Votes for Effort:
Electoral Accountability under Autocracy[*]

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Abstract

How does the opposition in an electoral autocracy attract voters when it lacks regime connections ostensibly required to deliver private goods to its supporters? The regime possesses an extensive set of strategies to incentivize support for its preferred candidates, yet opposition parties still achieve significant electoral successes. I argue that institutional channels help to level the playing field between regime and opposition candidates in hybrid autocracies. Though regime candidates may have the ear of those in power through backdoor channels and personal connections, opposition politicians can use 'by the book' politics – the legitimate authorities that accompany their office – to supply the constituency goods voters expect. I construct a vast database of activity from recent legislative terms in Morocco, including more than 27000 unique queries submitted by elected members of parliament to government ministers, and find systematic evidence that voters reward parties and deputies that engage in more constituency service via institutionalized action. Yet the relationship between activity and vote share is exclusive to opposition parties: regime-linked parties do not see electoral gains from increased legislative activity, but neither are they punished for shirking in office.

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1 Introduction

How does the opposition attract voter support under autocracy? Briefly, I will argue that institutional authorities – created contemporaneously with elected institutions themselves – help to level the playing field between regime and opposition candidates. Though regime candidates may have the ear of those in power through backdoor channels (historical relationships, family connections, etc.), opposition politicians provide the goods voters expect using the authorities of their office.

Other scholars have argued that regime-affiliated candidates satisfy voter demands by exploiting their close personal connections to the government to supply patronage goods to supporters, but little work has been done to explain how opposition parties generate electoral support in the face of structural disadvantages. And yet, globally, opposition groups have achieved increasing electoral success (see Figure 1 for evidence that legislative dominance has declined over time). In Morocco, the case studied here, opposition parties have won pluralities in the national legislature since 1997. How have such parties moved beyond niche appeal?

Opposition parties seek changes to the policy status quo (Lust-Okar, 2005); this outsider status also limits their access to patronage provided by the regime. Yet in elections, opposition parties must compete with regime-affiliated parties[1] for voter support. In Morocco, as in other autocratic settings, voters primarily expect politicians to deliver constituency-focused services.[2] I argue that though they lack the personal access that gives regime-backed candidates influence over state goods, opposition groups can instead take advantage of institutional features that offer them some authority over government ministries and the bureaucracy.

Theories of cooptation hold that autocrats use minor political concessions to incentivize the cooperation of the opposition (Gandhi and Przeworski, 2006). As a result, though the

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[1]In Morocco, a constitutional monarchy, I refer to regime-affiliated parties as 'royalist' and those lacking such linkages as 'non-royalist' or opposition.

[2]Both royalist and opposition party members interviewed for this project consistently characterized constituency service as a priority for acquiring electoral support.

balance of power remains heavily weighted in favor of the executive, there are nevertheless a set of authorities that give legislative actors oversight over policy and its implementation. These institutional features are often constitutionally enshrined and therefore difficult for the regime to remove. I argue that these concessions to the legislature, however slight, give the opposition an opportunity to compete with regime-affiliated candidates for the same set of voters – those motivated by the promise of local goods – but through different means: while regime insiders trade on their connections for favors and local patronage, opposition deputies use the legitimate powers of office to deliver the same goods. Voters then evaluate incumbents based on the constituency outputs they received, regardless of the mechanism through which they were acquired.

In Morocco, as in many polities (Rozenberg and Martin, 2011), bureaucratic oversight occurs through querying of cabinet ministers, which allows elected representatives to formally request information or explanation directly from the executive branch. I draw on interviews with MPs and content analysis of the queries they submit to show that these legislative authorities facilitate constituency service in crucial ways.[3] They allow deputies to access details relevant to their districts, to pressure government agencies on local issues, and to convey this information to the constituents concerned. Notably, though deputies from both royalist and non-royalist parties agree that written questions are an important component of their activities and duties as elected politicians, I find evidence that this authority is used vastly more – nearly ten times as often – by the latter group, consistent with the claim that this 'by the book' action can substitute for other avenues of service provision such as patronage activity accessible only to those with personal connections to the regime.

I link electoral outcomes to this activity and find that party-level voteshare within a district is strongly linked to the legislative performance of its deputies. Voters reward parties and deputies that engage in more constituency service via institutionalized action – evidence

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[3]Interviews were conducted with 13 legislators – all active office-holders at the time of the interview. Interview protocols, including consent forms, were reviewed and approved by IRB at Author Institution. Appendix A7 describes this qualitative data collection in more detail.

of electoral accountability distinct from patronage. Yet the relationship between institution-alized constituency service and voteshare is exclusive to opposition parties. Royalist parties do not see electoral gains from increased legislative activity, but neither are they punished for failing to engage in this action. On the other hand, opposition parties experienced sub-stantively meaningful electoral gains in districts where their deputies were more active.

The results here add to a growing literature on what happens inside autocratic legisla-tures (Malesky and Schuler, 2010; Truex, 2020) and demonstrate that such entities can host meaningful political action. I find systematic evidence that elected deputies use legislative authorities to work for constituents. And far from being trivial exercises in regime syco-phancy, autocratic elections have consequences: better performance in office is associated with electoral support.

This also offers novel insight into the behavior of opposition actors under autocracy: they use institutional rules to compete in a space designed to favor regime candidates. This demonstrates that they are able to adapt to the political environment, taking advantage of the rigidity – even in such a setting – of constitutionally-enshrined authorities. Yet the dif-ferential response of voters to behavior by actors with closer ties to the regime implies that substantial politicking occurs off the books, consistent with the expectation that patronage-based voting remains a factor in this environment. Regime-linked parties apparently satisfy voter expectations without going through official channels, suggesting that institutional ac-tions and those that draw on personal connections can substitute. While voters may have the same ultimate expectations for both types of politicians, the ways in which regime-affiliated and opposition actors fulfill these expectations differ substantially.

The specific institutional authority examined here is present in around half of autocratic regimes today and, consistent with the argument advanced, is correlated with broader rep-resentation in the legislature (Appendix A1.1). Though the setting investigated here is that of a liberalized autocracy (Berman, Forthcoming), the theoretical and empirical implica-tions might apply across a range of competitive autocracies and developing democracies –

effectively, any environment in which one actor has a competitive advantage in attracting support through the use of patronage. Institutional authorities help to level the playing field for under-resourced candidates, allowing them to counter their opponents' deeper pockets and personal connections with above-board effort.

2 Vote Choice under Autocracy

What motivates voters in autocratic settings? Other scholars have addressed this question, largely in the context of explaining voter support for regime representatives (Magaloni, 2006; Greene, 2007). The general academic consensus is that vote choice in autocratic settings is primarily the result of competition over localized or private goods: voters are motivated to support those politicians that they expect are best able to deliver to their constituency (Gandhi and Lust-Okar, 2009). Elections are thus seen as a contest not over policy, but rather over patronage and how and to whom it is distributed (Lust, 2009).

This explanation of voter demands makes it clear why, in such a context, citizens are often motivated to support regime-backed candidates. Individuals with close connections to the regime have insider access (Magaloni, 2006; Lust-Okar, 2006) or personal wealth (Blaydes, 2010) that enables them to deliver desired goods directly to their supporters. Citizens anxious to avoid exclusion from state resources will therefore seek to ensure that their district is represented by politicians with the capacity to deliver. But if patronage is the normal mechanism of service delivery, opposition candidates lacking regime connections should be at a disadvantage.

A corresponding implication of the argument in favor of patronage-based voting is that the electorate is largely unconcerned with policy promises. That is to say, voter utility is based primarily on expected private or group-level redistribution, and individuals ascribe comparatively low weight to candidate ideology. This argument is particularly plausible in light of the challenges in delivering on policy-based campaign promises in autocratic contexts. Many such legislatures are seen as 'rubber stamp' institutions with little agency over

the policy that is produced (Malesky and Schuler, 2009; Blaydes, 2010; Truex, 2014). This is attributable in part to regime efforts to stack the electoral deck in favor of its preferred candidates and to fragment potential opposition (Pripstein Posusney, 2002). A divided legislature will struggle to implement major policy changes, even where it has the authority to do so: in the qualitative data collection for this project, several MPs noted that it is challenging to push their individual bill proposals through the legislative process.[4] In other words, practical voters should not expect policy-focused campaign promises to directly translate into new laws, even if the candidate in question wins office.

This does not imply that opposition parties lack ideological objectives; in fact, that is what distinguishes them from regime-affiliated politicians (Lust-Okar, 2005). Greene (2007) posits that opposition parties are created and supported by the subset of the population with strong policy convictions. But an overemphasis on policy limits such parties to occupying 'niche' segments of the political spectrum due to their narrow appeal. Per Greene, it is only when the regime loses its advantage that the opposition can compete, citing a 'leaner bureaucracy' that reduced the regime's ability to provide patronage benefits as the downfall of the Mexican PRI.

There may be more complexity to voter interests, but there is substantial evidence in support of the claim that they expect constituency-level goods (Benstead, 2008) and that regime-affiliated candidates seek to attract votes through the promise of patronage (Liddell, 2010). To compete within the broader electorate and avoid 'niche' status, then, the opposition must also be able to deliver local or even personal benefits. But the existing literature suggests few avenues for them to do so, given their status as regime outsiders.[5] And our understanding of opposition support is relatively limited: researchers have identified the demographic characteristics of those voters hardest for the regime to buy off (the middle class), but generally find that turnout is low for this bloc of the electorate (Magaloni, 2006; Malesky

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[4]Deputy Interviews, January 22 and February 5, 2018.

[5]One possibility is that they develop their own extra-governmental social organizations: Masoud (2014) finds that the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's success can be attributed to the social and fiscal networks they used to deliver material goods to voters.

and Schuler, 2009).

Yet opposition parties are represented in a large number of autocratic legislatures globally, and in some cases achieve substantial successes. In addition to the rare yet prominent events in which political outsiders upset a ruling party or win out in transitional periods (such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood or Mexican PAN), there is evidence that autocratic legislatures have become increasingly competitive in recent years. Figure 1 plots the ruling party's average legislative seatshare in autocratic regimes from 1975-2017.[6] As we might expect, the average regime controls the majority of the legislature – and yet its share has fallen over time, from nearly 90% of seats in the 1970s to less than 65% in 2017. This suggests that legislative representation has diversified to include more political outsiders. In Singapore, for example, the oppositional Worker's Party has grown from winning a single legislative seat in a 1981 by-election to a total of ten (11% of elected seats) in the most recent national elections. In Morocco, the case examined here, successive opposition parties have won a plurality (though never close to a majority) of seats in every legislative election since 1997, surpassing parties with royalist linkages. How have they achieved such success despite their comparative disadvantage in regime connections? In the next section, I develop an explanation that draws on the relevance of institutions for satisfying voter demands.

3 Institutional Authorities and Opposition Vote Mobilization

Elected legislatures in autocratic settings often appear to be rubber stamp bodies that simply enact the regime's preferred policies and lack real authority relative to the executive. And yet, there is reason to believe that they are not entirely trivial. Competition for legislative seats is often fierce, suggesting that there are, at the least, personal returns to office and perhaps more at stake (Lust-Okar, 2006; Blaydes, 2010; Reuter and Robertson, 2015). And, importantly, such bodies are typically granted a set of constitutional authorities, including the ability to query or interpellate government ministers, propose legislation, and control

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[6]This descriptive exploration is a conservative measure that includes only ruling party regimes where the executive shares a partisan identity with legislative participants. In Appendix A1, I further examine this metric and find consistent trends across different regime types.
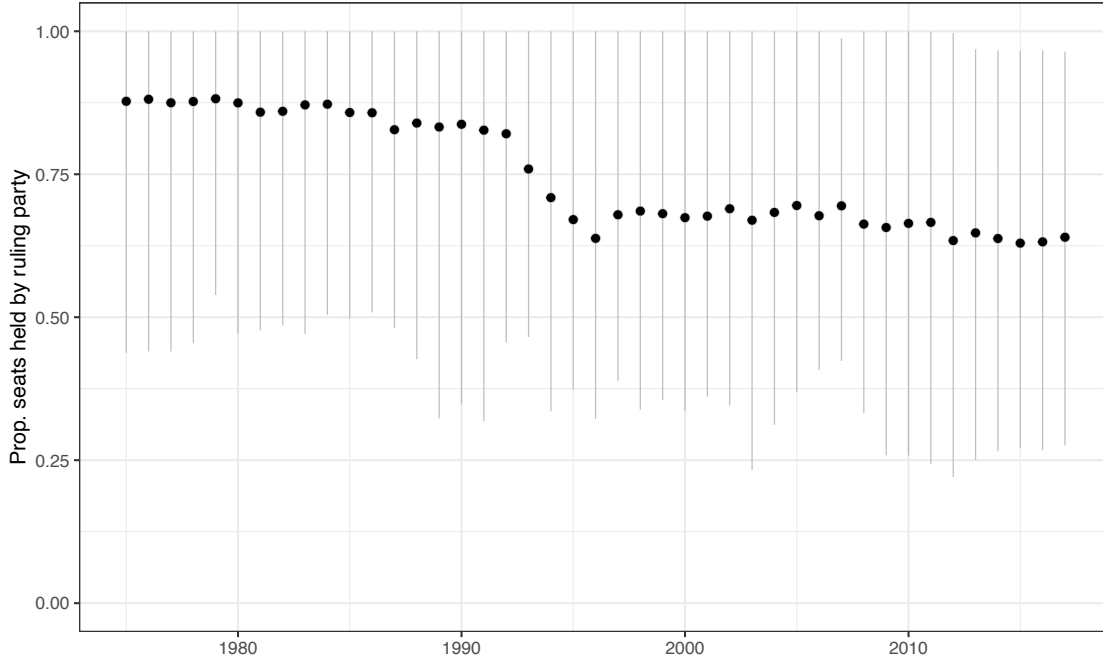
Figure 1: Ruling Party Legislative Seatshare, 1975-2017. Plots average legislative seatshare as well as 95% quantiles for executive's party in ruling party autocratic regimes annually. Data from the Database of Political Institutions and Varieties of Democracy project.

their own finances.[7] Though their authority relative to the executive is limited compared to their counterparts in democratic polities, members of the legislature nevertheless have certain privileges within the governing apparatus.

Once having granted such privileges through constitutional commitment, it is difficult for autocrats to remove them entirely.[8] Indeed, the extensive literature on why such bodies exist stresses the importance of institutions in tying the hands of the autocrat in order to induce cooperation from other members of the political elite (Gandhi and Przeworski, 2006). Institutions serve as the credible commitment required for such a bargain (Boix and Svolik, 2013) and should therefore be costly to alter.

So what is the role of legislative authority in governance, and should we expect this to matter for electoral competition? The aforementioned literature on rubber stamp parlia-

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[7]See Appendix A1.1 for more discussion of the prevalence of these authorities.

[8]Constitutional amendment is challenging, even in such unbalanced regimes. Autocrats may instead try to manipulate other rules of the game, such as through modifying voting systems or gerrymandering electoral districts (Pripstein Posusney, 2002).

ments argues that legislatures play an extremely minor role in establishing policy; though they ostensibly vote on laws, most bills are drafted by executive ministries and transmitted to parliament simply for ratification (Blaydes, 2010). Similarly, in most cases the implementation of policy is also controlled by the executive via the bureaucracy (Jensen, Malesky and Weymouth, 2014).

The constitutionally-established legislative authorities include provisions for interaction with and oversight of this bureaucracy. Even limited institutionalization can produce some horizontal accountability within government structures (Diamond, 1999). Elected office comes with perks: this helps to explain the competitiveness of these elections (Magaloni, Diaz-Cayeros and Estévez, 2007). The enhanced status acquired with office can then be used to expropriate state resources for legislators themselves (Truex, 2014), but it might also be used to force bureaucrats to do their jobs – in other words, to oversee policy implementation. This is a related argument to that put forth by Lust (2009), in which she argues that elected politicians in Jordan use their office to direct goods to supporters. But instead of doing so through exploitation of their position (that is, by using their influence in a corrupt or illegitimate manner), I suggest that they may achieve similar effects through regularized, 'by the book' activities. Legislators may not be able to immediately and directly translate electoral wins into policy advancements that favor their constituents, but they *can* influence the implementation of existing policy to ensure that their district is not overlooked by the regime. In that sense, then, this type of action blurs the line between non-programmatic and programmatic politics: the reality in these settings is that implementation of policy can occur selectively but through institutionalized channels.

The argument is thus as follows: in order to buy cooperation, the autocrat must make political concessions in the form of institutional authorities granted to the elected legislature, including oversight of the executive-controlled bureaucracy. These institutions create opportunities, especially for members of the political opposition: while regime insiders may trade on their personal connections in order to convince voters to support them, opposition

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legislators use the power of their office in legitimate ways to serve their constituents. Voters then evaluate incumbent parties on the basis of the constituency service they received during the preceding term, though that service is provided through differing mechanisms (cronyism or by the book politics) depending on each party's proximity to the regime.

3.1 Electoral competition in Morocco

How do opposition actors use these legislative authorities in practice? I explore legislative activity and electoral accountability in the context of the Moroccan parliament, an institution created in the years following independence from France. Note that in this paper, I use 'opposition' in the autocratic rather than parliamentary sense, to refer to political outsiders lacking regime connections and advocating for policies that deviate from the status quo; I use 'government' and 'non-government' where necessary to indicate whether or not a party is a participant in the governing coalition.

Moroccan parliamentary elections are held every five years, and a majority of seats (305 out of 395) are filled via closed list proportional representation within districts of between two and six seats. The remaining 90 seats are filled via national lists reserved for female and youth candidates.[9] Electoral competition is party-based and highly competitive; in many cases, a voteshare in the single digits is sufficient to earn a seat.[10] The campaign period is limited to a brief two-week period preceding elections, meaning parties have little opportunity to communicate a prospective policy platform to citizens. Incumbent parties must therefore rely on voter evaluations of their performance in office and try to maximize turnout among supporters (Fearon, 1999; Gans-Morse, Mazzuca and Nichter, 2014). Though in the years post-independence, elections were occasionally marred by allegations of fraudulent behavior, the past few decades have seen voting conducted in a generally free and fair manner. Independent election observers assessed the 2011 parliamentary elections positively, describ-

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[9]National list candidates are selected by party leadership and are typically first-time deputies; seats are allocated proportionally based on a party's national voteshare.

[10]In the 2016 national legislative elections, there were an average of fifteen lists competing per district. 27 MPs (9%) won seats with less than 10% of the district vote, and 142 (47%) won with less than 20%.

ing them as "procedurally sound and transparent" and generally free from concerns about "tampering or systematic procedural violations" (National Democratic Institute, 2011).[11]

Morocco is a monarchy, and no party represents the palace in an official capacity in electoral competition. Instead, within the crowded political scene today[12] are a set of parties with close ties to the monarchy.[13] These parties, termed 'royalist' or pro-regime (Willis, 2002a), are characterized both by these palace linkages as well as a general lack of ideological orientation for other than the policy status quo (Lust-Okar, 2005).

A set of opposition (or 'non-royalist') parties also regularly competes in elections. Unlike royalist groups, opposition parties typically have a more cohesive ideological stance and advocate for specific changes to the status quo.[14] The Moroccan opposition is quite fragmented, comprising a variety of secular and Islamist parties that typically compete independently in elections (Willis, 2002b; Szmolka, 2010).[15] They are also distinguished by what they apparently lack: proximity to existing power structures and a resulting ability to deliver non-programmatic patronage benefits to their supporters.

Patronage plays a large role in Moroccan electoral politics, evidenced both by surveys and qualitative research (Lust, 2009; de Miguel, Jamal and Tessler, 2015). Because such strategies are highly personalistic and depend on regime ties, it follows logically that royalist parties have an advantage in this form of voter linkage (Liddell, 2010). As Sater (2012) puts it, "Connections to the king thus remain the single most important political asset in

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[11]These elections took place in the wake of the Arab Spring. Like other countries within the region, Morocco saw a wave of public protest early in the year; though the size and impact was more limited than in other settings, these did lead to constitutional revisions (though not to the institutional authorities examined in this paper).

[12]There are more than 30 registered political parties. 27 participated in the 2016 national elections, though only 12 won seats in parliament.

[13]These ties often manifest through leaders' membership in the historical class of notables (*makhzen*) first established during the French protectorate and further cultivated by the palace during the early stages of independence (Waterbury, 1970), or through party leaders' personal links to the royal family. For example, the Party of Authenticity and Modernity was created in 2008 by a close friend of King Mohammed VI.

[14]For example, the Party of Justice and Development advocated for judicial independence and controlling government corruption during the 2011-2016 term (Fakir, 2018).

[15]Opposition parties very occasionally join forces in electoral contests (or agree to compete in separate districts), but these coalitions are generally short-lived (Buehler, 2018) and have failed to translate to collective behavior within parliament.

Morocco." Though it is difficult to find direct, systematic evidence of patronage given the sensitivity of the subject, the expectation that royalist parties engage in more clientelistic behavior is borne out by Moroccan scholarship (Pellicer and Wegner, 2013) as well as cross-national efforts at coding party behavior.[16]

Yet, though a patrimonial political system should favor parties proximate to the regime, opposition parties in Morocco have proven competitive. In the last five parliamentary elections, an opposition party won a plurality of total voteshare, and the 2011 national elections resulted in a roughly 40-60 split in voteshare between royalist and non-royalist parties. There is also evidence that both party types compete for the same set of voters: in the 2011 elections, the median and modal outcome across the 92 parliamentary districts was a 50-50 split of seats between royalist and non-royalist parties. Only 14% of districts elected exclusively royalist or non-royalist deputies.[17] At the voter level, there are few demographic differences between royalist and opposition supporters (Appendix A2.1).[18]

For the purposes of this study, I restrict attention to the eight largest parties, which together won 96% of parliamentary seats in the 2011 legislative elections. Parties are categorized as 'royalist' or 'opposition' on the basis of origin, leadership, and ideological orientation; notes on this classification and on each party are included in Appendix A2. Royalist parties include the Party of Authenticity and Modernity (PAM), the National Rally of Independents (RNI), the Constitutional Union (UC), and the Popular Movement (MP).[19] The opposition includes leftists (the Socialist Union of Popular Forces, or USFP, and the Party of Progress and Socialism, or PPS), centrists (the Istiqlal party), and Islamists (the Party of Justice and

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[16]Though Kitschelt (2014) only includes data for five of the eight parties considered here, the two royalist parties (Popular Movement and RNI) were higher than the three nonroyalist parties (Istiqlal, USFP, and PJD) in use of vote-buying and preferential regulatory treatment to attract support. Istiqlal was, however, rated as using other clientelist practices, reflecting the perception that it has moved closer to the monarchy over time. See Appendix A5.2 for more discussion of this concern.

[17]These patterns also held for the 2015 municipal elections.

[18]Royalist supporters are, on average, poorer, consistent with evidence that clientelistic linkages are most effective among this demographic.

[19]Notably, like opposition parties, royalist parties do not operate as a bloc in parliament; though all have connections to the regime, the personalist nature of such connections do not necessarily generate common ground.

Development, or PJD).

4 Institutional Avenues for Constituency Service

Existing literature and empirical explorations in similar contexts have demonstrated that voters seek representatives who can deliver localized benefits. In Morocco, this constituency service may comprise a variety of activities addressing district-level needs, including development of local infrastructure, local service provision, job creation, or even directly assisting individual citizens in their interactions with the state (Benstead, 2008). The implication is that voters are less concerned with national-level policy reforms but rather ensuring that service agencies are adequately addressing the needs of the district.[20] And deputies are keenly aware of this: among more than a dozen currently active deputies interviewed, every single one stated that 'interaction with constituents' was the most important part of their job.[21]

While connected individuals may provide these benefits through under the table dealings, the Moroccan constitution also establishes an institutionalized way for legislators to hold government agencies accountable. Among other forms of executive oversight, MPs have the authority to query government ministries both orally, in regular televised sessions, and in written form. Query authority is common to both democratic and autocratic settings Martin (2011); per Varieties of Democracy data, in 2015, this authority was present in 46% of autocratic regimes.[22] Legislative questions constitute a meaningful mechanism of horizontal accountability between branches of government in mature and developing democracies (Herron and Boyko, 2015). In autocracies, oral queries have been shown to offer an avenue for public criticism of the regime (Malesky and Schuler, 2010). Written queries – less public and with the potential for a high level of detail – are used instead as a mechanism of constituency service (Rozenberg and Martin, 2011). Though the questions do not themselves create policy, legislators see them as a necessary, and usually successful, interface with

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[20]This is borne out by existing survey data. In the Round 6 Afrobarometer (carried out in Morocco in 2015), 79% of respondents listed a public service issue as one of the top three most important problems in the country.

[21]Deputy interviews, January-February 2018.

[22]I examine the prevalence of this and other legislative authorities in Appendix A1.1.

government ministries, allowing them to gather information, extract public promises, and pressure ministers into action.[23] In that sense, then, they offer elected representatives a lever for influencing policy *implementation.*

4.1 Addressing constituency issues with written questions

Moroccan MPs use written queries primarily to address "local rather than national" issues,[24] consistent with how the authority is used in other polities (Rozenberg and Martin, 2011). This usage is facilitated by the format, which allows deputies to ask complex questions and obtain "detailed answers," making these questions a critical information-gathering tool.[25] MPs also use them to pressure the bureaucracy to fix local service issues, often highlighting lapses at the municipal level such as road condition or problems with health facilities. In contrast to oral queries, they can be submitted to ministries at any time, and there is no cap on the number of queries submitted – some deputies produce thousands of questions in a single term. As such, they provide an opportunity for MPs to channel constituency concerns directly to ministries: in a scenario analogous to traditional conceptions of *wasta* (mediation through cronyism) elsewhere in the Arab world (Lust-Okar, 2006), Moroccan deputies serve as intermediaries between citizens and the government. By using written queries, however, they act via a formalized institutional mechanism rather than their personal connections.

Queries submitted are constitutionally entitled to a formal, written response from the ministry concerned; the tangible nature ("a material documentation of the MP's work"[26]) offers utility from both an enforcement and credit-claiming perspective (Fenno, 1978). A written commitment to fix a problem is a record to which MPs can hold ministers accountable if the ministry fails to take the promised action; an unsatisfactory response allows them to blame the bureaucracy for service failures. MPs can share the response received directly with the citizens in their district. One deputy explained the role these play in supporting a sense

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[23]Deputy interview, January 23, 2018.
[24]Deputy interview, January 30, 2018.
[25]Deputy interview, February 5, 2018.
[26]Deputy interview, February 12, 2018.

of government accountability among the electorate: "[written queries] allow the deputy to answer her constituents with a written answer from the ministry concerned."[27] Results can be shared with constituents via district fieldwork or, for the more tech-savvy, social media: one PJD deputy posts queries and responses on his Facebook page, where they routinely spark engagement with his 18,000 followers (see Figure 4).

In practice, deputies describe written queries as one of the most effective tools available for constituency service, used for gathering necessary data to inform their own fieldwork or pressuring the bureaucracy to shore up areas of poor performance locally.[28] And as a constitutionally-specified authority, it is not easy for the regime to remove this ability, meaning that opposition parties that earn seats in parliament have an established institutional vehicle through which to address district-level concerns. The regime might seek to reduce the utility of this mechanism through obstruction: a lack of constitutionalized enforcement mechanism means that ministries may respond slowly or not at all.[29] And yet, even where ministries are unresponsive, savvy deputies find ways to strategically deploy this authority, either by following up with additional queries[30] or publicizing the nonresponse to place pressure on the regime.[31] Though queries are not a perfect tool, deputies generally find them to be a useful one: as one MP put it, they are "a successful method for solving local problems."[32]

Ultimately, then, written questions provide deputies with an institutional channel through which to serve constituent interests. This is not the only tool at their disposal for serving constituents; in interviews, deputies characterized their work as encompassing a range of ac-

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[27]Deputy interview, February 13, 2018.

[28]All MPs interviewed for this project – from both royalist and nonroyalist parties – characterized written queries as 'important' or 'very important' on a Likert scale.

[29]67% of queries submitted from 2011-2016 received a recorded response. Some deputies complained about delays in getting an answer (Deputy interview, January 30, 2018).

[30]For example, one PJD deputy awaiting a response to a query from the Ministry of Higher Education resubmitted that same query five months later; the initial query was subsequently answered.

[31]Near the end of the 2011-2016 legislative term, USFP publicized the fact that it had asked more than 4000 questions that went unanswered. Reda Zaireg, "Plus de 8.500 questions de parlementaires au gouvernement restés sans réponse," *Huffington Post*, July 12, 2016 (`https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2016/07/12/questions-maroc-parlement_n_10943522.html`, accessed May 10, 2018).

[32]Deputy interview, January 23, 2018.

tivities including legislative duties (committee service), executive oversight, and constituent engagement through fieldwork in the district. Yet written queries in particular offer an effective way to corral the government apparatus into better local performance – and one for which systematic measures of activity are available.[33] Perhaps the best evidence of written questions' utility is the frequency with which deputies employ them: on average, deputies submitted more than 5000 unique written queries in total each year during the 2011-2016 term.

4.2   Questions submitted during the 2011-2016 legislative term

In this section, I use data on all written questions submitted during the 2011-2016 parliamentary term to examine the practical use of this activity in Morocco.[34] The data were gathered via a database hosted on the official parliamentary website and include information on the type and content of questions asked, as well as to which ministry they were directed and whether or not they received a response.[35] The qualitative evidence from politician interviews makes it clear that written questions are a useful tool for constituency service. I validate this characterization by examining queries submitted.

Over the course of the 2011-2016 parliamentary term, MPs submitted 27,196 unique written queries to ministries.[36] There is little evidence that the questions asked follow expectations related to the electoral cycle (Nordhaus, 1975): while this would lead us to expect an uptick in political activity in the last years of the parliamentary term, the number of writ-

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[33]They have the added benefit of being less likely to constitute 'political theatre' than oral queries (Rozenberg and Martin, 2011): though they are recorded in a database on the parliamentary website, written questions represent a lower profile activity given that they are not broadcast on the parliamentary floor. They offer comparatively little utility from a performative standpoint, and deputies who submit them are thus more likely to do so as honest effort in office rather than in an attempt to impress party leadership.

[34]The analysis is limited to a single term due to issues of data availability; in prior terms, information on queries was only published in aggregate statistics.

[35]Though this relies on self-reporting from an autocratic government, there is reason to expect that the record of queries is complete. Data obtained match summary statistics reported elsewhere by the government. Parliament itself hosts the website, and there is little incentive for deputies to undercount their own legislative activity.

[36]In some cases, multiple deputies from the same party endorse a query. Most questions (95%) were submitted by solo deputies.
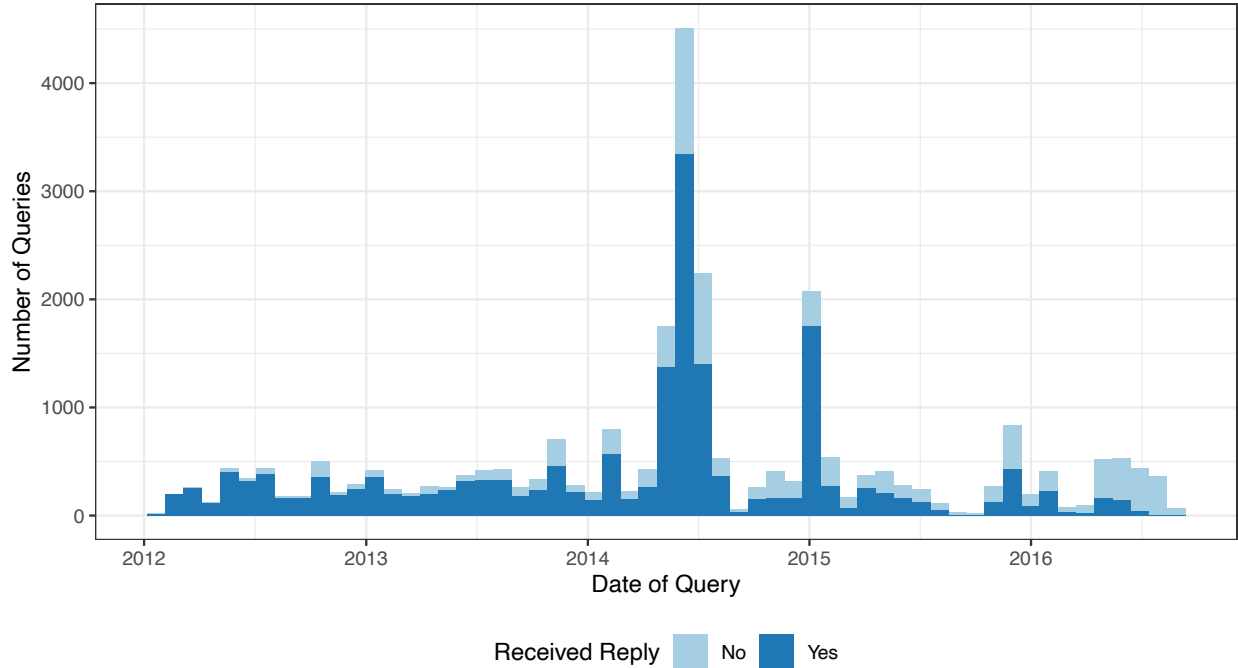
Figure 2: Number of Questions Submitted by Date. Figure depicts written queries submitted during the 2011-2016 parliamentary term by date and whether or not they received a recorded response.

ten questions in 2016 is far off the peak in 2014 (Figure 2).[37] It is also noteworthy that the response rate dropped off steadily over the course of the term, so last minute queries were especially unlikely to receive a response.[38]

Consistent with deputy characterizations, written questions are often used to address constituency problems. Table A4 in the Appendix characterizes the distribution of queries across cabinet portfolios and provides examples; service ministries received the bulk of queries, often addressing specific issues of service provision within a locality (e.g. "Connecting the residents of Imzelane neighborhood in Tinghir municipality to the drinking water network"). To bolster the qualitative evidence, I undertake content analysis of the full dataset, coding references to administrative units in Morocco as well as placenames; descriptive statistics are

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[37]Time trends in query submission varied somewhat by party (see Appendix A3). The observable mid-term peak in submissions is largely driven by a sharp uptick in questions from the opposition party USFP, which submitted few queries in the first two years of the term but dramatically increased submission in 2014 and subsequent years, likely in an effort to place more pressure on cabinet ministers.

[38]88% of questions submitted in 2011 were answered; in 2016 (the election year), only 26% of questions received a response.

shown in Figure 3.[39] The majority of written questions (77%) include a georeference of some kind. Most such references are to provinces (60% of all questions) or communes (23%), both units at the district or subdistrict level.[40] More rarely, written questions address regional or national considerations. Roughly 3% of written questions specifically reference an individual issue (e.g. "Pension adjustment for Mrs. X" or "Suspension of monthly salary for Mr. Y").[41] A small fraction of queries (1%) included complaint words.[42]

For the most part, questions reference locations within a politician's purview: among written questions with georeferences, 59% were local to a politician's district.[43] That deputies sometimes use queries to address issues in other constituencies may reflect their national-level stature. When asked about her constituency, one female MP said that while she felt closest to her direct constituents, she simultaneously "felt a responsibility" to represent women in general; other interviewees expressed similar sentiments.[44]

4.3   Deputy Activity

There are no restrictions on the submission of written questions, and thus this action is equally accessible to all MPs. Yet the exercise of this authority varies hugely among individuals. During the 2011-2016 term, some deputies submitted thousands of queries over the course of the term, while approximately 15% submitted none. Clarifying the nature of this disparity and identifying which politicians submit more questions sheds light on the purpose and political utility of written questions.

I combine data on query submission with MP characteristics, obtained via the parliamen-

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[39]Questions were coded using the quanteda text analysis package in R. To identify georeferences, I constructed a dictionary of all administrative place names in Morocco, including alternate spellings. I then coded questions that contained one or more placenames as including a georeference. Casework – explicitly addressing the concerns of individual constituents – was coded using a dictionary of common honorifics.

[40]Most legislative districts comprise a single province; in more densely populated urban areas, a province may be subdivided into more than one constituency. Communes are roughly equivalent to municipalities.

[41]This measure should be seen as a floor on the extent to which queries serve as casework; not all casework queries will explicitly reference the citizen concerned.

[42]Coded as including various syntactical forms of 'complaint' or 'problem.'

[43]For this particular statistic, I exclude questions asked by deputies elected as part of a national list, as they lack an official sub-national constituency.

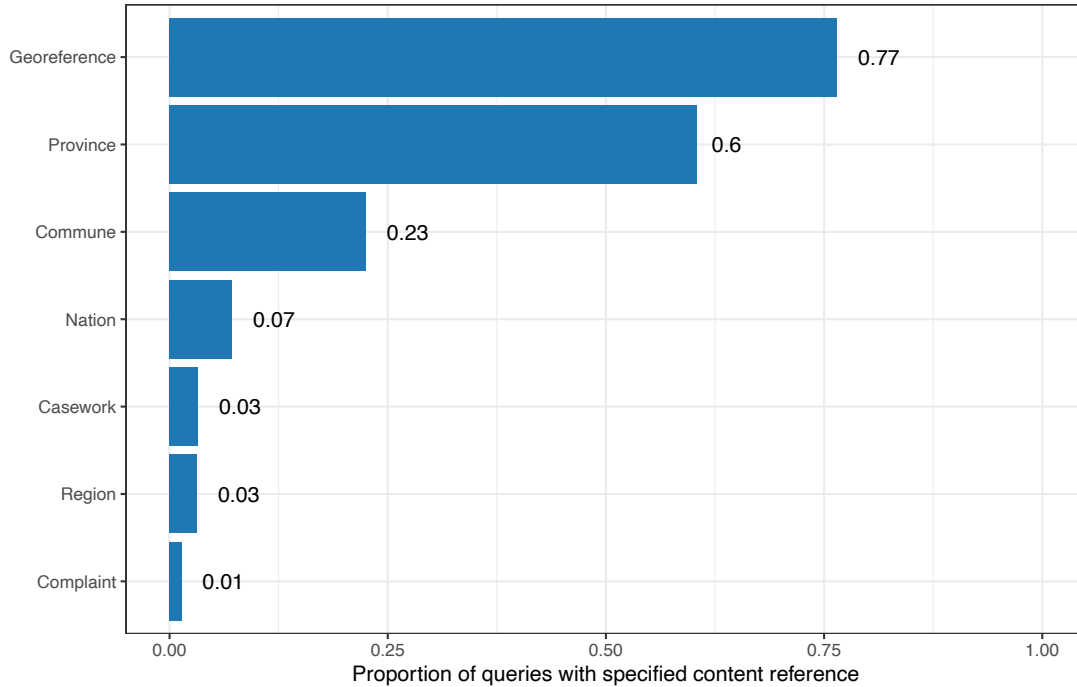[44]Deputy interviews, January 23, February 5, and February 12, 2018.

Figure 3: Query Content. Plot shows the proportion of written questions with references to the specified category.

tary website, to examine patterns in deputy-level activity. MP data include binary identifiers for whether or not a deputy was a committee leader, elected as part of the youth or women's national list, or a member of the preceding parliament elected in 2007. I also categorize deputies based on whether they belong to a royalist or opposition party and whether or not their party formed a part of the governing coalition from 2013-2016.[45] Finally, I include an indicator for civic engagement, which I measure based on whether or not a deputy chose to activate a profile on a web-based platform run by a local NGO to facilitate communication between politicians and their constituents.[46] Summary statistics are shown in Appendix Table A6.

I analyze the number of queries submitted as a function of politician characteristics. Because the dependent variable is overdispersed, I use OLS regression on a log transformation

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[45]This coalition, formed after Istiqlal left the previous governing coalition, included deputies from two opposition parties (PJD and PPS) and two royalist parties (RNI and MP).

[46]The website allows Moroccan citizens to submit questions directly to their elected representatives and allows deputies to write a public response. The currently active deputies and questions submitted may be viewed at `http://nouabook.ma/ar/`.

	Dependent variable:		
	Log Written Questions		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Royalist	−2.131**	−2.123**	−2.134**
	(0.777)	(0.765)	(0.755)
Governing Coalition			1.117
Committee Leader		0.853**	0.896**
		(0.324)	(0.337)
National List		−0.357	
		(0.190)	
Female			−0.326**
			(0.114)
Youth			−0.529
			(0.303)
2007 Parliament		−0.601*	−0.479**
		(0.235)	(0.163)
Civic Engagement		0.730**	0.777***
		(0.263)	(0.233)
Observations	413	413	412
R^2	0.293	0.335	0.419

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table 1: Predictors of Question Submission in the 2011 Parliament. Models report coefficients from OLS regression of the log number of written questions submitted on politician characteristics. The unit of analysis is the deputy. Standard errors are clustered at the party level and calculated by block bootstrap.

of this variable.[47] As a result, coefficients should be interpreted in terms of log-units of the outcome variable. Because key variables are assigned at the party level, I cluster standard errors using block bootstrapping. I first regress the number of questions on the royalist indicator alone, then estimate models including controls for other politician characteristics. Model output is shown in Table 1.

Most striking is the fact that royalist deputies submit far fewer questions on average – more than two log units, or roughly an order of magnitude fewer – than politicians from non-royalist parties. The coefficient on the royalist indicator changes very little with the inclusion of controls and is significant to the 0.01 level with errors are clustered at the party level, providing strong evidence that opposition parties make substantially greater use of this authority.[48] This is consistent with the argument that this institutional activity might substitute for other means of providing constituency service: if deputies from royalist parties already have alternative avenues through which to satisfy voter demands, they do not need to avail themselves of this legislative privilege in order to be effective. Politicians from parties without connections to the regime and the related patronage networks, however, find this to be an activity worth investing in.

The predictors for question submission provide additional suggestive evidence that written questions are used to address constituency concerns. Individuals from the national list – deputies without obvious constituencies – submit fewer questions (significant at the 0.1 level), while those deputies who engage with constituents via the NGO website submit significantly more questions on average. Other predictors include parliamentary leadership, which is associated with more questions, and incumbency, which associated with fewer.

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[47]To account for the politicians who asked no questions, I use $ln(y+1)$, where y is the number of written questions submitted by a given politician. Though there are limitations to the use of OLS with count data (O'Hara and Kotze, 2010), this modeling approach reduces the probability of Type I errors (Ives, 2015). For robustness, I include a negative binomial specification in Appendix Table A10; results are very similar to results in Table 1.

[48]This holds true across opposition parties; see Appendix A3 for more descriptive analysis.

5 Effort and Electoral Accountability

The preceding sections present evidence that elected politicians make ample use of consti-
tutionally granted authorities to address local, district-level issues, and that this is most
utilized by opposition MPs. But do voters reward these efforts? If the theoretical predic-
tions outlined in Section 3 are correct, institutional avenues for serving constituents can
substitute for patronage provided through personal links to the regime. I therefore expect
institutionalized constituency service to translate into electoral support: all else equal, vot-
ers in a district with a hard-working and responsive incumbent should prefer to reelect that
candidate or their party.

There are some contextual features that may disrupt this relationship: while in many
electoral settings, voters can directly reward incumbents that performed at or above expec-
tations and vote out shirkers, closed-list PR gives parties significant control over incumbency.
In Morocco, parties determine the content and order of candidate lists. Voters then cast bal-
lots in support of lists rather than individual candidates and may be unable to reelect a
hard-working deputy if the party declines to renominate that individual.[49] The overall in-
cumbency rate for the 2011 parliament was quite low – around 30% – though this can largely
be ascribed to low rates of renomination by parties, particularly for deputies elected as part
of the national lists.[50]

Because this feature may impede voters' ability to retrospectively evaluate individual
politicians, I examine electoral accountability at the party level, analyzing party-district
electoral results within a district as a function of the performance of the party's deputies

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[49]In Section 2, I argue that constituency service is the most important consideration for voters deciding
how to cast a ballot. Parties, on the other hand, must balance a variety of strategic considerations in
determining which candidates to nominate. In addition to electability (the candidate most likely to appeal
to voters), these may include candidate ideology and ability to finance their own campaign. In Appendix
A6, I examine predictors of party re-nomination.

[50]Though national level data on candidate lists is not published by the Moroccan Ministry of the Interior,
in the run-up to the 2016 elections, I gathered information on candidate lists for seven of the largest parties
and matched them to the 2011-2016 parliament. Only 40% of deputies from the 2011 parliament were
renominated by their party as head of a list in the 2016 elections; for national list deputies, the renomination
rate was only 10%.

from that district during the 2011-2016 term. I combine data on legislative activity with electoral outcomes from the 2016 elections, obtained via the official elections website.[51] This approach relies on the assumption that the electoral benefits of deputy performance are not exclusive to the individual and can also accrue to the party they represent. However, it allows for identification of effects across the entire population of incumbents, given that parties in 2016 ran lists in nearly all districts where they held seats.[52]

Does having higher-performing deputies improve electoral prospects at the party level? To assess activity at the party level, I generate a continuous variable for the number of questions submitted, pooling queries submitted by all representatives of the same party within the given district. This is again log transformed to account for the high level of dispersion. I then regress 2016 electoral outcomes on written questions submitted at the party-district level (Table 2). In models 1 and 2, the dependent variable is party-level voteshare; for models 3 and 4 it is the number of votes a party received. In each specification, I include controls for the party's number of MPs as well as its performance in the preceding elections (district-level voteshare or raw number of votes).[53] To distinguish between constituency-focused effort and other political activity, I include a log transformed metric of the number of oral queries submitted by party deputies.[54] Finally, I include region FEs and district-level controls to account for other factors that may predict incumbency success.[55] I also estimate models with district FEs to account for unobserved district attributes that might affect outcomes.

The results are strongly supportive of the idea that voters reward constituency service:

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[51]Electoral returns from the 2016 legislative and 2015 municipal elections, aggregated to the constituency level, are available at `http://www.elections.ma/`.

[52]As a robustness check, I look at outcomes at the deputy level (incumbency rates conditional on party nomination) in Appendix A6. Results are consistent in sign and significance with findings from the party-district analysis.

[53]Data obtained from Tafra, an NGO focused on civic information and elections, downloaded from http://tafra.ma/data2002-2016/ on April 1, 2017.

[54]Per deputy interviews and content analysis, these are used almost exclusively to address national issues and larger policy priorities.

[55]These include population, urbanness, ethnic diversity (measured as the proportion of Amazigh speakers), internet penetration, and rates of both unemployment and illiteracy. Controls are estimated using 2014 census data published by the Moroccan census bureau and aggregated to the legislative district level. See Appendix Table A7 for summary statistics.

	Dependent variable:			
	Party Voteshare 2016		Party Votes 2016	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Log Written	0.011***	0.010**	568.701**	697.551**
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(205.181)	(250.888)
Log Oral	−0.009*	−0.006	−409.999	−426.620
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(272.831)	(342.405)
No. District Seats Held	0.021	−0.005	−20.849	−714.067
	(0.017)	(0.021)	(1,172.471)	(1,598.347)
2011 Voteshare	0.907***	1.006***		
	(0.068)	(0.086)		
2011 Votes			1.166***	1.174***
			(0.081)	(0.107)
Mean DV	0.19	0.19	12518	12518
Region FEs	✓		✓	
Dem. Controls	✓		✓	
District FEs		✓		✓
Observations	263	263	263	263
R^2	0.678	0.762	0.705	0.760

Note:	*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table 2: Legislative Activity and Electoral Success. Coefficients represent estimates of OLS regression of party-level voteshare (models 1 and 2), and party-level number of votes (models 3 and 4) on legislative activity by party deputies within a district. The unit of observation is the party-district. Models alternately include region FEs and district-level controls or district FEs.

the use of written questions by a party's deputies has a positive and significant association with both voteshare and number of votes received in a district. A log-unit increase in the number of written questions asked is associated with about one percentage point increase in the party's expected voteshare – a substantively important difference in a setting in which a voteshare in the single digits is often sufficient to earn a seat. A standard deviation increase in queries submitted (in this case, two log units) brings a 2.2 percentage point increase in expected voteshare. To contextualize this effect, in the 2016 elections, the winner of the last seat in a quarter of districts was determined by less than one percentage point; in 47% of districts, the margin was smaller than the 2.2 percentage points associated with a standard increase in query submission.[56] Written queries also predict an increase in the number of votes received, and findings are robust to the inclusion of district FEs.

This trend of electoral accountability does not, however, extend to any type of legislative activity: oral queries are associated with lower voteshare and fewer votes. This suggests that voters do not reward parties for taking on broader, nationally-focused policy issues; they may perceive such activity as taking time and attention away from constituency-level issues. As one deputy put it, the Moroccan electorate does not appreciate the difference in responsibilities between municipal and national government, and citizens "prefer local availability" from their parliamentary representation.[57] Such an explanation is consistent with findings from developing contexts that voters may perceive national and local legislative activities to be substitutes (Adida et al., 2020). Importantly, the results demonstrate that it is not simply legislative effort, but specifically constituency-focused effort, that is rewarded by the electorate.

5.1 Opposition-specific electoral benefits

In Section 3, I argue that both opposition and regime-affiliated parties seek to deliver similar services in order to attract electoral support, but while regime parties can exploit their con-

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[56]I estimate this margin by comparing the voteshare of the strongest loser to the weakest winner in each district.

[57]Deputy interview, October 17, 2016.

	Dependent variable:					
	Change in Voteshare 2011-2016			Change in Votes 2011-2016		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Log Written	−0.007	0.016***	0.015***	−228.890	1,235.381***	1,184.951***
	(0.008)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(525.447)	(226.260)	(238.478)
Royalist			0.058**			4,401.081**
			(0.020)			(1,370.933)
Log Writ*Royalist			−0.017*			−1,023.717*
			(0.007)			(515.534)
Sample	Royalist	Opposition	All	Royalist	Opposition	All
Region FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dem. Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	115	148	263	115	148	263
R^2	0.216	0.341	0.172	0.218	0.331	0.186

Note: $^*p<0.05$; $^{**}p<0.01$; $^{***}p<0.001$

Table 3: Electoral Success by Party Type. Coefficients represent estimates from OLS regression on the change in party voteshare (models 1-3) and the change in party votes (models 4-6) within a district. The unit of observation is the party-district. Models 1 and 4 reflect estimates for royalist parties only, while models 2 and 5 reflect estimates for opposition parties. All models include region FEs and district-level controls.

nections to deliver patronage and satisfy voter demands, opposition actors must work through institutional mechanisms. Consistent with this line of reasoning, Section 4.3 demonstrated that legislative authorities are used with differing frequency by the two types of politician. I therefore explore differences in how voters respond to this behavior for royalist and non-royalist parties, estimating effects separately for royalist and opposition parties as well as an interaction model with the royalist indicator on the full sample (Table 3).[58] In all models, I include region FEs and the same set of district controls as before.

For regime-affiliated parties (models 1 and 4), constituency service via written questions does not predict improved electoral prospects in 2016: the coefficients on activity are small and insignificant for both changes in voteshare and number of votes. In contrast, there is a strong, positive association between legislative activity and votes for opposition parties (models 2 and 5). A log-unit increase in the number of written questions submitted is linked

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[58]To aid interpretation and avoid a three-way interaction model, I use the change in voteshare (or votes) between 2011 and 2016 as the dependent variable in these specifications.

to a 1.6 percentage point increase in voteshare and more than 1000 additional votes for the relevant party. The results of institutional activity are very different for the two types of parties, as confirmed by the negative and significant interaction terms in models 3 and 6.

The results in support the assertion that opposition parties' use of institutional authorities is important in generating electoral support. For the opposition, taking advantage of written queries' role in service provision translates into increased electoral success. Failing to do so is associated with electoral losses: in districts where their deputies submitted no written questions, opposition parties did worse in 2016 relative to 2011.

But how should we interpret the null relationship for regime-affiliated parties? For royalist parties, there is no link between written queries and electoral gains – though it is important to keep in mind that they engage in less query submission overall (Table 1). But it is noteworthy that while such parties do not benefit from submitting more written questions, neither are they punished for submitting fewer. This is consistent with the supposition that institutionalized activity offers a substitute for connection-based patronage. In the preceding section, I posit that citizens prioritize constituency service in choosing how to vote. If regime-linked politicians satisfy voter demands through other means, then it may simply be the fact that institutionalized action is a bad proxy for constituency effort for royalist parties. On the other hand, if written queries are the primary way for opposition deputies to address district concerns, then we would expect them to be very closely linked to electoral support. In other words, the broad consensus in the literature that regime-backed candidates win support through non-programmatic, under-the-table distribution of favors remains unchallenged by the results shown here. However, Table 3 offers new evidence that opposition candidates' use of institutionalized action is rewarded by the electorate.

6 Localized Support for Local Effort

I have argued that written queries proxy for deputy effort on behalf of their constituency: voters observe and reward politicians that perform more constituency service, and the written

query measure captures this trait especially well (at least for opposition parties).[59] In other words, it is not that voters reward good, hard-working politicians, but, more specifically, good politicians that expend their effort to provide *locally-focused* service. In this section, I provide further evidence for this claim by examining municipal-level references within queries and linking this hyperspecific activity to sub-district voteshare.

If voters are indeed basing their support on local effort, we would expect electoral support to vary across communities based on the level of attention each receives. Legislative districts in Morocco typically comprise multiple municipalities across a large geographical area, and busy deputies may not divide their efforts evenly across their constituency. I expect that the more attention a community receives from party MPs, the more motivated it will be to support that party in elections. And local references within written queries provide a metric of municipal attention.

To test this, I extract municipal references from written questions and construct a new independent variable at the party-municipality level summarizing the number of questions that reference the given community, submitted by any party deputies (*References (any)*) or specifically by those representing the relevant community (*References (local)*).[60] I use the log transformation of this measure as the main predictor in the specifications that follow.[61] Some municipalities share toponyms with higher level administrative units; for example, the municipality of Settat is located in the province of Settat. This generates some ambiguity as to whether a question is in reference to the subdistrict or district entitiy. To ensure that results are not driven by mis-attributed references, I include specifications that subset the data to include only municipalities with unique toponyms.

The dependent variable is party voteshare at the municipal level. An ideal analysis would incorporate subdistrict outcomes from the 2016 legislative elections; however, the Moroccan government does not release subdistrict electoral results. Instead, I use outcomes from the

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[59]This is evidenced both by deputy characterization and the preceding content analysis.

[60]I construct two distinct measures because municipal elections are not direct referenda on legislative performance, and voters may consider general party effort as well as the effort of their elected MPs.

[61]As before, the transformed variable is equivalent to $ln(y + 1)$.

midterm municipal elections, for which vote results were published at the municipal level.[62] This party-level analysis again requires the assumption that voters evaluate and support political parties on the basis of the performance of their legislative deputies. In constructing the IV, I include only references from queries submitted in advance of the September 2015 elections.

I report results from OLS regression of municipal voteshare on municipally-focused queries in Table 4. In all specifications, I include controls for log population and the number of parties competing. I also include party-district fixed effects to absorb other activity by local deputies; the model comparison is thus across localities within a district. Finally, to address potential concerns regarding reverse causality, such as the possibility that parties might direct the majority of resources and effort to core supporters, I include a control for the party's seatshare in the 2009 municipal elections.[63]

In all models, the estimated coefficient on municipal references is positive, substantively large (ranging from 1.3 to 3.5 percentage points), and significant at the 0.001 level. Notably, coefficients are largest when data are limited to local deputies: a log-unit increase in local questions submitted by district MPs predicts an additional 2.5-3.5 percentage points in party voteshare. This may reflect the greater visibility of district representatives within a locality. Taken collectively, the results in Table 4 provide evidence that voters are most supportive of parties when deputies' effort is expended directly on behalf of their locality, consistent with the argument that this electoral relationship is based on institutionalized constituency service.

7 Discussion

The preceding empirics provide evidence that, in Morocco, legislative activity related to local concerns is linked to voter support, and that this is especially significant for opposition

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[62]Municipal elections are held every six years.

[63]Ideally, I would control for each party's voteshare rather than seatshare, but the Moroccan government did not release vote totals at the municipal level for the previous municipal elections (Pellicer and Wegner, 2013).

| | Dependent variable: | | | |
| | 2015 Municipal Voteshare | | | |
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Log References (any)	0.013***	0.017***		
	(0.003)	(0.004)		
Log References (local)			0.024***	0.035***
			(0.005)	(0.007)
Log Pop	−0.002	−0.002	−0.010*	−0.009
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.005)
No. Parties	−0.015***	−0.015***	−0.016***	−0.016***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)
2009 Seatshare	0.279***	0.276***	0.295***	0.289***
	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Party-District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Unique Toponym Subset		✓		✓
Observations	8,179	7,795	3,519	3,377
R^2	0.384	0.384	0.371	0.370
Adjusted R^2	0.331	0.329	0.329	0.326

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table 4: Effect of Local Activity on Municipal Voteshare. Coefficients represent estimates from OLS regression on party voteshare at the municipal level. Models 2 and 4 are estimated on data subsets with unique toponyms. Models include party-district FEs.

politicians. But is the query metric a measure of quality or performance? Put differently, are voters rewarding politician effort or results? It is plausible that voters make choices based on both considerations, and that politician quality is an important factor. Per (Fearon, 1999), in scenarios where voters have a limited ability to monitor politicians, as in autocracies where information is limited, selecting based on 'type' becomes a more optimal strategy. Yet there is reason to believe that these legislative requests are in many cases linked to bureaucratic action. First, 67% of queries received a formal response; the response rate was closer to 90% for queries submitted early in the term. As a robustness check, I replicate the analysis from Table 2 including only queries that received a response in the IV (Appendix A5.6) and find that outcomes are largely unchanged. And though it is challenging to assess the impact in a comprehensive manner given the diversity of queries submitted and paucity of subnational indicators, there is evidence from specific cases that queries prompt ministries to commit to improving outcomes.

Figure 4 depicts a publicly-accessible Facebook post from a PJD deputy. In it, he has shared a photo of the official response to a query submitted to the Ministry of Transportation concerning the geographic isolation of a community within his district due to infrastructural problems. The original query highlighted the difficulty for residents to access medical services. In its response, the ministry committed to address this issue through a combination of repairing existing roads and building a new road and access across the wadi. The MP stated in his post that he was publicizing the ministry's commitment to pressure it to speed up the remaining aspect of the intervention – the construction of the wadi access bridge. The screenshot was taken about a week after the response was posted; in that time, it had garnered 63 likes, 24 comments, and 18 shares. This demonstrates one method deputies have for holding ministries accountable for their promises. Public shaming may not be universally effective, but it creates reputational costs for the bureaucracy and the regime. Additionally, this shows how politicians can engage in credit-claiming and how constituents learn about this form of deputy action: the physical record of the request and corresponding ministry

Figure 4: Screenshot of a social media post by an MP sharing the response to his query.

action is used to demonstrate how the deputy is working on citizens' behalf.

Another important question concerns the generalizability of the results here, given the structure of the Moroccan party system and the specificity of the institution examined. Cross-national analysis reveals that query power is found across a range of autocracies globally and that, as in Morocco, it is associated with legislative competitiveness: its presence is associated with an 8-10 percentage point decrease in the dominant party seatshare (Appendix A1.1). This supports the assertion that legislative authorities offer a viable path to increase outside seatshare in autocratic legislatures. The usage of queries in Morocco is consistent with usage in other contexts (Rozenberg and Martin, 2011), and scholars have found that opposition parties in other polities benefit from taking parliamentary institutions seriously

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(Shehata and Stacher, 2006). It is plausible, then, that the findings here could extend to a broader set of contexts.

With respect to internal validity, a limitation of the analysis here is that it includes only a single legislative term – the first for which these data were available with the necessary level of granularity. The publication of internal legislative proceedings offers exciting opportunities for research into autocracies globally (Gandhi, Noble and Svolik, 2020), but raises questions about the strength of the empirical inference due to the short timespan. I have sought to mitigate this with a series of robustness checks (Appendix A5) to assess the sensitivity of the results to decisions about party coding or to potential confounders such as participation in the governing coalition, as well as to clarify the interpretation of the query effect. But the limited time horizon means that the findings may reflect specifics of party strategy during this particular term. Appendix A3 offers descriptive analysis that explores varying patterns of behavior at the party level. One opposition party (USFP) dramatically increased its query submission rate in the middle of the term, and another (PJD) was extraordinary in the consistency of its use of queries, submitting at least 44 in each district for which it held seats.[64] The singular status of the PJD as the most successful opposition party in recent years as well as the most active with respect to query submission raises the question of party-specific confounders – as with Islamist parties in other contexts (Masoud, 2014), is it possible that extra-governmental organizing explains their success? And yet PJD strategy is clearly linked to parliamentary performance, and has been for more than one term: even before the 2011 elections, PJD internal policy required parliamentary attendance and constituent outreach (Liddell, 2010). Though the party may derive additional reputational benefits from extra-governmental activity, institutional work remains a cornerstone of its strategy for attracting support.

Finally, because the focus here is on legislative politics under autocracy, it is important to consider the regime perspective. Why does the regime allow opposition parties such a viable

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[64]Other opposition parties still exceed royalists in query submission, and the findings from Table 1 are robust to the exclusion of the PJD from the sample (Appendix Table A5).

path to voter support? One answer lies in the constitutionalization of legislative authority: as outlined in Section 3, autocratic institutions must involve some measure of commitment in order to be effective cooptative mechanisms, and revising them is therefore costly. Autocrats are not omniscient, and they may not anticipate all future implications of institutional arrangements when they are being enacted. Query power in Morocco dates to the 1990s, when the regime was seeking to weaken existing opposition through cooptation; that it today creates opportunities for political outsiders to increase their electoral strength may simply be an unintended consequence of the institution. Rather than remove the authority and face potential backlash, the regime may prefer obstruction – ignoring requests is a subtler method for sapping queries' effectiveness.[65]

It may also be the case that the regime benefits from this opposition behavior. Scholars have hypothesized that competitive elections among the selectorate allow the regime to farm out responsibility for citizen satisfaction (Blaydes, 2010). The autocrat may prefer to have these activities undertaken by ideologically-aligned actors, but he must balance an array of strategic considerations, including those that allow for the inclusion of moderate opposition members (Lust-Okar, 2005). To that end, opposition constituency service may help to alleviate the bottom-up threat posed by aggrieved citizens. And the fact that voters reward localized action means that vote-seeking parties must spend the bulk of their energy and resources on such activies rather pursuit of their partisan agenda. To this end, it seems that the regime has been successful in corralling the opposition into competing on an electoral playing field that privileges local responsiveness over national policy concerns. If voters perceive that one action substitutes for the other, they may even punish parties that seem too focused on policy, alleviating a potential source of pressure for the regime.

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[65]Using data on ministry responsiveness, I find in other work that regime-controlled ministries are less likely on average to answer deputy requests.

8   Conclusion

This paper examines legislative behavior and voting patterns in an autocratic context, with an emphasis on the distinction between regime-affiliated and opposition parties. One underlying assumption, corroborated by a broad body of scholarship as well as by interviews with Moroccan politicians, is that a majority of voters in this context expect elected representatives to focus on constituency-level concerns. While individuals with close ties to the regime might do so through their personal connections, I offer evidence here that opposition politicians use the legitimate authorities of their office to ensure their constituents are not neglected. This solves an important puzzle: how opposition actors make headway in an environment designed to disadvantage them.

Though the authorities examined here – queries directed at government ministries – are common to parliamentary systems globally and present in a large minority (46%) of autocracies, their relevance in an autocratic setting is neither trivial nor obvious. Yet I find that they play an important role in electoral accountability and in leveling the electoral playing field. Because of these institutional opportunities, opposition parties can achieve parity with or even surpass regime-affiliated candidates by maintaining high levels of effort in office and relentlessly pressuring government ministries to follow through on projects relevant to their district. And yet they may do so at the expense of their policy agenda: the results here suggest that voters are less supportive of activities that address national issues.

These findings raise tantalizing questions about the electoral ceiling for the opposition, as well as the implications of this strategy for public opinion. Can the opposition parlay this action into majority support? And does this by the book alternative to patronage-based voting change voter views toward governing institutions? Future research might take on the broader implications of legislative effort for public attitudes and the larger question of democratization.

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