UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES (CES)

THE EU IN MOROCCO: GRASSROOTS REFLECTIONS ON DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT AID

A Qualitative Case Study of Moroccan Perceptions within the Framework of Norm Localisation

Yassin Anass Ayoub Laghmari

Master's thesis:	30 credits
Programme:	Master's Programme in European Studies
Level:	Second Cycle
Semester year:	Spring 2025
Supervisor:	Kristen Kao

Abstract

This thesis investigates how Moroccan citizens perceive the European Union's (EU) efforts to promote democracy and provide development aid in Morocco. While existing literature often emphasizes elite-level cooperation and institutional reform, this study focuses on the understudied grassroots level, exploring how ordinary citizens interpret and respond to EU initiatives. Using a qualitative research design, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants varying in gender, age, region, and educational background. The analysis is guided by Acharya's Norm Localisation Theory, which explains how global norms are adapted, accepted, or rejected within local contexts. Findings suggest that while most participants are aware of the EU's presence in Morocco, detailed knowledge of its specific activities, especially the conditionality of aid, is uneven. EU development aid is largely seen as beneficial, particularly in improving education, infrastructure, and job opportunities. However, perceptions of EU democracy promotion vary significantly. Several participants view the monarchy as essential for national stability and are cautious toward reforms perceived as externally driven. Rather than outright rejection, there is a pattern of selective appropriation, where democratic values are accepted when compatible with national identity and cultural norms. The study concludes that norm acceptance in Morocco is not a linear process but is shaped by how external norms resonate with local experiences and political realities. The thesis offers empirical support for Norm Localisation Theory and calls for future EU democracy and aid strategies to better consider the cultural, religious, and political frameworks of recipient societies.

Master's thesis:	30 credits
Programme:	Master's Programme in European Studies
Level:	Second Cycle
Semester year:	Spring 2025
Supervisor:	Kristen Kao
Keywords:	EU, Morocco, Aid, Democracy, Norm Localisation, Perceptions
Word count:	16716

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

The European Union (EU) has long framed itself as a normative power that promotes democracy, good governance, and human rights beyond its borders. Through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), launched in 2004, the EU seeks to foster political and economic stability in neighbouring regions by encouraging reforms and offering incentives such as financial aid, trade access, and technical cooperation (EU Neighbours South, 2018; European Commission, 2023). The ENP has been a central pillar of the EU's foreign policy, particularly in the southern Mediterranean, where the EU has sought to engage with countries undergoing political and economic transitions. One of the core assumptions behind the ENP is that democratic governance contributes to long-term regional stability and that the EU, as a successful model of democratic integration, has both the capacity and the responsibility to support democratic development in its periphery (European Commission, 2004, p. 11).

Morocco represents a particularly strategic case within this framework. As the only African country sharing a land border with the EU, via the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, thus making Morocco inherit a unique geopolitical position. Its historical legacy, particularly in relation to southern and western Europe, has made it a longstanding point of interest for European powers. In the present day, Morocco plays a central role in the EU’s southern neighbourhood, especially in areas such as migration management, regional security, and trade cooperation. This has elevated Morocco’s status in EU foreign policy, particularly within the ENP, where it is often referred to as a "privileged partner’’ by the EU (European Commission, 2024).

This thesis explores how Moroccan citizens perceive the EU's democracy promotion efforts and development aid. While institutional analyses have dominated the study of EU–Morocco relations, this research takes a bottom-up approach, focusing on the experiences and interpretations of ordinary citizens. The aim is to uncover how people on the ground understand and engage with the EU’s involvement in their country’s political and developmental landscape, particularly in a semi-authoritarian setting where formal reforms may not fully reflect democratic realities.

1.2. Aim

This thesis explores how Moroccan citizens perceive the EU's democracy promotion efforts and aid. It considers the ways in which EU engagement is interpreted, received, and evaluated by ordinary Moroccans in their everyday political and social realities. While institutional analyses have dominated the study of EU–Morocco relations, this research takes a bottom-up approach, focusing on the experiences and interpretations of ordinary citizens. The aim of this thesis is to understand *why* and *how* Moroccans perceive the EU's democracy promotion efforts and EU aid to Morocco. It seeks to uncover the underlying factors shaping these perceptions and how they vary depending on individual experiences, political awareness, or social background. In doing so, it aims to provide insight into the local legitimacy of EU engagement and the broader challenges of promoting democratic values in a semi-authoritarian and postcolonial context.

1.3. Research Question

> How do members of the Moroccan civil society perceive the EU's democracy promotion efforts and aid to Morocco?

Sub questions:

> 1. Awareness and Knowledge**:** To what extent are ordinary Moroccans aware of the EU's activities and aid in Morocco?
>
> 2. Democracy Promotion**:** How do Moroccans perceive the EU's efforts to promote democracy, and how do these perceptions interact with loyalty to the monarchy?
>
> 3. Development Aid**:** How do Moroccans perceive the EU's development aid in terms of benefits and conditionality?
>
> 4. Religion and Identity: How do Islamic values and Moroccan identity shape these perceptions?
>
> 5. Localisation: To what extent do Moroccans adapt, accept, or reject EU-promoted norms in line with Acharya's localisation theory?

1.4. Background

Among the EU's southern neighbours, Morocco stands out as a key partner. The country has often been referred to as an “exception” in the region due to its relative political stability, gradual reform process, and longstanding ties with Europe (IEMed, 2021). Morocco was among the first countries to sign an ENP Action Plan with the EU and has since benefited from substantial EU funding and technical support (European Commission, 2024; IEMed, 2021). Cooperation has spanned a wide range of sectors, including public administration reform, judicial independence, human rights promotion, and civil society development. In recent years, EU assistance has also supported projects aimed at economic development, gender equality, and migration management. The EU has praised Morocco as a "privileged partner," and bilateral cooperation has been further deepened through the EU-Morocco Association Agreement and the Advanced Status granted in 2008 (European Commission, 2024; CER, 2020).

Moroccan dynasties have historically held strategic significance for several southern and western European countries, owing to the country’s geographical proximity to Europe and its influence in Europe, especially on the Iberian Peninsula (Boddy-Evans, 2019). Today, that significance continues, particularly as Morocco plays a key role in EU efforts to manage cross-Mediterranean migration, counter regional threats, and promote economic cooperation. According to EU ambassador to Morocco, Patricia Llombart Cussac, the institutionalised partnership through the ENP underlines shared interests and interdependence between the two parties (European External Action Service, 2021; North Africa Post, 2022).

Despite this extensive cooperation, Morocco remains a semi-authoritarian regime, where meaningful democratic change has often been slow, controlled, and top-down (Freedom House, 2024). Critics argue that the Moroccan regime has selectively adopted reforms to maintain international legitimacy and attract foreign aid, while avoiding substantial political liberalisation. Morocco is formally a constitutional monarchy that permits parliamentary elections and the formation of governments, but the monarch retains significant influence over political affairs. As a result, the country is often classified as a hybrid regime, blending democratic structures with authoritarian practices. This dynamic creates a unique context for examining the EU’s efforts to promote democracy and governance in Morocco (Chograni, 2021; Freedom House, 2024).

2. Previous research

In order to understand how Moroccans perceive the EU's democracy promotion efforts in Morocco, it is first of vital importance to thoroughly analyse previous research made in this field. The EU has long positioned itself as a promoter of democracy as well as a bastion for democratic and liberal values, particularly in its southern neighbourhood, more specifically North Africa. Through initiatives like the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the EU aims to promote democratic reforms, human rights as well as governance in countries such as Morocco. However, more importantly, the effectiveness and local reception of these efforts remain contested (Börzel and van Hüllen, 2014, p. 1044).

Therefore, the following segment of this literature review will primarily give insights over previous research regarding the EU's democracy promotion in the MENA region, more specifically Morocco. Furthermore, an overview of the European Neighbourhood Policy and its aid support to countries such as Morocco will be prevalent in this segment. Additionally, this segment will use the previous research made regarding Moroccan perceptions regarding the EU and its efforts of democracy promotion in Morocco. This will be conducted by using previous surveys and interviews made with Moroccan regarding this topic, which will further provide a clearer understanding of the gap this thesis is trying to narrow.

2.1. Definitions of a Democratic State

In order to examine Moroccan perceptions regarding the EU's role in sending aid as well as promoting democracy in Morocco, there will be a need for a clear definition of what a democracy is. This thesis will utilise the definition of a democratic state stated by Freedom House. Freedom House is a U.S based non-governmental organisation (NGO) that conducts research and advocacy on democracy, political freedom, and human rights across the globe. Freedom House was founded in 1941 and the NGO is known for its annual ''Freedom in the world report'', which ranks countries based on their levels of political rights and civil liberties. According to Freedom house, a democracy is;

''At the most basic level, democracy means government by the people. Democracies have existed in every part of the world, with unique characteristics in every instance. Each democracy has its own rules and laws to guide it, and no two are the same. What democracies have in common are shared values and commitments to fundamental principles, as well as institutions that protect basic rights'' (Sedaca, 2024).

For a more in-depth definition of a democracy there is a need for a well-functioning democracy which rests on several foundational pillars. One of these pillars is the rule of law, which is the principle that society is governed by clear and equally applied laws enacted by elected representatives. The core to this is an independent judiciary, where judges interpret laws fairly and with the absence of bias, ensuring due process for all, including the presumption of innocence and access to legal defence. Crucially, no one, not even those who exercise power, is exempt from the law, and systems like appeals processes and civil oversight exist to correct injustices (Longley, 2024; Sedaca, 2024).

Furthermore, to prevent the concentration of authority, democracies rely on separation of powers, dividing governance among branches that check and balance one another. This is reinforced by external forces like a free press and active civil society, which promote transparency and hold people in power accountable. In contrast, authoritarian regimes centralise power, stifle dissent, and eliminate room for accountability (Sedaca, 2024).

Additionally, a free and independent media plays a vital role in a democratic state, as the media often investigates into those who hold political power by exposing corruption, scrutinising those in power and providing citizens with the information they need to make informed decisions. Governments that suppress the media often do so to conceal abuses and evade the responsibility which has been given to them by the electorate (Sedaca, 2024).

Moreover, democracies are also defined by their protection of fundamental human rights, including that of free expression, assembly, religion, and privacy. These aforementioned rights are universal and inalienable, meaning no government, no matter how democratically elected they are, has the authority to violate them. True democracy is not just concerning elections, it is also regarding sustaining institutions and norms that uphold justice, accountability, and liberty for all (Sedaca, 2024).

In order to understand the EU's role in its democracy promotion in Morocco, it is of vital importance to primarily define the concept of a democracy. The word democracy in itself means ''the rule of the people'', however, this research will utilise a firm definition of what could be classified as a democratic regime (Dahl, 1989, p. 222). Therefore, his research will utilise the concept of democracy provided by Robert A Dahl's seven institutions, which outlines a democratic regime, in order to examine if the EU has influenced any of the seven institutions. Robert A Dahl's seven institutions are the following;

Table 1 - Robert A Dahl's Seven Institutions of a Polyarchy

Institution	Explanation
1. Elected Officials	Government decisions are made by officials chosen through elections.
2. Free and Fair Elections	Elections are conducted regularly, without coercion or manipulation.
3. Inclusive Suffrage	All (or nearly all) adult citizens have the right to vote.
4. Right to Run for Office	Citizens have the right to run for public office under equal conditions.
5. Freedom of Expression	Citizens can express political opinions without fear of punishment.
6. Access to Alternative Information	Independent sources of information exist and are protected by law.
7. Associational Autonomy	Citizens have the right to form and join independent political organisations.

By using various sources, this research aims to acknowledge different views on what a democratic state is as well as its characteristics. This thesis has acknowledged both Robert A. Dahl's polyarchy concept of the seven institutions as well as the definition contributed by

Freedom House regarding the definition of a democracy (Dahl 1989, p. 222; Longley, 2024; Sedaca, 2024).

2.2. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was launched in 2004 and is the EU's primary framework for engaging with countries in its southern and eastern neighbourhoods, including Morocco. Through bilateral action plans as well as financial assistance, the ENP has aimed to promote political and economic reforms, with democracy promotion as the main aim of the policy. However, the ENP has faced criticism for its inconsistent application of democratic conditionality, often prioritising stability over transformative change (Börzel and van Hüllen 2014, p. 1034). In the case of Morocco, the ENP has supported reforms in areas like governance, human rights, and economic development. However, the EU's top-down approach has led to scepticism among local actors, who view EU intervention as paternalistic or misaligned with local priorities. The tensions the ENP is creating between the EU's goals and Moroccan perceptions provides a critical lens for analysing the effectiveness and reception of EU democracy promotion in Morocco (Haddadi, 2010, p. 154).

2.3. Goals & Mechanisms of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)

The ENP seeks to foster a more robust democratic governance and economic development in its southern neighbourhood. For instance, initiating bilateral action plans financial aid, and subsequently conditionality. Some of the key mechanisms include bilateral action plans in form of tailored agreement between the EU and each of its partner countries, which outlines reform priorities, for instance in Morocco. Furthermore, the ENP also utilises the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) which aims to fund and support reforms in areas like governance, human rights, as well as civil society (European Parliament, 2025).

Additionally, the concept of conditionality is vital in order to strengthen democratic governance in countries such as Morocco. Through conditionality, the EU offers financial and political incentives for reforms, however, enforcement has been proved to be inconsistent. Ultimately, while the ENP's aims are ambitious, its top-down approach and reliance on

conditionality have been facing critique for failing to take into account for local contexts and priorities (Bhabha, 2010, p. 163; European Parliament, 2025; Sepos, 2018, p. 522).

2.4. Challenges & Critiques of the European Neighbourhood Policy

This section of the previous research will go through the various challenges and critiques the ENP has faced. The ENP is a vital strategy utilised by the EU in order to promote stability but also to promote democratic reforms in its southern neighbourhood.

Several scholars, including Börzel, van Hüllen, Grimm, and Sepos, have extensively analysed the European Union's approach to external governance and democracy promotion, particularly in its southern neighbourhood. Their research consistently highlights a recurring pattern in EU policy: the prioritisation of stability over democratic transformation, especially in dealings with authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes such as Morocco. Börzel and van Hüllen (2014, p. 1034) provides a critical examination of this tendency, arguing that the European Neighbourhood Policy's (ENP) application of democratic conditionality is frequently inconsistent and subject to geopolitical expediency. According to their analysis, strategic interests, including migration control, counterterrorism cooperation, and economic stability, often take precedence over the promotion of democratic values, even when such values are formally enshrined in EU policy frameworks.

This inconsistency, as Börzel and van Hüllen (2014, p. 1034) demonstrate, has significant consequences for the EU's credibility as a normative actor. When democratic conditionality is applied selectively or abandoned in favour of short-term stability, it not only weakens the EU's leverage but also sends mixed signals to partner governments, reinforcing authoritarian resilience rather than encouraging reform. Grimm (2015, p. 79) further supports this critique, emphasising that the EU's democracy promotion efforts are frequently undermined by competing policy objectives, leading to a fragmented and often counterproductive approach. Similarly, Sepos (2018, p. 523) notes that the EU's reluctance to enforce strict democratic conditionality in cases like Morocco reflects a broader tension between its normative aspirations and its pragmatic foreign policy interests. Collectively, these scholars illustrate how the EU's strategic compromises have, in many cases, perpetuated authoritarian governance rather than fostering meaningful democratic change in its southern neighbourhood.

Postcolonial critiques emphasise the paternalistic nature of the EU's ENP strategy, which often has come under the critique of reflecting neo-colonial power dynamics. The EU's emphasis on ''European values'' of democracy can be perceived by Moroccans as dismissive of local traditions and values, which reinforce a potential hierarchical relationship between the EU and its neighbours. This power dynamic is particularly relevant in the case of Morocco, were colonial legacies drastically shapes perceptions of external interventions (Bhabha, 2010, pp. 45-46; Tessler & Gao, 2005, p. 86; Tessler & Gao, 2008, p. 204).

A recurring critique of the ENP is its lack of local ownership, the top-down design of the ENP programs often fails to engage grassroots actors or incorporate local perspectives, leading to an eventual mismatch between the EU's aims and local realities on the ground. This disconnection is particularly evident in Morocco, where civil society organisations and ordinary citizens often view interventions by the EU as misaligned with local needs and aspirations (Börzel & van Hüllen, 2014, p. 1036; Khakee et al. 2008, p. 10).

2.5. The European Neighbourhood Policy in the Moroccan Case

Morocco holds a unique and strategically important position as one of the European Union's closest partners in the southern Mediterranean region. This special relationship was formally recognised when Morocco became one of the first countries to adopt a European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Action Plan back in 2005. The ENP is the EU's framework for working with neighbouring countries to foster stability, security, and prosperity, and Morocco's early adoption of its Action Plan highlighted the strong cooperative ties between the two partners.

The ENP has played a significant role in supporting reforms in Morocco across several key areas, including governance, human rights, and economic development. Through financial aid, political dialogue, and technical assistance, the EU has sought to encourage Morocco to modernise its institutions, improve democratic practices, and strengthen the rule of law. For example, the EU has funded projects aimed at enhancing judicial independence, supporting civil society organisations, and promoting gender equality. Additionally, economic cooperation under the ENP has facilitated trade liberalisation and investment, which have

contributed to Morocco's economic growth (EU Neighbours South, 2018; European Commission, 2023; Van Hüllen, 2012, p. 118).

However, despite these efforts, the impact of the ENP in Morocco has been mixed. While there have been some positive developments, such as constitutional reforms in 2011 and progress in certain human rights areas, critics argue that deeper democratic transformation has been limited. Scholars like Börzel and van Hüllen (2014, p. 1038) point out that the EU's approach has often prioritised stability and cooperation on issues like migration and security over pushing for more substantial democratic reforms. This has sometimes led to a situation where Morocco's government adopts superficial changes to satisfy the EU without making meaningful progress toward full democratisation.

The European Parliament (2025) has also acknowledged these challenges, noting that while Morocco remains an important partner, the effectiveness of EU policies in promoting lasting reform has been inconsistent. This raises important questions about whether the EU's current strategy is sufficient to bring about the kind of transformative change it originally envisioned when the ENP was established. Thus, while the EU-Morocco relationship remains strong in terms of diplomacy and economic ties, the broader goal of fostering deep democratic governance in Morocco through the ENP has yet to be fully realised.

2.5.1. Positive Developments

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has served as a crucial framework for supporting governance reforms in Morocco, demonstrating a sustained commitment to strengthening key institutions and promoting democratic principles. Through targeted funding, technical assistance, and political dialogue, the ENP has facilitated measurable progress in modernising Morocco's governance structures. One of the most notable areas of reform has been in the judicial sector, where EU-supported initiatives have helped enhance the independence and efficiency of Morocco's legal system. This includes training programs for judges, improvements to court infrastructure, and the implementation of measures to reduce case backlogs (European Commission, 2013).

Equally significant have been the ENP's efforts in supporting Morocco's anti-corruption framework. The EU has worked closely with Moroccan authorities to establish stronger accountability mechanisms, including the creation of specialised anti-corruption bodies and

the implementation of more transparent public procurement processes. These reforms have been complemented by initiatives to increase government transparency, such as the adoption of freedom of information legislation and the digitisation of administrative services (European Parliament, 2025).

Beyond institutional reforms, the ENP has played a pivotal role in strengthening Moroccan civil society. Recognising that sustainable democratic development requires active citizen participation, the EU has provided substantial support to local NGOs and human rights organisations. This support has taken various forms, including capacity-building programs, funding for advocacy campaigns, and facilitation of dialogue between civil society and government institutions. Particularly noteworthy has been the EU's focus on promoting gender equality, with specific programs designed to empower women's rights organisations and support their efforts in advocating for legal reforms and social change (Börzel & van Hüllen, 2014, p. 1038).

These governance initiatives reflect the ENP's comprehensive approach to reform, which addresses both institutional modernisation and societal empowerment. While challenges remain in fully implementing these reforms, the ENP's sustained engagement has created important foundations for continued progress in Morocco's democratic development. The policy's multifaceted strategy which combines institutional support with civil society engagement demonstrates an understanding that meaningful governance reform requires simultaneous top-down and bottom-up approaches to create lasting change (EU Neighbours South, 2020; Van Hüllen, 2012, p. 127).

2.5.2. Restrictions

Despite the EU’s support for democratic reforms, Morocco’s political systems remain highly centralised, with limited progress on key issues such as the freedom of press and political pluralism. Morocco’s authoritarian resilience reflects the country’s strong and stable monarchy, led by King Mohammed the VI (Bolleyer & Storm, 2010, p. 1216). Additionally, as aforementioned, many Moroccans view the EU’s ENP strategy as paternalistic, which often lead to Moroccans reflecting a neo-colonial attitude that undermines local agency (Bhabha, 2010, p. 163). Furthermore, the initiatives the EU provides to Morocco often focuses on technical assistance rather than addressing systematic issues such as economic inequality and

social justice. Many Moroccans regard the EU's initiatives more or less as misaligned priorities, which leads ordinary Moroccan citizens to criticises the EU's actual priorities in Morocco (Benstead, 2015, p. 1198).

2.6. Research Gap

This section will analyse the previous findings that have been found regarding the perception Moroccans have towards the EU when it comes to aid support and the promotion of democracy in Morocco. Furthermore, this section will additionally examine gaps regarding the topic in question and further assist the thesis in its quest to fill the gaps that exists.

2.6.1. The Democratic Imagination of Ordinary Moroccans

According to Torres (2025, p. 2), a major shortcoming in the existing body of scholarship on EU–Morocco relations, particularly in the realm of democracy promotion, is the notable absence of grassroots perspectives. He contends that this gap constitutes a critical void that limits our understanding of how EU external action is perceived and experienced on the ground. While elite-level analyses, focusing on diplomatic interactions, government strategies, and institutional frameworks, have shaped the academic discourse, Torres (2025, p. 5) emphasises that such approaches often overlook the voices and agency of ordinary Moroccan citizens. He argues that the lived experiences, political expectations, and subjective perceptions of these citizens are central to assessing the actual impact and legitimacy of EU democracy promotion policies. Their underrepresentation, therefore, undermines efforts to produce a complete and empirically grounded evaluation of the EU's normative engagement in Morocco. In order for democratisation to succeed there needs to resonate at the grassroots level where ordinary citizens have the possibility to engage in democratic activities.

Additionally, Khakee & Weilandt (2022, p. 458) emphasise that despite the European Union's formal commitment to fostering civil society engagement as part of its normative agenda, there remains a substantial disconnect between this rhetoric and the actual implementation of such principles in the Moroccan context. Their study reveals that Moroccan civil society actors are routinely sidelined and often lack access to meaningful channels of participation in EU policy processes—most notably in areas such as trade negotiations, where strategic interests tend to dominate. By analysing specific instances of exclusion, Khakee & Weilandt (2022, p. 458) demonstrate that the EU frequently opts for state-centric modes of cooperation,

favouring governmental actors over grassroots organisations. This preference, they argue, undermines the democratic legitimacy of EU external action and calls into question the depth of its commitment to participatory governance. In doing so, their work reinforces the broader critique that EU democracy promotion often fails to meaningfully engage with the voices and agency of local civil society.

However, there has been survey research conducted by the Arab Barometer, which is a nonpartisan research network that conducts consistent public opinion survey across the Arab speaking word. The Arab Barometer covers a wide range of issues such as Democracy and governance, religion and politics, economic conditions, gender equality and the perspectives of youths. According to the Arab Barometer Wave VIII Morocco report of the 18th of May 2024, which is the most recent report on Morocco in existent, a significant majority of 73% of the Moroccan respondents believe that democracy is preferable to other forms of governance, even with its potential flaws. This amount is significantly higher than the report of 54% in Wave VII which was published on the 5th of January 2023 (Arab Barometer, 2024). However, 36% of respondents believes that the country's economic performance would be weak under a democratic system, and 35% of respondents consider democratic regimes are indecisive and full of problems.

Further on, 40% of respondents believe that a system governed by Islamic law in which there are no political parties or elections, which clearly indicates the role of Islam has among Moroccans (Arab Barometer 2024). For instance, Mohammed Hashas (2024, p. 543) argues that Islam has been a unifying force in an ethnically diverse society such as Morocco. Hashas (2024, p. 543) further argues that Islam has been used as a force of unity, especially during French colonial rule who created division between the Amazigh and Arab populations. The Amazigh and Arab population being largely Muslim further emphasis the role of Islam as common tool for unification in a Morocco which is ethnical diverse. Therefore, the role of religion still plays a significant role in how Moroccans prefer their political system can be traced back to the country's struggle for independence from France and Spain during the first half of the 20th century.

To clarify, it is not the researcher's intention to equate Islam with autocracy, and the researcher fully acknowledge that many devout Muslims support democratic values and institutions. As Tessler (2002, p. 241) argues, survey data from the Arab speaking world

consistently shows that large segments of Muslim populations support democracy, while maintaining their religious commitments. Similarly, Stepan & Robertson (2003, p. 39) emphasis that ‘’there are no theological obstacles to democracy in Islam per se’’, however political historical factors often shape how religion and governance interact with each other. In the context of Morocco, several of the interviewees expressed a desire for both more democratic governance and the preservation of Islamic values. This suggests that democracy and Islam are not perceived as contradictory to each other and can coexist.

2.6.2. Temporal Limitations & Changing Perceptions

Furthermore, Tessler's (2002, p. 351) scope of research was conducted between 1995-1996 in Morocco, which makes his finding three decades old. Several events have occurred in Morocco and the wider MENA region since then which could eventually make his findings outdated. Some of these events are the NATO interventions in Iraq and Libya, the Arab spring and most recently, the ongoing hostilities between Hamas and Israel. These aforementioned events could have drastically changed Moroccan perceptions regarding the role of the EU in the country, as EU member states such as France was heavily involved in Libya during the Arab spring (BBC, 2020; Khakee et al. 2008). The way the EU or its member states act, will receive reactions from Moroccans, which the Palestine-Israel conflict might be the largest contributor of how Moroccans perceive everything that is connected to the EU. Therefore, Moroccan perceptions of democracy and EU aid could have significantly changed since 1995-1996 because of the previously mentioned events which occurred in the region since.

While the Moroccan government has normalised its ties to Israel, public perceptions are strongly pro-Palestinian in its sentiment (BBC, 2020; Khakee et al. 2008). For this reason, the thesis will examine by conducting semi-structured interviews if public perceptions of the EU and the EU's financial support to Morocco have changed, whether negatively or positively. By conducting semi-structured interviews, this thesis will also receive more in-depth results as previous studies have either conducted large scale surveys or semi-structured interviews with people in positions of power or those belonging to an NGO (Arab Barometer, 2022; Tessler, 2002, p. 351).

2.6.3. The Grassroots Perception Gap

There is also a lack of research regarding *citizens' perceptions of the EU's democracy promotion* in Morocco by ordinary Moroccan citizens. Previous research has primarily involved EU officials and Moroccan policymakers, which provides vital insights on the bureaucratic level when it comes to the EU and the ENP. For instance, there has been a wide range of in-depth interviews with key figures of political parties, civil society organisations and the media, however, this is not the case with ordinary Moroccans who do not hold higher office (Khakee et al. 2008, p. 15; Khakee & Weilandt, 2022, p. 458).

There have been surveys and interviews conducted by the Arab barometer as previously mentioned. These surveys and interviews have however not been in-depth and does not leave space for the respondent to expand on her or his opinions regarding the topics presented by the Arab barometer. Thus, the lack of in-depth interviews on the grassroot level could possibly lead to an insufficient understanding how ordinary Moroccan citizens perceive the EU's influence on Morocco's political landscape. The surveys conducted by the Arab Barometer additionally do not allow us to understand the domestic conflict concerning the proper roles of Islam and democracy in modern day Morocco (Arab barometer, 2024).

Therefore, this research aims to conduct semi-constructed interviews with Moroccan citizens of various socio-economic backgrounds. The main reason for interviewing people from various socio-economic backgrounds is to provide a wide range of views and narrow the gap that exists in contemporary research on the grassroots level. Additionally, there is scarce research exploring if there are any differences or similarities regarding EU's democracy promotion when it comes to Moroccans who have worked or studied in Europe in contrast to those who have not. Subsequently, this thesis aims to bridge the gap regarding this question and provide valuable insight regarding this topic.

Furthermore, several studies have been made regarding on how Moroccans perceive the EU and the methods utilised in order to research this has been diverse as previously mentioned in this chapter. The Arab barometer does not pose extensive empirical data regarding Moroccan perception of EU aid to Morocco. However, 74% of respondents would support the government's quest in requesting foreign aid to address the effects of earthquakes (Arab barometer, 2024). The strong willingness of Moroccans to seek aid from abroad clearly

indicates that there is a will in the Moroccan civil society to accept aid from abroad if natural disasters occur. This is however not enough in order to establish a clear view of how Moroccans perceive EU aid and that there is a clear gap in the research regarding this topic. Therefore, this study will aim to narrow the gap by asking Moroccan citizens on how they perceive EU aid to Morocco which will be conducted by semi-structured interviews which has been mentioned previously throughout this paper.

3. Theoretical Framework

To analyse how Moroccan citizens perceive the EU's democracy promotion and development aid, this thesis draws on Amitav Acharya's (2004, p. 239) theory of norm localisation in her article *"How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism*." Challenging top-down models of international norm diffusion, Acharya (2004, p. 241) argues that local actors are not passive recipients of foreign norms, but active agents who reinterpret, adapt, and sometimes resist these norms in ways that align with their own cultural, political, and historical contexts. Rather than assuming that concepts like "democracy" or "good governance" are universally understood or accepted, norm localisation focuses on how these ideas are redefined and contextualised by local communities (Acharya, 2004, p. 270). This framework is especially appropriate for this thesis, which seeks to explore how ordinary Moroccan citizens, shaped by a postcolonial history and a hybrid regime domestic context, make sense of EU engagement in their country.

Acharya's (2004, p. 245) emphasis on local interpretation and agency aligns directly with the thesis's empirical approach, which is based on qualitative interviews with Moroccan citizens. The goal is not to evaluate the EU's policies from a bureaucratic or institutional perspective, but to understand how these policies are interpreted from below as helpful, intrusive, irrelevant, or conditional. A Norm Localisation theory thus provides a conceptual lens to analyse why EU democracy promotion may resonate with some citizens while being rejected or ignored by others, depending on their values, experiences, and social environment. In this way, the theory enables a grounded, citizen centred analysis of international norm reception.

While a constructivist theory in international relations, particularly as articulated by Alexander Wendt (1999, p. 224) offers important insights into how political meaning and identities are socially constructed, it has been primarily applied at the state or institutional

level, often focusing on how states construct their interests through interaction. A postcolonial theory, such as Bhabha's (2010, p. 163) theory of location of culture, provides a powerful critique of the historical and structural power imbalances that shape Euro-Mediterranean relations, especially in postcolonial contexts like Morocco. Yet, both theories fall short when it comes to capturing how ordinary citizens engage with and interpret foreign political actions in their day-to-day realities.

In contrast, Amitav Acharya's (2004, p. 239) norm localisation theory is explicitly concerned with how local actors reinterpret international norms in light of their own cultural and political contexts. This makes it particularly well-suited for this thesis, which focuses on citizen level perceptions of the EU's democracy promotion and aid. Acharya's framework allows for an analysis that centres local agency and highlights the bottom-up processes of meaning-making, rather than viewing norm diffusion as a one-way or elite-driven process. By recognising that citizens may accept, adapt, or reject external norms based on how well they align with local values and experiences, norm localisation provides the most appropriate and nuanced theoretical lens for grassroots, perception-focused study of EU–Morocco relations (Acharya, 2004, pp 250-251).

This thesis adopts a primarily deductive approach, in that it draws on an existing theoretical framework constructed by Amitav Acharya's (2004, p. 239) norm localisation theory, to guide the analysis of empirical data that has been collected for this research. The norm localisation theory provides conceptual tools to examine how international norms, such as democracy promotion and development aid, are received and reinterpreted by local actors. At the same time, the research design remains open to inductive insights, allowing themes to emerge from participants narratives that may challenge or refine theoretical expectations. This reflects an interpretive logic of investigation, where theory and data are engaged in dialogue, rather than a one-way testing process (Kuczynski & Daly, 2003, pp. 373-374).

4. Method & Material

4.1. The Selection of Case

The rationale of selecting Morocco as the case study for this thesis is because the country represents a strategically important and politically nuanced partner within the EU's Southern Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Among the southern Mediterranean states, Morocco has received sustained attention and support from the EU over the past decades, particularly in the areas of democracy promotion, governance reform and varieties of financial aid, primarily development aid. Morocco is often portrayed by the EU as a ''model partner'' in the MENA region, especially following the granting of ''advanced status'' in 2008 by the EU (European Commission, 2024; IEMed, 2021). This enables Morocco to enjoy a deeper and more privileged partnership then other countries in the region. It allows for closer political and economic cooperation. Thus, making Morocco a relevant case for examining how the EU's external policies are interpreted on the ground Council for European Reform [CER], 2020).

Furthermore, Morocco presents a complex hybrid political context, where formal democratic structures coexist with strong monarchical authority and limited political pluralism. These dynamic raises important questions about the real impact, local reception and perception of EU engagement in Morocco. While much of the existing literature has focused on institutional cooperation and elite-level relations, there remains a lack of empirical research on how and how ordinary Moroccan citizens perceive these external democracy promotion efforts and aid.

By selecting Morocco, this thesis aims to fill that gap by offering a bottom-up approach on EU foreign policy by interviewing those who are affected by it, that is to say the average Moroccan citizen. Morocco's combination of close EU ties, hybrid regime governance and significant exposure to external aid and reform discourse makes it a highly relevant and illustrative case for further exploration. The broader question of how democracy promotion and aid is experienced and understood by Moroccans is also vital to the EU, which position itself as a normative power.

4.2. Research Design: Qualitative Single-Case Study

In order to address the research question of how Moroccan citizens perceive the EU's democracy promotion efforts and EU aid to Morocco, this thesis will be conducted by the lens of a qualitative single-case study. A qualitative single-case study design was selected because the research seeks to explore how ordinary Moroccans perceive the EU's democracy promotion and aid in particular fashions.

These are explanatory and interpretive questions in nature that cannot be adequately answered through pre-defined variables or large-scale comparisons if a comparative case study would have been conducted instead of a single-case study. Instead, the case requires a research approach that priorities depth over breadth, as well as allows for the analysis of subjective meanings, social context, and local experiences. Qualitative research is particularly well suited for uncovering how individuals make sense of political phenomena and why certain narratives or perceptions take shape in certain environments (Mayring, 2000, p. 7).

Additionally, a single case study enables a detailed examination of Morocco's unique and long standing political and historical context, which for much of its history has been linked to Europe. As previously mentioned, Morocco holds a special position within the EU's ENP which often portrays Morocco as a ‘’important partner’’, yet the country remains a hybrid regime with limited democratic characteristics, enabling it as a hybrid regime (European Commission, 2024; Freedom House, 2024).

Moreover, while comparative designs offer value for identifying general patterns across cases, they risk overlooking the nuanced, embedded processes that shape how international norms are received and contested at the grassroots level. A comparative study would also require this research to reduce the complexity of each case into comparable indicators, which would not suit this thesis's objective of understanding how democracy promotion and aid in interpreted by Moroccan citizens in their own terms. According to Seawright (2008, p. 278), a comparative approach might dilute the deep contextual grounding needed to fully grasp the Moroccan perspective, which is the aim of this thesis.

Moreover, a quantitative approach would not have been appropriate for the main aims of this thesis. While survey data can offer general insights into attitudes and trends, it cannot explain why individuals hold certain views or how those views are influenced by personal experience, social discourse, or historical context. Quantitative data is also limited in its ability to capture contradiction and emotional nuance, both of which are essential in order to understand how external actors like the EU are perceived in postcolonial societies. In contrast, qualitative interviews provide the flexibility to explore participants perspectives in depth, allowing space for them to reflect, explain, and sometimes expand on their assumptions (Kallio et al. 2016, pp. 2955-2956; Ruark & Fielding-Miller, 2016, p. 380).

In summary, the choice of a qualitative single-case study design reflects the aim of this thesis by conducting an in-depth, bottom-up analysis of Moroccan perceptions. It further enables the researcher to engage closely with the Moroccan context, listen to citizens voices, and analyse how broader international norms are locally interpreted, adapted, or resisted. A qualitative single-case study design aligns well with the thesis's theoretical foundations in norm localisation, which emphasises the importance of local agency, social interaction, and contextual meaning in understanding people's perceptions.

4.3. Methodological Framework

In order to address the research question of this thesis in a methodological fashion, this thesis utilised semi-structured interviews which were conducted with members of the Moroccan civil society. The interviewees hailed from different social backgrounds, age, gender and regions/cities across Morocco, thus enabling a diverse range of Moroccans who have all experienced EU's democracy promotion and aid differently. The primary data selection method of semi-structured interviews was chosen because it allows for open-ended responses and follow-up questions, enabling participants to express their thoughts in their own words and reveal nuanced perceptions that may not emerge in more structured formats, such as surveys. Semi-structured interviews offer the researcher further flexibility in order to explore how Moroccan citizens make sense of complex issues such as democracy, international aid, and the role of the EU.

4.3.1. Qualitative Content Analysis

In order to analyse the material collected through the interviews, as well as relevant sources such as the Arab Barometer, this study has utilised a qualitative content analysis. This approach includes systematically identifying, coding, and interpreting themes and patterns within the data. The aim is to understand the meaning behind the interviewees responses and how these meanings reflect broader social, political, or historical contexts. A qualitative contents analysis is particularly appropriate for research grounded in norm localisation theory, as it allows for the interpretation of how individuals construct their perceptions through discourse, experience, and interaction with norms.

One of the more prominent scholars in this field, Philip Mayring (2000, p. 8), argues that a qualitative content analysis allows researchers to remain both systematic and flexible in the interpretation of qualitative data. Furthermore, Mayring (2000, p. 3) emphasises that this method enables the development of categories that are both theoretically guided and grounded in the data itself, making it ideal for research questions that aim to explore how people construct meaning in context. Mayring (2000, p. 5) further emphasis the vital importance of transparency in coding and analysing, where themes are refined as the researcher becomes more familiar with the material utilised. This approach is specifically useful in research like this thesis, which aims to connect individual perceptions to broader political and normative frameworks.

4.3.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

This thesis relied on semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they offer a balance between structure and openness, which allows for both comparability across interviews and the flexibility for the researcher to follow up on topics that emerged during the interviews. Furthermore, Bernard (2018, p. 219) stresses that semi-structured interviews are preferred for further understanding of different contexts, which enables the researcher to capture diverse qualitative data without overly constraining the participant's narrative.

The interviews for this study were initially conducted using convenience sampling, where participants were selected through the researcher's personal network, including friends and family members. This approach provided a practical and accessible entry point, especially

given the potential sensitivity of discussing political topics. While convenience sampling has limitations, particularly regarding representativeness, it was effective for initiating the fieldwork in a thoughtful context. As the study progressed, the sampling strategy naturally transitioned into snowball sampling. Early participants referred others in their social circles who were willing to take part. This helped the researcher move beyond the initial circle of contacts and gain access to a broader range of individuals. This evolving approach made it possible to include participants with diverse backgrounds in terms of age, gender, region, and socioeconomic status, enriching the overall quality and scope of the collected data.

When designing the sample, the researcher made efforts to ensure diversity in terms of gender, age, socioeconomic background, and geographic location was taking into account. Participants included both men and women from a variety of different cities and regions of Morocco, representing a variety of professions, educational levels, and life experiences. While the sample does not claim statistical representativeness, it was however deliberately constructed to reflect a broad section of Moroccan society, in order to better understand how perceptions of the EU's role vary across different social and regional contexts.

The interviews were conducted in Moroccan Arabic and English, depending on the preference and language ability of the participant. Worth taking into account is that the researcher is fluent in both the Moroccan dialect of Arabic and English. Worth noting that the explicit usage of the term ''Moroccan Arabic'' is because of the Moroccan Arabic's distinct nature, which at times is non-comprehendible by other Arabic speakers from the Middle East or those fluent in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Worth noting is that five of the interviews were being conducted in English while three interviews were being conducted in Moroccan Arabic. Those interviews which were being conducted in Moroccan Arabic has been translated into English by the researcher himself. The English proficiency among Moroccans, although low, has increased significant over the last decade with the surge of online platforms which enables easy access for English content online. It should be noted that those who spoke English during the interviews were 25 years old or below except one who has above 25 years old. According to the British Council Maroc (2021), around 30% of Moroccan youth can understand English with high proficiency.

All the interviews were audio recorded, with seven interviews being conducted through Zoom and one interview being held physically. All the participants agreed to being audio recorded and all the participants were assured of anonymity, which all participants agreed on, in order to encourage open and honest discussions. The data collection generated through these interviews forms the core of the empirical material utilised in the qualitative content analysis.

Moreover, the interview guide has been carefully constructed by the researcher in accordance with the advice from this thesis supervisor (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, p. 57). Thus, in order to assure that the questions posed on the participants would flow without much hindrance, whenever there was a question including certain numbers and definitions which the researcher would present to the participant upon their approval, which then enabled them to form their own opinion regarding the matter. As this topic might not be well addressed to those who lack a higher educational background, presenting certain statistics to the participants ensured that everyone would be able to form their own opinion and expand on it from their experience (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, pp. 62-63).

In order to elucidate the variety of perspectives, a table presenting the interviewees has been constructed.

Table 2 - List of interviewees

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Occupation	Region/City	Educational Background
1	Female	20	University Student	Rabat	Bachelor's Degree
2	Male	25	IT Technician/Content Creator	Nador	Master's Degree
3	Male	23	Finance	Marrakech	Bachelor's Degree
4	Male	47	Public Administrator	Fes	Master's Degree
5	Male	24	University Student	Taza	Master's Degree
6	Male	86	Retired	Fes	Primary School

7	Female	76	Retired	Fes	Primary School
8	Female	41	Teacher	Fes	Master's Degree

4.4. The Processing of Data: A Qualitative Content Analysis

The thesis applies a qualitative content analysis framework to the processing and the interpretation of interviews. A Qualitative content analysis provides a systematic approach to analysing verbal or textual data while remaining open to the development, based on the participants own language, of themes and patterns relevant to participants notions (Mayring, 2000, p. 3; Schreier, 2012, p. 23).

The content analysis will be qualitative rather than quantitative. The quantitative approach focuses on counting words or on the frequency of codes, while qualitative content analysis is interpretative and context sensitive. With open-ended data analysis, it is helpful because it allows for a structured yet flexible process of determining meaning, looking for linkages between concepts, and expressing different ways in which people view their perspectives. A Qualitative approach thus permits a more factual analysis of the ways participants present concepts relating to democracy, to foreign aid, and to external influence in consideration of the fact that these cannot be pre-categorised (Mayring, 2000, p. 4; Schreier, 2012, p. 30).

This approach reflects the Norm Localisation Theory underlying this thesis. Because the emphasis is on the ways in which meaning is constructed by individuals from external political engagement, qualitative content analysis provides the method corresponding to this epistemological point of view. According to Schreier (2012, pp. 12-13), qualitative content analysis is capable in order to explore how meaning is created in language and to interpret subtle differences of emphasis, tone, and framing across narratives. It also allows one to define categories that are theoretically derived but data driven, hence providing for an iterative dialogue between theory and empirical material.

This approach is also supported by Mayring (2000, p. 3), who argues that qualitative content analysis permits a methodical yet flexible approach to the analysis of intricate texts, permitting both deductive and inductive reasoning to be employed. This is significant in this thesis, where the analysis is framed within the norm localisation theory but is also open to insights that emerge from the interview data. The two logics of qualitative content analysis is theory driven and responsive to the data, which are advantageous in research where interpretation, depth, and context are crucial.

As for how the data was processed, there were several steps. First, the interviews were transcribed and subsequently read several times to gain an overview of the material. Initial coding was done with a combination of deductive elements which was informed by the theoretical framework and inductive categories which emerged from the participants responses. These codes were grouped into higher order themes that address the main issues of the thesis. The analysis was conducted in a manner whereby the participants' voices were prioritised throughout the engagement with the larger conceptual questions that the research aims to address.

In conclusion, a qualitative content analysis offers a solid and adaptable framework in order to analyse the data from the interviews. The focus centred around meaning-making, contextual interpretation, and thematic development makes it especially appropriate for investigating how political concepts such as democracy and international aid are perceived and interpreted at the grassroots level.

4.5. Analytical Framework

In order to provide a methodological as well as a theoretical appropriate answer to the research question *"how do members of the Morocco civil society perceive EU democracy promotion and aid to Morocco*," a table describing the concepts of the Norm Localisation Theory has been provided.

Table 3 - Analytical Framework

Norm Localisation Dimension	Description
Local beliefs and values	Identification of cultural, historical, or religious norms shaping reception.
Local agency	Evidence of actors actively reshaping or reinterpreting EU-promoted norms.
Acceptance/adaptation	Expressions of support or positive reinterpretation of EU democracy norms.
Contestation/resistance	Critiques, scepticism, or rejection of EU norms or perceived external imposition.
Strategic appropriation	Instances where EU norms are used to pursue local goals or legitimise agendas.

Amita Acharya's (2004, p. 239) norm localisation framework contributes a valuable theoretical tool for this thesis because it implements an analysis that moves beyond simplistic perceptions of norm diffusion. Rather than assuming that international norms are universally applicable or automatically internalised by local actors, Acharya's (2004, p. 242) model focuses on the agency of local communities in interpreting, adapting, or resisting external normative frameworks. This is especially relevant in the case of the Moroccan context. Foreign concepts such as democracy and development are often negotiated through the lenses of national identity, religious values, and postcolonial memory. The norm localisation theory therefore provides the necessary conceptual flexibility to capture these varied and often uncertain responses.

The analytical table above has been constructed by utilising Acharya's (2004, p. 246) framework, which plays a central role in structuring the qualitative content analysis of the data from the interviews. Table 3 entails the key dimensions of norm localisation theory, such as local beliefs and values, local agency, adaption, contestation, and strategic appropriation.

The aforementioned concepts create solid analytical categories that can be systematically applied across the analysis of the data selection. Following the structure of table 3 helps to ensure that the analysis remains both theoretically informed and empirically grounded for this research. It also provides a consistent frame through which different interview responses can be compared, while still allowing room for inductively emerging themes to be incorporated. Thus, table 3 acts not solely as an organisational tool, but also as a connecting bridge between theory and data, guiding the researcher in identifying the process through which Moroccan citizens engage with EU promoted norms. By adhering to this framework, the thesis maintains analytical coherence while also taking into consideration the complexity and the context of the participants perspectives.

4.6. Discussion Regarding Ethics, Validity, Reliability, Critique & Limitations

4.6.1. Ethical Considerations

The utilisation of interviews for data collection method demands that the researcher take into account certain ethical considerations. This study follows an ethics checklist which has been provided from the UK Statistics Authority (2022). A table has been constructed to visualise what ethical considerations has been taking into account before, during and after the interviews.

Table 4 - Ethics Checklist

Ethical Principle	Summary of Considerations
1. Reflection	Think through potential ethical issues and risks at all stages. Prepare accordingly.
2. Avoiding Harm	Ensure no harm to participants or researchers. Have support systems in place if needed.
3. Methods & Quality	Use appropriate, accessible methods. Avoid leading questions. Acknowledge limitations and bias.

4. Public Good	Clarify the benefits of the research. Ensure it adds value and reflects participant voices.
5. Transparency	Clearly explain data collection, use, and what participation involves.
6. Confidentiality	Maintain anonymity and data security. Be prepared to break confidentiality if safety is at risk.
7. Legal Compliance	Follow data protection laws. Know what to report and collect only what's necessary.

The researcher has put significant thought regarding the study and more so on the implications the interviews could have. Considering the complex topic of this thesis, steps has been made in order to ensure that no participant would suffer any harm as a result of taking part in this research. This has been ensured as all the participants are anonymous, that is to say that names have not been included in this study. Aspects as gender, age, occupation, educational background has been included in this thesis which the participants all agreed to would be appropriate.

Moreover, an interview guide which has been constructed together with the supervisor of this thesis has been utilised for the interviews. A lot of considerations were taken in order to ensure that the interview guide would not consist of any leading questions or bias, and that the interview guide would allow the participants to express themselves freely without interruption from the interviewer. The researcher himself put significant time in order to ensure that his ethnic background would not create any bias towards the outcome of this research by strictly follow the interview guide.

Additionally, the researcher has also taken into account what public good the findings would entail. The researcher argues that it is important to discuss topics that could be seen as ''complex'' as long as it does not inflict any harm on the participants. This thesis has ensured that even marginalised people, such as those with no educational background, can have a voice on matters they might know a little about but maybe have opinions on, nonetheless. By giving ordinary Moroccans a voice, this thesis has filled current gaps in the literature by conducting in-depth interviews regarding EU aid and democracy promotion.

The researcher has been transparent regarding the aim and use of the interviews. The researcher introduced himself to the participants and explained the reason for the study and its content. The researcher also explains how the data would be utilised and analysed in this study, and that the outcome of the findings will be shared to the participants after its conclusion if they wish so.

Lastly, all participants were asked before the audio recording if they were willing to participate in this study, which all accepted. The researcher also informed all the participants that their names would not be included in this thesis and only their age, gender, educational background and region/city where they come from, which all participants agreed to. Thus, ensuring the legal compliance of the study and the safeguarding of the participants identities (UK Statistics Authority, 2022).

4.6.2. Validity & Reliability

According to *Metodpraktikan* (Esaiasson et al., 2017, p. 58), validity in qualitative research refers to how well the researcher's interpretations reflect the reality or views of the participants. It is further strengthened by utilising methods, such as transparent documentation, respondent quotes, and critical reflection. On the other hand, reliability focuses more about being systematic and consistent in the research process. While qualitative studies are not meant to be repeated with identical results, reliability is ensured when other researchers can follow the logic and steps taken to reach the conclusions (Esaiasson et al., 2017, p. 64; Noble & Smith, 2015, pp. 34-35).

The researcher has been thorough in his procedure to ensure that the participants from the interviews could talk freely and that their voices would be heard. The researcher has carefully transcribed the interviews conducted, both those which were made in English as well as Moroccan Arabic. None of the participants in this study works with any NGO nor any government related occupation, ensuring that the participants are representing the grassroots level of the Moroccan civil society. All the participants were informed before the start of the interview that they have the option to be anonymous, which all participants chose to opt for. The researcher also provided thorough explanations of the terminologies used which could potentially be difficult to understand for someone who lack higher education.

Moreover, the reliability of this study is supported by a clear and consistent research process. All interviews were conducted using the same semi-structured approach, and the data was analysed using a systematic coding framework that was applied uniformly across all transcripts. The coding process was documented in detail, allowing others to follow the steps taken from raw material to interpretation. This aligns with *Metodpraktikan* (Esaiasson et al., 2017, p. 64), which highlights the importance of transparency and structured procedures in achieving reliability in qualitative research.

At the same time, the reliability of the study can be called into question due to the interpretive nature of qualitative research. As the researcher plays an active role in analysing the material, personal assumptions or background may influence how certain responses were understood. Another researcher might interpret the same data differently. However, this is a known limitation of qualitative work and does not weaken the study, as long as the process is well-documented and reflexivity is maintained throughout.

4.6.3. Critiques & Limitations

As with every research, it is of vital importance to take into account the potential source of criticism that could be directed to this thesis. One major critical point of view is the lack of an equal division of men and women who participated in this study. This study has conducted eight interviews, whereas five consisted of men and three consisted of women. The study recognises the significance that it is vital that both men and women have an equal voice regarding their views on the thesis's topic. However, it should be noted that the sampling of participants for the interviews was conducted through snowball sampling. This approach of sampling entails the researcher to conduct interviews with a few participants from his personal network who meet the criteria for the study. These initial participants were then asked to refer others in their personal network who may also be relevant for the research. The researcher acknowledges the disparity of women and men in the study. However, the researcher did take into account to interview as many women as possible, but the personal networks of the participants eventually contributed to more men than women in this study.

Moreover, a potential limitation for this study was that the researcher could not interview all the participants in person. Eight interviews were conducted, while one was conducted in person and the other seven interviews were conducted online via Zoom. As the researcher was

present in Sweden for the time of the interviews, most of the participants were physically in Morocco, while one was present in Sweden but through Zoom, and one was present in Sweden and was able to meet the researcher in person. By conducting the majority of the interviews online, the researcher might not have been able to analyse potential facial expressions when asking certain questions to the participants. However, the aim of the interviews was not to analyse the facial or physical expressions by the participants but solely focus on the answers.

Furthermore, the fact that the researcher is of Moroccan origin and living in Europe could potentially have made the participants feel more comfortable talking to the researcher as he is from a different environment but yet speaks the same language and understands Moroccan values as the participants. On the other hand, it could also make the participants feel uncomfortable as they could be worried about saying negative things about Europe or a lack of knowledge about the EU to the researcher.

Another limitation is that there were only eight interviews conducted in this research, which means that the sample that has been gathered can be representative of all Moroccans. While there is a wide variety of different age groups, educational background and gender, it could still not be enough to represent the views and thought of all Moroccans. Most of the participants hail from northern Moroccan while one of the participants hail from Marrakech in the south, which could potentially alter the sample to have a somewhat northern Moroccan perspective regarding the topic.

5. Findings

The following section presents the core empirical findings of this study, based exclusively on the semi-structured interviews conducted with Moroccan citizens. These findings form the foundation of the research and are organised into six thematic categories, four of which has outlined in the analytical framework and two which were derived inductively from the data analysis. Each category reflects a key dimension of how participants perceive the EU's democracy promotion and aid efforts in Morocco. Throughout the section, connections to the Norm Localisation Theory will be drawn to highlight how external norms are interpreted and adapted by local actors. These links will also serve as a bridge toward the subsequent discussion and conclusion chapters.

5.1. Awareness and Knowledge of the EU and Its Activities

The interview findings suggest that while most participants were aware of the European Union's general presence and support to Morocco, the depth of their knowledge varied significantly. Several of the interviewees could identify that the EU provides financial assistance to Morocco, yet many struggled to specify exactly how or where this funding is directed. This reflects a partial awareness that is perhaps indicative of how EU-Morocco cooperation is communicated to the broader public. For instance, Interviewee 1, a university student from Rabat, stated that she had heard about the EU funding to Morocco but could not say where the funds go or how they are utilised. This sentiment was shared by Interviewee 5, who also recognised the EU's financial involvement but admitted that he had little understanding of its practical impact.

Similarly, both Interviewee 6 and Interviewee 7, elderly and retired citizens from Fes, reported being aware of the EU's presence in Morocco but had no clear knowledge of the areas in which EU funds are spent. These responses suggest that awareness does not necessarily translate into informed knowledge and point to a broader communication gap between EU institutions and ordinary Moroccan citizens. In contrast, Interviewees 2, 3, 4, and 8 demonstrated a more informed understanding of EU activities in the country. Interviewee 2, an IT technician from Nador, noted that the EU provides funding to support infrastructure, educational institutions, and the regulation of migration from Morocco to Europe. These observations were echoed by Interviewee 3, working in finance, and Interviewee 4, a public administrator from Fes, who both pointed out that EU funds are used in building projects and in managing migration-related issues.

Furthermore, interviewee 8, a teacher, added that the EU also supports education and development in social services. Their answers not only demonstrated familiarity with the EU's financial engagement but also a clearer understanding of the areas in which the funds are implemented. This variation in awareness and knowledge is important to note. From a norm localisation perspective, understanding and recognising external actors' norms and initiatives is a key prerequisite for their reception or rejection. As Acharya (2004, p. 246) highlights, norms are not simply transferred from one actor to another, however, are filtered through local knowledge and interpreted in a culturally specific way. Thus, if EU funding and

democracy promotion efforts are not clearly visible or understood by the people they are intended to benefit, their perceived legitimacy and effectiveness may be undermined.

Moreover, the findings reflect how information about international cooperation can often remain confined to those who are more educated or more connected to administrative or professional environments. While participants from academic or professional backgrounds appeared to have greater awareness of the EU's activities, those from older or less formally educated groups demonstrated much more limited knowledge. This division reinforces the idea that structural inequalities, such as education, age and access to information, play a role in shaping public understanding of external political actors like the EU.

In sum, the interview data reveals that although the EU's presence in Morocco is generally recognised, the level of knowledge regarding its activities is uneven. For democracy promotion and aid efforts to have a meaningful impact at the grassroots level, they must be accompanied by clearer communication strategies that engage local populations and improve transparency. Without this, the EU risks being seen as a distant and abstract actor, rather than as a relevant partner with a visible role in Morocco's development.

5.2. Perceptions of EU Democracy Promotion

The interviews revealed a wide range of perceptions regarding the European Union's efforts to promote democracy in Morocco, shaped by individual backgrounds, regional identity, and attitudes toward the Moroccan monarchy. While some interviewees welcomed the EU's involvement, others viewed democracy as either unnecessary or potentially destabilising. Moreover, interviewee 1, a university student from Rabat, expressed a positive attitude towards EU democracy promotion, noting that it is good that the EU supports democratic development in Morocco. This perspective was echoed by Interviewee 5, who similarly welcomed the EU's approach and highlighted that the monarchy often suppresses the idea of democracy in public discourse. Coming from the Rif region, where political grievances and scepticism towards the central government are more prominent, Interviewee 5 highlighted how many Moroccans remain reluctant to embrace democratic reforms.

Additionally, interviewee 5 noted that for these groups, governance is often still closely tied to the figure of the king, making democracy appear less as an alternative to monarchy and more as something that could potentially reinforce it. This perspective may appear

contradictory from a Western point of view, where democracy and monarchy are seen as fundamentally opposed unless the king relinquishes substantial power. Yet in the Moroccan context, democracy promotion is sometimes interpreted through the monarchy itself. Because of the King's close relationship with the EU and his central role in state-led reforms, EU democracy promotion can be perceived as shoring up the monarchy's legitimacy rather than weakening it. This helps explain why some of those most critical of the regime, including in regions like the Rif, may also remain sceptical of democracy promotion: it is not seen as a tool of political change but rather as a mechanism that consolidates the existing system.

Subsequently, interviewee 8, a teacher, also welcomed the EU's democracy promotion, but was cautious about its impact, emphasising that the monarchy remains essential to Morocco's stability and national unity. Other participants were more reserved or sceptical. Interviewee 2 appeared uncertain about the applicability of democracy in Morocco, suggesting that it may not align with the country's societal structure and traditions. A stronger rejection of democracy was expressed by Interviewee 3, who firmly believed that the monarchy is the only system capable of ensuring Morocco's stability and economic development. This interviewee repeatedly referenced the national slogan, "God, Homeland, King," and warned that democratic reform might lead Morocco down a path of instability similar to that experienced by countries such as Algeria and Egypt, which he viewed as democracies only in name but lacking in order and progress. Interviewee 2 also emphasised that ''Morocco is stable as it as because of the people's trust in the monarchy''.

Additionally, Interviewee 8 also made similar comments as interviewee 2, she said that ''Moroccans prefer stability and economic prosperity rather than political rights'' and she followed up on this by saying ''Morocco is good as it is now and we have seen improvements the last few decades regarding infrastructure projects''. A similar pattern seems to resurface time and time again, which is that all the participants in one way or the other prioritise stability and economy over anything else. The takeaway point from the remarks from the participants is that the Moroccans who were interviewed would rather live in a stable and peaceful country and where they are financially stable.

Despite his scepticism of democracy, Interviewee 3 was not opposed to closer cooperation with the EU and saw the EU as a useful economic and political partner. Interviewee 4 took a different stance, arguing that Morocco is already a democracy. He pointed to the existence of

a parliament and other institutions, and noted that the monarchy's role has gradually diminished, enough to consider Morocco democratic in practice. This view highlights a more institutional understanding of democracy, though it arguably overlooks the power still held by the king in key decision-making processes. Meanwhile, Interviewees 6 and 7, both elderly and retired, voiced support for the monarchy but believed that the country could benefit from incorporating more democratic elements, with assistance from the EU. Their perspective suggests a preference for gradual reform rather than systemic overhaul. Together, these diverse perspectives reflect the complex interplay between tradition, political identity, and openness to reform within Moroccan society.

Moreover, the monarchy remains a deeply embedded and respected institution, and for many, it symbolises national unity and continuity. At the same time, the EU's democracy promotion is not rejected outright but rather reframed in ways that make it useful without threatening the status quo. This reflects a particular group of respondents who can be described as "instrumental" in their outlook: they welcomed institutional strengthening and EU support for reforms but only insofar as these efforts did not undermine the monarchy. For these participants, democracy promotion was less about transforming Morocco into a liberal democracy and more about selectively drawing benefits, such as improvements in transparency, justice reform, and administrative efficiency, while keeping the monarchical framework intact. This middling position illustrates a form of norm localisation where external norms are not absorbed wholesale, but strategically appropriated to reinforce existing structures rather than replace them.

These findings underline the importance of considering local values and historical legacies when assessing the reception of external norms like democracy promotion. From a norm localisation perspective, as argued by Acharya (2004, p. 247), such external norms are often accepted only when they are seen as compatible with existing identities and institutions. In the Moroccan case, democracy promotion is not wholly rejected but must navigate a socio-political context where loyalty to the monarchy plays a central role in how governance is understood and legitimised. The monarchy is not simply an obstacle to democratisation but rather a central institution through which external norms are filtered, adapted, and made meaningful. For many participants, democratic principles were only acceptable when framed in a way that complemented, rather than undermined, the king's authority. This highlights a

critical dimension of norm localisation: the EU's democracy promotion cannot bypass Morocco's political and cultural context but must work through it. Thus, the legitimacy of democracy promotion in Morocco depends less on the EU's insistence on liberal reforms and more on the extent to which such reforms can be reconciled with Morocco's deeply rooted monarchical tradition.

5.3. Attitudes Toward EU Development Aid

Across the interviews, EU development aid was consistently viewed as having a positive and tangible impact on Moroccan society. Participants frequently mentioned improvements in education, infrastructure, employment opportunities, and public services as key benefits. These material outcomes formed the basis of most respondents' understanding of the EU's role, with aid being seen as a practical means of improving day-to-day life rather than as an abstract policy tool. Respondents with higher education and professional backgrounds, such as teachers, public administrators, and IT specialists, tended to cite specific initiatives—like infrastructure projects or academic exchange programmes, indicating a higher level of awareness of the EU's concrete contributions. By contrast, participants from older age groups or with less direct access to information often spoke in more general terms, reflecting a perception shaped primarily by visible, localised improvements rather than policy-level understanding.

When responses are examined through the lens of political orientation, especially attitudes toward the monarchy, distinct patterns emerge. Supporters of the monarchy often framed EU aid as a neutral or apolitical force that works alongside Morocco's existing governance structures. For these respondents, aid reinforced rather than challenged the monarchy's legitimacy by delivering visible development outcomes under its stewardship. This interpretation resonates with Acharya's (2004) notion of grafting, where external norms or resources are embedded within and legitimised by pre-existing institutions. Conversely, participants more critical of the monarchy tended to view EU aid as a potential lever for reform. These individuals, including some from the historically marginalised Rif region, linked development assistance to the need for greater justice sector reform, gender equality, and decentralisation. Their interpretations illustrate Acharya's (2004, p. 243) framing process, where international inputs are aligned with local grievances and aspirations for political

change. In this way, the same EU policy instrument, development aid, was localised in very different ways depending on the recipient's political outlook and regional identity.

Perceptions of conditionality further reveal how local actors selectively interpret the EU's intentions. While some respondents recognised that aid is tied to cooperation on migration control, particularly in managing irregular crossings to Europe, this was generally not seen as politically intrusive. Instead, it was understood as part of a pragmatic exchange that benefits both sides. However, several participants expressed uncertainty about whether conditionality exists at all, pointing to a gap in public communication about the EU's strategic aims. This selective awareness demonstrates Acharya's (2004, p. 248) pruning stage of localisation: local actors adopt and internalise the elements of an external norm that are visible and useful—such as funding for education or infrastructure, while downplaying or ignoring elements that are less salient or potentially contentious, such as governance-related conditions. In both monarchist and reformist interpretations, development aid is adapted into pre-existing narratives about Morocco's political future, serving either to consolidate the current system or to promote gradual change.

Taken together, these patterns show that EU development aid is not received as a uniform policy message but is instead refracted through the social, political, and regional contexts of its recipients. Its perceived legitimacy and purpose depend heavily on how it is framed in relation to Morocco's political system and the monarchy's role. Supporters of the status quo see it as enhancing national stability through economic growth, while reform-minded participants interpret it as a resource for modernisation and institutional reform. In both cases, however, the EU's material contributions are central to its positive image, underscoring the importance of aligning development cooperation with locally resonant priorities to ensure sustained acceptance and relevance.

5.4. The Role of Religion in Shaping Perceptions

The influence of Islam plays a central role in shaping how the EU's democracy promotion and aid efforts are perceived by ordinary Moroccans. All participants identified as Muslims, with the exception of Interviewee 3 who opted not to answer the question. The interviews reveal a wide range of views regarding the relationship between religious or cultural identity and democratic values, but the majority of participants did not regard their religious or

cultural background as incompatible with EU values or aid efforts. For instance, Interviewees 1 and 2 both stated that their Islamic faith and cultural background do not affect their opinions on democracy or EU aid. Interviewee 2 even emphasised that religion should remain a personal matter and not play a dominant role in political life.

Moreover, interviewee 3 declined to answer whether he identified as Muslim and refrained from discussing how religion may influence his perceptions, which might suggest a discomfort with linking faith to political views or simply a preference to keep personal beliefs private. By contrast, Interviewee 4 held the view that Islam and Moroccan culture are not only compatible with democracy but actively support it, stating that Islam promotes justice, consultation, and governance principles that align with democratic values. Similarly, Interviewees 6 and 7 stressed that their religious beliefs enhanced their support for democracy and EU involvement in Morocco. They viewed Islam as a framework that encourages justice, participation, and social welfare, which in their eyes resonated with the EU's democracy-related efforts.

Furthermore, these findings stand in sharp contrast to influential arguments in the literature. Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations (1996, pp. 298-299) and Elie Kedourie's Democracy and Arab Political Culture (1992, pp. 5-6) both argue that Islam is inherently anti-democratic, suggesting that Islamic values and democratic governance are fundamentally incompatible. The respondents, however, directly challenged this claim. Rather than perceiving Islam as a barrier, many interpreted their faith as reinforcing democratic values such as justice and participation. In doing so, they illustrated the core of Acharya's (2004, p. 240) localisation theory; external norms like democracy are not accepted or rejected, but are reframed in ways that resonate with local belief systems. In the Moroccan case, Islam did not undermine democracy promotion, as Huntington (1996, pp. 298-299) and Kedourie (1992, pp. 5-6) would predict, but was instead used as a cultural and religious frame to legitimise and adapt democratic norms.

On the question of religion, the interviews revealed more than a simple assertion that Islam and democracy are compatible. Several participants explained this compatibility in terms of Islamic principles that they saw as resonant with democratic values. For example, Interviewees 6 and 7 emphasised that Islam promotes justice, fairness, and collective consultation, values they associated with democracy. While they did not explicitly reference

the concept of shura (consultation) found in Islamic governance traditions, their descriptions align with this notion, framing democracy as a system that reflects participatory and just decision-making rather than something imposed from the outside. Similarly, Interviewee 4 argued that Islam and Moroccan cultural traditions actively support democratic development, suggesting that religious values are not only compatible but can serve as a legitimising framework for democratic reforms. In terms of Acharya's (2004, p. 240) norm localisation theory, these respondents illustrate how external norms are framed in ways that draw on local religious references. Democracy is not adopted as a European idea, but rather made meaningful through Islamic concepts that emphasise consultation and justice, allowing respondents to see it as authentic rather than foreign.

At the same time, not all respondents articulated religion as fully supportive of democracy. For some, the relationship was more ambivalent. Interviewee 2, for instance, stressed that Islam should remain a personal matter and not extend into politics, which suggests that religion could become a source of conflict if brought into the political sphere. Interviewee 3, who refused to disclose his religious identity, avoided linking Islam to democracy altogether, perhaps indicating discomfort with how religion intersects with political legitimacy. These examples show that while localisation can involve positive reframing, it can also involve selective silences or rejections where external norms are not easily aligned with personal or cultural values. Acharya's theory is relevant in this case; localisation is not uniform but plural, producing both adaptations that legitimise external norms (as in the references to justice and fairness) and resistances where norms are kept at a distance.

Taken together, the findings suggest that Islam functions as both a bridge and a boundary for EU democracy promotion. For some participants, Islamic values are mobilised to legitimise and localise democracy, while for others, religion is bracketed off from politics altogether, either out of caution or scepticism. This duality extends Acharya's framework by showing how localisation can proceed along multiple tracks simultaneously, one where external norms are made meaningful through religious frames, and another where religion is kept separate to prevent contradiction. In both cases, the EU's democratic norms are filtered through the lens of Islamic identity, but with different outcomes: either as reinforcement or as cautious separation.

For others, democracy was not seen as oppositional to Moroccan traditions but as something that could be compatible with them if adapted to local realities. What the interviews reveal, however, is that this compatibility is conditional and selective, shaped by the way Moroccans negotiate between external pressures and their own political culture. For example, Interviewee 4 argued that Morocco is already democratic because of the existence of parliament and elections, thereby appropriating the language of democracy while simultaneously affirming the centrality of the monarchy. This goes beyond Acharya's (2004, p. 252) idea that norms are "reshaped" locally: in this case, democracy is not just adapted but redefined to fit within an existing monarchical framework. Similarly, Interviewees 6 and 7 saw no contradiction between Islam and democracy, but they supported only limited democratic reforms as long as they reinforced rather than weakened stability. These findings extend the theory by showing that localisation does not always result in partial adoption of an external norm, but sometimes in its transformation into a narrative that legitimises the status quo. At the same time, respondents like Interviewee 5, who connected his support for democracy to regional grievances in the Rif, demonstrate how localisation can also open space for contestation and resistance. Taken together, these perspectives illustrate that EU-promoted norms are not only negotiated but strategically reframed: for some to protect the monarchy, for others to demand change. In this way, the findings do not merely confirm Acharya's (2004, p. 240) framework but highlight the different political functions that localisation can serve within Moroccan society.

In the Moroccan case, these interviews suggest that the success of the EU's democracy promotion is not simply about the transmission of values from Brussels to Rabat, but about how those values are received, interpreted, and incorporated into the lived experiences of Moroccans. Islam and national identity do not inherently block the reception of democratic norms; instead, they matter in three distinct ways. First, for several respondents, Islam was seen as supportive of democracy, with principles such as justice and consultation interpreted as compatible with democratic practices. This allowed EU democracy promotion to be viewed positively when framed in terms that resonate with Islamic values. Second, national identity was strongly tied to the monarchy, which many participants regarded as the cornerstone of Moroccan stability. In these cases, democracy was accepted only to the extent that it did not undermine the king's authority, showing how national loyalty acts as a boundary for external norms. Third, a minority of participants, particularly one from the Rif region, which has a

history of political tension with Moroccan authorities, linked his identity to a more critical stance toward the monarchy and were therefore more open to external democratic ideas. Together, these themes highlight that religion and national identity function less as outright barriers and more as cultural filters: they shape which aspects of EU-promoted norms are accepted, which are reinterpreted, and which are resisted.

5.5. Negotiating Change: Between Reform and Stability

One of the most recurring themes in the interviews was the balancing act between the desire for political reform and the preservation of stability, with the Moroccan monarchy often perceived as the key guarantor of that stability. While some interviewees welcomed the EU's efforts to promote democratic values in Morocco, these efforts were often interpreted through a distinctly local lens, framed by Morocco's own political, historical, and cultural context. As such, the monarchy was not seen as incompatible with democratic development, but rather as a necessary structure to ensure that change occurs in a gradual, stable, and culturally appropriate manner. This pattern of interpretation reflects what Acharya (2004, p. 245) refers to as to adjust to the chape and content of foreign ideas, a process by which local actors selectively adopt international norms, not necessarily because they are fully aligned with them ideologically, but because they serve a useful function within the local context.

In this case, most participants acknowledged the value of certain democratic principles such as improved transparency, justice reform, and citizen participation, but did not support a full transition to a Western-style liberal democracy. Instead, they appeared to favour a model that retains the monarchy as a stabilising institution while incrementally incorporating some democratic reforms. Interviewees 3, 6, 7 and 8 particularly stressed the importance of the monarchy in safeguarding Morocco's stability and unity, especially in a regional context where the collapse of authoritarian regimes in countries like Libya and the ongoing struggles in Algeria and Egypt were seen as cautionary tales. As Interviewee 3 put it bluntly, "Without the king, we would end up like Syria or worse." This view was not necessarily hostile to the idea of democracy, but rather rooted in a deep-seated fear that dramatic political change could potentially open the door to instability or division.

Others, like Interviewee 4, even argued that Morocco already possesses democratic institutions, citing the existence of a parliament and regular elections as proof that the country has its own version of democracy within a monarchical framework. This kind of acceptance and adaptation of external norms is central to Acharya's (2004, p. 250) localisation theory. Rather than rejecting or passively absorbing EU norms, Moroccan citizens, at least among those interviewed, demonstrated a nuanced engagement with them. They filtered these norms through national identity, religious values, and historical experience, choosing aspects that align with local priorities while modifying or resisting others that appear threatening or culturally misaligned.

The monarchy, in this case, is not simply a relic of tradition but a mechanism through which democratic norms are selectively filtered and implemented in a way that feels safe and familiar to many Moroccans. In sum, the findings suggest that EU democracy promotion is not rejected outright, but rather reframed and repurposed in a way that supports Morocco's own path of controlled political reform. The participants' views indicate a desire for change, but not at the expense of the stability they associate with the current system. This highlights the importance of understanding not only whether EU norms are accepted, but how they are reinterpreted and strategically localised by local actors who navigate the tensions between reform and continuity.

5.6. Awareness and Informational Gaps

The varying degrees of awareness about EU activities across participants highlight a key dynamic in the norm localisation process: the importance of access to information. Participants with higher education and younger age profiles – such as Interviewees 1 (female, university student), 2 (male, IT technician), and 8 (female, teacher) – demonstrated relatively higher levels of awareness about EU activities and funding, particularly in areas like infrastructure, migration regulation, and education. These participants are more likely to have engaged with public discourse, media, or professional environments where such cooperation is discussed. Their educational backgrounds likely contributed to their ability to articulate the nature and purpose of EU involvement in Morocco. In contrast, older participants such as Interviewees 6 and 7 (both retired males from Fes) were aware of the EU's presence but lacked detailed knowledge of where aid is directed. This gap may stem from generational differences in media consumption, access to higher education, and general exposure to

international affairs. The disparity suggests that while EU norms and initiatives may be formally present, they are not always embedded within public consciousness at a grassroots level.

6. Discussion

This chapter reflects on the core findings of the study and places them within the broader analytical framework of Norm Localisation Theory (Acharya, 2004, p. 239). By doing so, it aims to better understand how Moroccan citizens perceive the EU's democracy promotion and development aid efforts, and how their backgrounds – including education, occupation, age, gender, and regional identity – might have shaped their responses. Rather than viewing the EU's efforts as either wholly accepted or rejected, the findings point to a more complex process of negotiation and adaptation of external norms, as suggested by Acharya (2004, p. 251).

6.1. Perceptions of Democracy: Between Endorsement and Scepticism

Attitudes toward democracy among participants reflected how external norms are filtered through local identities and experiences, illustrating key processes in Acharya's (2004, p. 240) localisation framework. Supportive views of EU democracy promotion tended to align with ''acceptance'' or "adapted acceptance'', where democratic principles were embraced so long as they could coexist with Morocco's monarchical framework. In contrast, more sceptical perspectives aligned with selective rejection or modification of the norm, often framing democracy as a potential threat to stability. These patterns suggest that personal histories, regional affiliations, and professional roles act as mediating filters in the localisation process, shaping whether EU-promoted democratic norms are integrated, adapted, or resisted. While the EU norm is framed in universal terms, its reception is inherently contextual, rooted in Morocco's political culture and historical experience, and negotiated through identities that determine how far the norm is perceived as legitimate or desirable.

6.2. Development Aid and Perceived Conditionality

All participants acknowledged the tangible benefits of EU development aid, particularly in sectors like education, infrastructure, and employment. However, perspectives varied on whether this aid was conditional or politically motivated. Interviewees 1, 4, and 5 viewed the

aid as largely neutral or financial, while others like Interviewees 2, 3, and 8 recognised some degree of conditionality, especially around migration cooperation.

Here again, differences in education and profession played a role. Interviewees who had more detailed knowledge about the conditional nature of EU aid (e.g., Interviewee 2, an IT technician) were also more connected to international issues through their work or education. By contrast, those who viewed aid as purely benevolent or neutral often lacked deeper engagement with how aid is negotiated and implemented. This reinforces the idea that aid, is interpreted not in line with EU objectives, but according to local experiences and visible outcomes, a clear example of localised interpretation in Acharya's (2004, p. 240) framework.

6.3. The Influence of Islam

Despite the strong presence of Islam and the monarchy in Moroccan society, most participants did not see these as conflicting with democratic values or EU aid. In fact, Interviewees 4, 6, 7, and 8 explicitly stated that Islam supports democratic values such as justice, consultation, and participation. This view challenges the common assumption that religious identity in Muslim societies is inherently incompatible with liberal democratic norms.

More importantly, female interviewees (e.g. Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 6) often presented Islam as empowering and consistent with their views on democracy and development. This may reflect the growing role of women in higher education and professional settings, where exposure to pluralistic values is more common. These interpretations demonstrate what Acharya (2004, p. 244) describes as ''grafting'', where global norms are not only accepted but interpreted through and reinforced by existing cultural values.

6.4. Strategic Adaptation and the Role of the Monarchy

Finally, a key insight from the findings is the central role of the monarchy in shaping how participants perceive political change. Most interviewees, including 3, 6, 7, and 8 viewed the monarchy as a guarantor of stability and were cautious about sudden reforms. These views reflect a preference for gradual change and suggest that EU democracy promotion is only acceptable when it does not threaten national unity or traditional authority structures.

This corresponds with Acharya's (2004, p. 264) concept of strategic adaptation: external norms are not rejected, but are appropriated in ways that support domestic priorities. For instance, participants were more willing to accept democratic norms when framed as enhancements to existing institutions, rather than as radical alternatives. The monarchy thus becomes a filter through which EU norms are selectively localised, maintaining political legitimacy while allowing incremental reform.

6.5. Conclusion of the Discussion

This section will include a table for a more detailed visualisation of the discussion that has been conducted by categorising the main themes as well as to tie it to the Norm Localisation theory.

Table 5 - Visualisation of Themes

Theme	EU Norm / Objective	Local Response (Interview Findings)	Norm Localisation Process (Acharya)
Awareness of EU Activities (Deductively)	Transparency and visibility of EU democracy promotion and aid	Mixed awareness. Younger and educated participants (e.g., Interviewees 2, 3, 4, 8) had clearer knowledge. Older or less educated (e.g., 6, 7) were aware but uninformed on details.	**Precondition for localisation** – Awareness is necessary before norms can be meaningfully adopted or rejected.
Democracy Promotion (Deductively)	Promotion of democratic governance and values	Some (1, 5, 8) welcomed it. Others (3, 4, 6, 7) were cautious or preferred monarchy as a stabilising force. One (2) questioned democracy's fit with Moroccan society.	**Strategic appropriation / Adapted acceptance** – Democracy is supported when framed within local structures (e.g., monarchy).
Development Aid (Deductively)	Conditional aid to foster reforms (education, governance, etc.)	All saw tangible benefits. A few (2, 3, 8) mentioned migration-related conditions. Most focused on economic impact (infrastructure, jobs, education).	**Selective internalisation** – Aid is accepted for practical benefits; political strings often overlooked or downplayed.

Islam & National Identity (Deductively)	Compatibility of EU norms with religion and culture	Most participants saw no contradiction. Several (4, 6, 7, 8) argued Islam supports justice and democratic values.	**Cultural framing / norm subsidiarity** – EU norms are filtered through Islamic and national identity for local legitimacy.
Reform vs. Stability (Inductively)	Broad systemic democratic transition	Majority favoured gradual reform. Monarchy seen as necessary for stability, especially in light of regional unrest (e.g., Interviewee 3).	**Strategic appropriation** – Norms are adopted to the extent they don't challenge perceived stability provided by monarchy.
The Importance of Respondent Backgrounds (Inductively)	Not a direct EU objective, but a contextual factor influencing how EU norms are received	Age, education, occupation, and regional origin shaped awareness and openness toward EU democracy promotion and aid. Younger, educated respondents (e.g., 1, 2, 4, 5, 8) showed higher awareness and more openness to reform. Older or less educated participants (e.g., 6, 7) prioritised stability via the monarchy. Regional background (e.g., Rif origin) sometimes correlated with stronger reformist views.	While background factors are not part of the EU's normative objectives, they shape the *preconditions for localisation*. Variations in education, age, and regional identity affected whether norms were understood, adapted, or resisted, thereby influencing the overall localisation process.

In sum, the findings demonstrate that the reception of EU democracy promotion and aid in Morocco is deeply shaped by local context. Participant characteristics, including gender, age, education, and occupation, significantly influenced how norms were understood and internalised. Through the lens of Norm Localisation Theory, it becomes clear that EU efforts are not received in a vacuum; they are interpreted, contested, and adapted according to Moroccan cultural and political realities. Whether through cautious support, selective appropriation, or reinterpretation of democratic principles through religious and national identity, Moroccan citizens act as active agents in localising international norms rather than passive recipients. This insight is crucial for understanding not only the limits of EU external

action but also the conditions under which it might become more legitimate and effective in the eyes of those it aims to influence.

7. Conclusions

This study set out to explore how ordinary Moroccan citizens perceive the European Union's democracy promotion and aid efforts. Using Acharya's Norm Localisation Theory as the analytical framework, the aim was to understand how EU-promoted democratic norms are received, interpreted, and potentially adapted by local actors in Morocco. Through semi-structured interviews with eight Moroccan participants of various backgrounds, this thesis has examined awareness of the EU's activities, perceptions of democracy promotion, attitudes toward development aid, the influence of religion and national identity, and the balancing act between reform and stability. The findings show that while all participants had at least some awareness of the EU's presence and support in Morocco, the depth of knowledge varied.

Those with higher education or professional backgrounds generally had a better understanding of where EU funds are directed, while others, particularly older interviewees, had more limited knowledge. This uneven awareness is a relevant point in the context of norm localisation, since understanding and visibility of a foreign norm is a necessary step for its local adaptation. Regarding EU democracy promotion, the responses revealed mixed perceptions. While some participants welcomed the EU's support for democratic values, others were sceptical, especially when democracy was viewed as potentially destabilising. Several interviewees expressed strong support for the monarchy and saw it as the only viable source of national unity and order. For these individuals, democracy was not rejected outright, but it was perceived as something that must be compatible with Morocco's historical and political context.

In fact, some participants even believed that Morocco was already democratic in its own way. These perspectives echo the idea of "acceptance" and "adaptation" from Acharya's (2004, p. 264) theory, showing that EU norms are not necessarily rejected but rather reframed to fit local values. When it comes to EU development aid, most participants expressed positive views. Many mentioned tangible improvements in sectors such as education, infrastructure, and the job market. However, several were unsure whether such aid came with political conditions, while others believed that the only conditionality involved migration management.

This uncertainty about conditionality also points to a lack of transparency in how EU-Morocco cooperation is communicated to the public.

The development aid was largely seen as financial support rather than a political tool, which is important when evaluating how norms are strategically appropriated on the ground. Religion and national identity played a strong role in shaping perceptions, but not in a way that conflicted with EU values. Most participants believed that Islam supports democracy and does not stand in opposition to EU-promoted norms. This finding challenges the idea that cultural or religious identity always creates barriers to norm transfer. In this study, Moroccan cultural and religious frameworks were used to interpret and sometimes support external ideas such as democracy, again showing the relevance of norm localisation in explaining these processes. A central theme that emerged was the desire for reform—but only when tied to stability. The monarchy was widely viewed as the key to preserving Morocco's unity and avoiding the chaos that has affected other countries in the region.

For many participants, democratic reform should be slow and guided by national interests, with the monarchy remaining in place. This is perhaps one of the clearest examples of strategic appropriation, where norms are not fully internalised but used selectively to support local needs. In sum, this thesis concludes that the EU's democracy promotion efforts in Morocco are not outright rejected, but their reception is highly dependent on local values, historical memory, and political realities. The Norm Localisation Theory helps make sense of this selective acceptance by showing how external ideas are filtered and reinterpreted. Moroccan citizens may support democratic principles in theory, but often only when they are compatible with the monarchy, Islam, and national unity.

7.1. Future Research

This thesis is based on a limited number of interviews and does not claim to be representative of all Moroccan perspectives. However, it offers a grounded insight into how ordinary citizens perceive the EU's role in their country. Future research could expand on this by including a larger and more diverse sample of participants, perhaps across different regions, age groups, and socio-economic backgrounds. It would also be valuable to investigate the role of Moroccan civil society organisations in mediating EU norms, as well as how young people view the EU's influence, especially in light of increasing global polarisation.

Moreover, future research could explore how these perceptions develop over time, particularly as the EU and Morocco continue to deepen their cooperation. Researchers could also explore how perceptions vary between urban and rural populations, or between those engaged in civil society and those who are not. Finally, further research could test the applicability of other postcolonial or norm diffusion frameworks, providing a broader theoretical base to understand the complexities of EU external action in non-European contexts.

References

Acharya, A. (2004). How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism. *International Organization*, *58*(2), 239–275. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818304582024

Arab Barometer. (2024). *Morocco: Public Opinion Report 2024*. AB8-Morocco-Report-ENG.pdf

Arab Barometer. (2023). *Morocco Country Report 2021-2022.* ABVII_Morocco_Report-ENG.pdf

BBC News. (2020). Morocco-Israel ties: The view from Rabat's streets. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55266089

Benstead, L. J. (2015). Why do some Arab citizens see democracy as unsuitable for their country? *Democratization, 22*(7), 1183–1208. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2014.940041

Bernard, H. R., & ProQuest. (2018). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (Sixth Edition.). Rowman & Littlefield.

Bhabha, H. K. (2010). *The location of culture*. Routledge.

Boddy-Evans, A. (2019). A brief history of Morocco. *ThoughtCo*. https://www.thoughtco.com/brief-history-of-morocco-43987

Bolleyer, N., & Storm, L. (2010). Problems of party assistance in hybrid regimes: The case of Morocco. *Democratization, 17*(6), 1202–1224. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2010.525934

British Council Maroc. (2021). Shift to English in Morocco – British Council. Shift to English | British Council Morocco

Börzel, T. A., & van Hüllen, V. (2014). One voice, one message, but conflicting goals: Cohesiveness and consistency in the European Neighbourhood Policy. *Journal of European Public Policy, 21*(7), 1033–1049. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2014.912147

Chograni, H. (2021). Morocco consolidates its authoritarianism. Arab Center Washington DC. https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/morocco-consolidates-its-authoritarianism/

Council for European Reform [CER]. (2020). *Rethinking the EU's approach towards its southern neighbours* [Policy brief]. CER. Retrieved from https://www.cer.eu/publications/archive/policy-brief/2020/rethinking-eus-approach-towards-its-southern-neighbours

Dahl, R. A. (1989). *Democracy and its critics*. Yale University Press.

Esaiasson, P., Gilljam, M., Oscarsson, H., Towns, A., & Wängnerud, L. (2017). *Metodpraktikan: Konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad* (5th ed.). Wolters Kluwer.

EU Neighbours South. (2018). Morocco-EU twinning project launched in judicial field. https://south.euneighbours.eu/news/morocco-eu-twinning-project-launched-judicial-field/

European Commission. (2004). *European Neighbourhood Policy: Strategy Paper*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2004:0373:FIN:EN:PDF

European Commission. (2013). *EU-Morocco European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan*. https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/enp/pdf/pdf/action_plans/morocco_enp_ap_final_en.pdf

European Commission. (2023). *EU launches new cooperation programmes with Morocco worth €624 million for green transition, migration and social protection*. EU Neighbourhood & Enlargement. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-launches-new-cooperation-programmes-morocco-worth-eu624-million-green-transition-migration-and-2023-03-02_en

European Commission. (2024). *Morocco*. European Neighbourhood Policy. Retrieved from https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/morocco_en

European External Action Service. (2021). *About the Ambassador – Delegation of the European Union to the Kingdom of Morocco*. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/morocco/about-ambassador_en?s=204

Freedom House. (2024). *Freedom in the World 2024:Morocco*. https://freedomhouse.org/country/morocco/freedom-world/2024

Grimm, S. (2015). European Democracy Promotion in Crisis: Conflicts of Objectives, Neglected External-Domestic Interactions and the Authoritarian Backlash. *Global Policy*, *6*(S1), 73–82. https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12230

Haddadi, S. (2010). Two cheers for whom? The European Union and democratization in Morocco. *Democratization, 9*(1), 149–169. https://doi.org/10.1080/714000238

Hashas, M. (2024). Religion and Politics in Morocco: Islamic, Islamist, and Post-Islamist Dynamics. *Filozofija i Društvo (Zbornik Radova)*, *35*(3), 537–562. https://doi.org/10.2298/FID2403537H

Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. Simon & Schuster.

IEMed. (2021). *The new EU agenda for the Southern Mediterranean: Prospects for Morocco*. *Mediterranean Yearbook*. https://www.iemed.org/publication/the-new-eu-agenda-for-the-southern-mediterranean-prospects-for-morocco/

Kallio, H., Pietilä, A.-M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: Developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 72*(12), 2954–2965. https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031

Kedourie, E. (1992). *Democracy and Arab political culture*. Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Khakee, A., Afoukane, J., Ammor, F., & Lutterbeck, D. (2008). Pragmatism rather than backlash: Moroccan perceptions of Western democracy promotion. OA - Pragmatism Rather than Backlash.pdf

Khakee, A., & Weilandt, R. (2022). Supporting democratic participation beyond democracy promotion? EU relations with Moroccan and Tunisian civil society in the areas of trade and anti-corruption. *Mediterranean Politics, 27*(4), 456–482. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2021.1883282

Kuczynski, L & Daly, K. (2003). Qualitative methods as inductive (theory generating) research: psychological and sociological approaches. In L Kuczynski (Ed.) Handbook of Dynamics in Parent-Child Relations (pp. 373-392). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage. (44) Kuczynski & Daly (2003). Qualitative Methods for Inductive (Theory- generating) Research

Longley, R. (2024). What Is Democracy? Definition and Examples. *ThoughtCo*. What Is Democracy? Definition and Examples

Magnusson, E., & Marecek, J. (2015). Designing the interview guide. In *Doing Interview-based Qualitative Research: A Learner's Guide* (pp. 46–57). chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Magnusson, E., & Marecek, J. (2015). Doing the interview. In *Doing Interview-based Qualitative Research: A Learner's Guide* (pp. 58–72). chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mayring, P. (2000). Qualitative Content Analysis Qualitative Content Analysis. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 1*(2).

Noble, H., & Smith, J. (2015). Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. *Evidence-Based Nursing, 18*(2), 34–35. https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2015-102054

North Africa Post. (2022). Morocco is a major strategic partner of the European Union on migration management. *North Africa Post*. https://northafricapost.com/62533-morocco-a-major-strategic-partner-for-eu-in-migration-management-eu-ambassador-says.html

Ruark, A., & Fielding-Miller, R. (2016). Using qualitative methods to validate and contextualize quantitative findings: A case study of research on sexual behaviour and gender-based violence among young Swazi women. *Global Health: Science and Practice, 4*(3), 373–383. https://doi.org/10.9745/GHSP-D-16-00062

Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice* (First Edition, pp. viii–viii). SAGE Publications, Limited. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529682571

Seawright, J. (2008). Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences [Review of *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*]. *The Journal of Politics, 70*(1), 276–278. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381607080231

Sedaca, N. (2024). What Is Democracy, and Why Does Defending It Matter? *Freedom House*. What Is Democracy, and Why Does Defending It Matter? | Freedom House

Sepos, A. (2018). EU support of polyarchy? The case of Morocco. *European Foreign Affairs Review, 23*(4), 521–547. https://doi.org/10.54648/eerr2018040

Stepan, A., & Robertson, G. B. (2003). An "Arab" more than "Muslim" electoral gap. *Journal of Democracy*, *14*(3), 30–44. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2003.0064

Tessler, M. (2002). Do Islamic orientations influence attitudes toward democracy in the Arab world? Evidence from Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Algeria. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology, 43*(3–5), 229–249. https://doi.org/10.1177/002071520204300302

Tessler, M., & Gao, E. (2005). Gauging Arab support for democracy. *Journal of Democracy, 16*(3), 83–97. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2005.0054

Tessler, M., & Gao, E. (2008). Democracy and the political culture orientations of ordinary citizens: A typology for the Arab world and beyond. *International Social Science Journal, 59*(192), 197–207. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2451.2009.00692.x

Torres, L. F. (2025). Bolstering Autocracy, Hindering Democracy: Local Stakeholders' Perspectives on the Effects of EU Migration Policy Externalization in Morocco. *The International Migration Review*. https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183251314854

UK Statistics Authority. (2022). *Ethical considerations associated with qualitative research methods*. https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/ethical-considerations-associated-with-qualitative-research-methods/pages/8/

Van Hüllen, V. (2012). Europeanisation through cooperation? EU democracy promotion in Morocco and Tunisia. *West European Politics, 35*(1), 117–134. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2012.631317

Wendt, A. (1999). *Social theory of international politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Appendix

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES (CES)

Interview Guide

Introduction & Consent

Purpose: Explain the study, build rapport, and obtain consent.

Hello and welcome! I will first introduce myself briefly and the purpose of this interview. My name is Yassin Laghmari and I am in my final semester at master's level at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. I study European Studies and I want to explore how Moroccans perceive the EU's attempt of democracy promotion in Morocco. I would like to hear your opinions regarding this topic. If you don't have much or any insight in this topic, I would like to briefly explain it for you and then you can form your opinions from there.

Explanation of the topic:

"Thank you for your time! My research focuses on understanding how Moroccans view the European Union's efforts to support democracy in Morocco.

The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union of 27 European countries that works together on issues like trade, security, and development.

''There are no right or wrong answers. I'm just here to listen to your perspective. Feel free to share your honest opinions!"

Script:

Your responses are anonymous if you would like them to be, and you can skip any question or stop at any time. Do you consent to participate and to be voice recorded? Voice recording would allow me to go back and hear what was being said during the interview. If you do not consent to be voice recorded, would you participate for a interview if I would take handwritten notes? Do you consent to participate in this interview? "Thank you for participating''

Background

1. Can you briefly describe yourself?
2. What is your occupation?
3. What educational background do you possess?
4. What is your region of residence?
5. How would you describe your interest or involvement in political/social issues in Morocco?

Concept of Democracy

6. How would you define democracy? –
7. What elements do you think a democratic state should include?

Interviewer: I am now going to tell you how some scholars would define democracy.

''More than simple majority rule, democracy is a governing system based on the will and consent of the governed, institutions that are accountable to all citizens, adherence to the rule of law, and respect for the human rights of all people''.

Core Questions

Theme 1: General Awareness of EU aid to Morocco

<u>Brief information about the EU and its aid to Morocco:</u>

8. Are you aware of the EU's aid to Morocco? If so, what do you know about it? If not, I will briefly provide you with brief information of what EU aid to Morocco consists of.

Interviewer: I will now tell you briefly about the EU's aid to Morocco.

*The EU provides financial aid to Morocco, including over **€1.5 billion** in funding between 2014–2020. The EU also sends missions to monitor Moroccan general elections, the latest being in 2021.*

Theme 2: Awareness & Perceptions of EU Democracy Promotion

9. In your view, what are the EU's main goals in sending aid to Morocco?

10. What positive impacts have you observed from EU aid to Morocco?

Probe: Can you share an example of a success?

11. What negative impacts have you observed from EU aid to Morocco

Probe: Can you share an example of a failure?

Theme 3: Impact & Effectiveness

12. Do you think the EU's aid has influenced Moroccan politics or society? If so, how?

Theme 4: Agency & Local Perspectives

13. Do you think Morocco can turn into a democracy with the EU's aid efforts? Why or why not?

14. How do Moroccans respond to EU involvement in democracy promotion? (e.g., acceptance, adaptation, resistance).

Theme 5: Hybridity & Cultural Context

15. Would you consider yourself a Muslim?

16. Would you say that your religious beliefs influence the way you perceive democracy?

17. Would you say that religion has an influential role in Moroccan politics?

Theme 6: Power Dynamics & Critique

18. How would you describe the aid partnership between the EU and Morocco in this partnership?

19. What changes would you suggest to improve the EU's approach to democracy promotion in Morocco?

Theme 7: Historical & Colonial Context

20. How do you think Morocco's history with colonialism (e.g., French/Spanish rule) shapes its relationship with the EU today?

Probe: Do you see any similarities and differences between past colonial interventions and current EU actions?

Wrap-Up & Final Thoughts

21. Is there anything else you would like to share about the EU's role in Morocco?

22. Is there someone you know I could interview as well?

23. Thank you! May I follow up with you if I need clarification?