readiness to deal with large-scale crises: analysis, measure, and world classification.
9. Fukuyama, F. (2014). *Political order and political decay: from the industrial revolution to the globalization of democracy*. First Edition.

10. Irbah, K. (2004). La question du Sahara Occidental : une approche sociologique. *Thèse de doctorat ès sciences économiques et sociales*. Département de Sociologie, Université de Genève.
11. Kalicka-Mikolajczyk, A. (2020). The international legal status of Western Sahara. *The Opole Studies in Administration and Law vol. 18, no. 4, 2020, Opole University Press, Polonia*.
12. Kalu, K. N. (2011). La construction des institutions, et non de la nation. *Revue Internationale des Sciences Administratives - Vol 77.*, pp. 121-139.
13. Khyii, O. (2016). *Marine fishing. Real lever for socio-economic development in Dakhla Oued Eddahab*. Retrieved from Ahdath Info (Arabic): <https://ahdath.info/145078>
14. Laroui, F. (2022, 06 22). *NOUS MENONS UNE VIE ARTIFICIELLE*. Retrieved from Le 360: <https://fr.le360.ma/blog/le-billet-de-fouad-laroui/nous-menons-une-vie-artificielle-262347>
15. Maghreb Arabe Press. (2018). *Région Dakhla-Oued Eddahab: Tourisme et pêche maritime, deux leviers de développement durable local*. Retrieved from MAP STATISTIQUES: <https://www.mapdakhla.ma/fr/statistiques/>
16. Maghreb Arabe Press. (2021, Septembre 10). *Sahara marocain: la participation record aux élections dans les provinces du Sud, "meilleure preuve" que l'idée du référendum est dépassée (ambassadeur)*. Retrieved from Agence Marocaine de Presse: <https://www.mapnews.ma/fr/actualites/politique/sahara-marocain-la-participation-record-aux-%C3%A9lections-dans-les-provinces-du-sud>
17. Marsa Maroc. (2022). *Port de Laâyoune*. Retrieved from Marsa: <https://www.marsamaroc.co.ma/fr/ports-et-terminaux/port-de-laayoune>
18. Ministry of energy transition. (2022). *PROJET DE NOOR LAAYOUNE I (85 MW)*. Retrieved from ministère de la transition énergétique et du développement durable : <https://www.mem.gov.ma/pages/secteur.aspx?e=2&sprj=185#:~:text=Le%20projet%20de%20la%20centrale,et%20investisseurs%20nationaux%20et%20internationaux.>
19. Ministry of Health and Social Protection. (2017, Août 3). *Mise en œuvre des établissements de santé dans les provinces du sud A l'occasion de la fête du trône*. Retrieved from Ministère de la Santé: <https://www.sante.gov.ma/Pages/Communique.aspx?IDCom=247>
20. Ministry of Interior. (2015). Monographie générale. *La Région de Laâyoune-Sakia el Hamra*. Maroc: Direction Générale des Collectivités Locales. Retrieved from Sahara Développement.
21. Ministry of Interior. (2015). Monographie générale. *La Région de Dakhla-Oued ed Dahab*. Direction Générale des Collectivités Locales.
22. Mouline, M. T. (2019). *Les provinces du sud en tant que hub et portail*. Bruxelles: Institut Royal des Etudes Stratégiques.
23. National School of Commerce and Management. (2020). *ENCG Dakhla*. Retrieved from <http://ecours-encgd.uiz.ac.ma/>
24. Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. (2004). *Doc. 10346. Situation au Sahara occidental*. Pour débat à la Commission permanente.
25. Sourzat, L. (2019). *Le contrat administratif résilient*. LGDJ.
26. World Bank. (2017). *World Development Report : Governance and law*.