1　Introduction

> Tell me how you treat your minorities, your immigrants and your refugees, I will tell you what is the state of your democracy!
> —Geisser (2019: 4)

An Empirical Puzzle

In November 2016, a high-level civil servant within the Tunisian State Secretariat for Migration and Tunisians Abroad (SEMTE) confessed during an interview, 'I won't hide it from you, the protection of immigrants is not the biggest priority.' Our conversation took place in Tunis, only a few kilometres north of Habib Bourguiba Avenue, where large-scale protests by Tunisian citizens successfully ousted dictator Ben Ali almost six years earlier. Over weeks, Tunisians across the country had demanded the end of systemic corruption and political repression – and freedom of movement had been a core demand for more dignity and human rights. But while the democratic transition kick-started in January 2011 expanded Tunisians' civil and political rights, immigrants' rights remained essentially unchanged in the first decade of democratization.

In March 2017, only a few months later, I was in Rabat and interviewed an official from the Ministry for the Moroccan Community Abroad and Migration Affairs (MCMREAM). My respondent was in charge of implementing the liberal immigration reform that King Mohammed VI had launched in September 2013. He explained, 'The royal declaration based on shared responsibility, migrants' access to rights and respect for migrants' dignity provides a very positive general framework' for immigration policy, adding, 'This is the first time that a public policy has been planned around the orientations of a human rights report.' Such rights-based framing of immigration policy not only markedly differs from that of my Tunisian respondent; it is also surprising given Morocco's political developments over the 2010s, characterized by the monarchy's authoritarian consolidation.

1

These two anecdotes from my fieldwork illustrate the immigration policy dynamics that have unfolded over the past decade in democratizing Tunisia and autocratizing Morocco. In Tunisia, democratization reshuffled domestic political processes and set an end to the decade-long systematic repression under Ben Ali's one-party regime. However, although Tunisians in 2011 actively claimed 'the right to mobility as a revolutionary right' (Giusa 2018), citizens' increased political freedoms did not spill over into more liberal migration policies. In fact, the restrictive immigration policies inherited from the authoritarian era were largely continued – such as a 2004 law criminalizing irregular migration or informal detention and expulsion practices. Overall, immigration has remained surprisingly un-politicized since 2011, despite the fact that Tunisia has transformed into a destination country that hosts not only the 53,500 immigrants recorded in the 2014 census (INS 2015) and several thousand irregular migrants from across Western and Central Africa, the Middle East and Europe but also a large community of Libyan citizens, which is estimated at around half a million people – or 5 per cent of the Tunisian population.

In contrast to Tunisia, Morocco has experienced much more modest immigration growth over the twenty-first century: census data recorded 86,200 immigrants in 2014, representing only 0.25 per cent of the Moroccan population (HCP 2009, 2015); but also higher estimates of about 250,000 migrants do not substantially change the fact that immigration in Morocco is relatively small scale. Nonetheless, immigration – particularly from 'sub-Saharan Africa'[*] – has become intensely politicized in Morocco since the mid-2000s. In this context, Moroccan immigration policies have shifted over time: in 2003, a restrictive immigration law was introduced, criminalizing irregular migrants and those supporting them; but one decade later, in September 2013, King Mohammed VI launched a liberal immigration reform that included two regularization campaigns and a series of migrant integration measures (CNDH 2015). These immigration liberalizations were surprising, as they seemed

---

[*] In Morocco and Tunisia, migrants coming from Western and Central Africa (and more rarely from Eastern Africa) are generally referred to as 'sub-Saharan' migrants in public, political and also academic discourse. However, this term is fundamentally problematic due to its colonial and racist origins (Gazzotti 2021a; Merolla 2017; Mohamed 2010). In fact, 'sub-Sahara Africa' replaced the expression 'Black Africa' (or Afrique Noire) at the end of colonialism, which was a racist, essentializing construction that served the European colonial project by disconnecting it from North Africa, often referred to as 'European Africa' at the time (Zeleza 2006). Given the term's problematic legacy, I do not use it in my own writing and instead refer to the geographical denomination Western and Central Africa. However, I do keep the term whenever it is part of a quote, an institutional designation or a policy document.

Table 1.1. *Morocco and Tunisia, a puzzling contrast*

	Morocco	**Tunisia**
Immigration policy dynamics	Liberal policy reform	Restrictive policy continuity
Political regime dynamics[*]	Authoritarian consolidation	Democratic transition

intuitively at odds with the increasingly repressive national political context. Indeed, Moroccan authoritarianism was strengthened over the 2010s as the monarchy's promises for more political freedoms – made to contain dynamics of regional 'revolutionary diffusion' after 2011 (Weyland 2009, 2012) – gradually waned.

The developments sketched in Morocco and Tunisia – where an autocratizing regime enacted a liberal immigration reform, while restrictive policies prevailed throughout a democratic transition (see Table 1.1) – go against baseline expectations that democracy has an inbuilt tendency to liberalize immigration policy and that autocracies tend to curtail human and thus also immigrants' rights. Such expectation that 'the link between migration reform and democratic reform is obvious' (M16-I6) was also common among my respondents: Moroccan respondents explained that 'if there is progress on human rights, there will be progress on migrants' rights, if there is a backlash, this will also impact migrants' (M17-I21). And in Tunisia, respondents highlighted that 'the democratic process will be incomplete' (T17-I22) without reforming the restrictive immigration regime, and that enacting an asylum law would have significant symbolic power, as 'talking about foreigners receiving asylum in Tunisia means that we are committed to democracy' (T17-I9).

Yet observations of policy developments on the ground do not match these baseline expectations on how political regimes shape immigration policy, raising a set of questions: what obstructed immigration policy liberalization in Tunisia after the democratic transition? Why did the Moroccan monarchy enact a liberal reform after a decade of policy restrictiveness? Or, more generally, to what extent do political regimes

---

[*] In this book, I use 'democratic transition' as synonym of 'democratization', and 'authoritarian consolidation' as synonym of 'autocratization'. Although democratic transition and authoritarian consolidation are, in fact, two specific processes within the broader phenomena of democratization and autocratization (see Cassani and Tomini 2020; Maerz et al. 2021), using them as synonyms in the context of twenty-first-century Morocco and Tunisia is unproblematic, as there are no other types of democratization or autocratization at play.

shape immigration politics, and what does immigration policymaking reveal about the inner workings of democratic and autocratic systems? As most scholarship on Moroccan and Tunisian immigration policy focuses either on the role of EU migration externalization (Cassarino 2014; Gazzotti 2021a; Roman and Pastore 2018; Wunderlich 2010) or on transnational civil society activism (Alioua 2009; Bartels 2015; Bustos et al. 2011; Üstübici 2018), domestic policy processes and their link to political regime dynamics remain largely unexplored, with some notable exceptions for Morocco (Alioua, Ferrié and Reifeld 2018; Bensaâd 2015; Norman 2016a).

This book zooms into the complex power dynamics on immigration within and among state, societal and international actors to understand how Tunisia's democratization and Morocco's authoritarian consolidation shaped their immigration policies in the twenty-first century. This systematic comparison of immigration policymaking in the context of contrasting regime dynamics hopes to provide critical food for thought for the scholarly debate on the 'regime effect' in immigration politics, which initially emerged in studies on Western liberal democracies and has recently been revived in the context of growing research on migration to the Global South.

The 'Regime Effect' in Immigration Politics

The scholarly discussion on how immigration policymaking – that is, the political processes underpinning decisions of how to govern and regulate the volume and rights of immigrants – is shaped by political regimes has been kick-started in the 1990s. At that time, migration scholars sought to explain why liberal democracies in Europe and North America consistently enacted liberal immigration policies despite popular demands for restriction. Freeman (1995), for instance, argued that immigration policymaking in democracies is dominated by 'client politics' that favour the interests of employers or human rights advocates who benefit from immigration. Sassen (1996) and Soysal (1994) pointed at how international human rights regimes and global liberal norms of individual freedom limit liberal democracies in restraining migrant rights. And Joppke (1998) stressed dynamics inside the liberal state that restrain attempts by executive and legislative powers to restrict immigration laws, particularly the role of national courts and judges in enshrining migrants' rights.

These explanations all emphasize the role of liberal democracy in creating internal and external constraints that limit states' possibilities to restrict immigration. Migration scholars have even suggested that
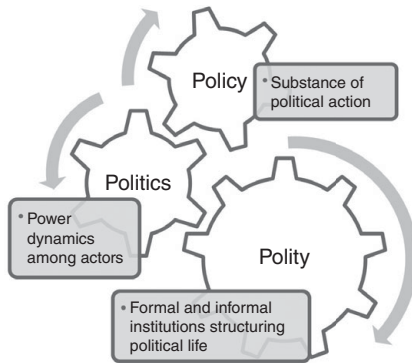
Figure 1.1 Polity, politics, policy.
Inspired by Leca (2012: 61–63)

'accepting unwanted immigration is inherent in the liberalness of liberal states' (Joppke 1998: 292) and that it is the 'features of liberal democracy itself that affect the way such regimes process migration issues' (Freeman 1995: 882). Also political theory work has highlighted how safeguarding foreigners' rights is the ultimate litmus test for liberal democracy (Abizadeh 2008; Carens 2013; Cole 2000, 2012). By assuming such a tight imbrication between polity, politics and policy on immigration (see Figure 1.1) – that is, between the institutions structuring political life, the power dynamics among actors involved in policymaking and the ultimate substance of political action – scholarship has introduced the idea of a 'regime effect'. According to this 'regime effect', liberal democracy gives rise to specific immigration policy processes – involving the role of courts, international norms, societal interest groups or inter-ministerial dynamics – that ultimately produce expansive immigration policy outcomes.

Since the 2000s, critical migration and securitization scholars have cast doubt on such claims of an inherent link between democracy and liberal immigration policy by showcasing how consolidated democracies in Europe and elsewhere have enacted increasingly illiberal, rights-denying policies towards foreigners (Adamson, Triadafilopoulos and Zolberg 2011; Guild, Groenendijk and Carrera 2009; Huysmans 2009; Skleparis 2016). Also political theorists and post-colonial scholars have questioned the fundaments of the 'regime effect' by highlighting that exclusion is inherent to the democratic project (Miller 2016; Song 2019) and that, historically, the consolidation of Western liberal democracy has been built on the oppression of 'underserving' populations – be they colonial subjects, women, Black people or migrants (Bhambra et al.

2020; Dahl 2018; Taylor 1998). While this has challenged the direct link between democracy and liberal approaches towards immigration – that is, between polity and policy – the question of how political regimes shape immigration *politics* remains underexplored and undertheorized, particularly when moving the gaze beyond the liberal state.

In fact, debates on the 'regime effect' in immigration politics have long focused on Western liberal democracies only. This can be partly explained by the political economy of migration research, where most resources are concentrated in Europe and North America. But it also stems from a tendency in scholarly and policy debates to associate the Global North with immigration and liberal-democratic rule, and the Global South with emigration or transit migration and autocratic or illiberal rule. Such binary world (di)visions disregard the fact that 44 per cent of international migrants and 86 per cent of refugees live in countries of the Global South, and that these countries have devised various immigration policies to regulate such flows (UNDESA 2019; UNHCR 2021). Also, while most of the countries classified as autocracies today are situated in the Global South (Marshall and Gurr 2020), systematically associating the Global North with liberal-democratic rule overlooks the fact that many European countries only democratized a few decades ago – such as Greece, Spain or countries in Central and Eastern Europe – and that autocratic tendencies are also gaining ground in the Global North, such as in Poland, Hungary or the United States under the Trump administration (V-Dem 2021).

Despite such limitation, binary (di)visions of the world into Global North/South, destination/origin country and democracy/autocracy have analytical power and structure theorizing of immigration politics. In particular, they have long limited scientific insight into the role of political regimes, as studies that would systematically investigate immigration policymaking beyond Western liberal democracies were largely missing. Fortunately, since the late 2000s, a dynamic research field has emerged that defies the Western- and democracy-centrism of earlier scholarship by putting the Global South centre stage, dissecting inter-actor dynamics and power plays in 'Southern' states and historicizing immigration politics in the broader context of (often post-colonial) state formation (Adamson and Tsourapas 2020; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2020; Gazzotti, Mouthaan and Natter 2022; Natter and Thiollet 2022).

This burgeoning scholarship on the Global South has also revived the 'regime effect' debate. On the one hand, scholars have demonstrated how population controls – and thus migration restrictions – are vital to autocratic regime survival: from Brazil to Saudi Arabia and Egypt to Russia, arbitrary emigration and immigration restrictions, large-scale expulsions or extreme curtailments of basic human rights for immigrants

and emigrants have been identified as authoritarian regime survival tools throughout history (Alemán and Woods 2014; Filomeno and Vicino 2020; de Haas and Vezzoli 2011; Natter 2018a; Thiollet 2021; Tsourapas 2018, 2020). On the other hand, quantitative studies have explained migration policy openness or restrictiveness through countries' categorization as either autocratic or democratic (Miller and Peters 2020; Mirilovic 2010; Ruhs 2011; Shin 2017).

While these studies have significantly advanced migration research beyond the liberal state, they have (often implicitly) continued to analytically separate theorizing on the Global South from theorizing on Western liberal democracies (notable exceptions are Abdelaaty 2021; Adamson and Tsourapas 2020; Garcés-Mascareñas 2012; Stel 2021). This has reinforced the initial assumption that immigration policy processes are fundamentally different across the Global South/North and democracy/autocracy divides, requiring different sets of theories to be understood. However, immigration policy processes in autocratic and democratic contexts have not been systematically compared as of yet. By investigating immigration politics in the contrasting cases of Morocco and Tunisia, this book provides fruitful ground to start delineating the boundaries of the 'regime effect' and to explore commonalities in immigration policy processes across political regimes.

A Typology of Immigration Policy Processes

This book seeks to bridge immigration policy scholarship on the Global North and Global South with broader political sociology, comparative politics and international relations research on power, politics and modern statehood to systematically examine how political regimes shape immigration policymaking. The analysis of policy processes in twenty-first-century Morocco and Tunisia shows that while specific aspects of immigration policymaking are heavily influenced by how decision-making is concentrated or dispersed in a particular power system, there are in fact significant similarities in the functioning of immigration politics across political regimes. In particular, while the decision-making leverage of the executive and the weight of domestic political and civil society actors were closely intertwined with political regime dynamics in Morocco and Tunisia, the internal workings of the state apparatus as well as the influence of foreign policy interests or international norms in national policymaking remained largely unaffected by autocratization or democratization trends.

To initiate a more systematic discussion of the 'regime effect', this book advances a three-fold typology of immigration policy processes that

distinguishes between generic, issue-specific and regime-specific pro-
cesses.[1] This typology is meant to provide analytical building blocks to
stimulate future research in view of consolidating and refining immigra-
tion policy theory across political regimes.

First, the typology identifies a set of *generic policy processes* that emerge
out of the very essence of policymaking in modern states. Although the
social sciences have tended to focus on the differences between states
regarding their political regimes, institutional capacities or state–society
relations, there are some fundamental commonalities in the nature of
modern statehood (Tilly 1992). For instance, modern state bureaucra-
cies are organized in strikingly similar ways – structured around minis-
tries with distinct portfolios, separate executive, legislative and judicial
institutions (even if only on paper) as well as a bureaucratic apparatus
that links central decision-makers to local implementers. Also, despite
wide variations in how states work on the ground, territory and popula-
tion control are always central to national sovereignty, and regimes along
the entire democracy–autocracy spectrum have to accommodate various
societal, economic and international actors to legitimize their decision-
making. Although the sources of legitimacy and means of preserving
control vary across countries, 'no political regime or authority wishes to
appear illegitimate' (Mazepus et al. 2016: 350). Such fundamental
dynamics in the workings of modern states create theoretical ground
for expecting more commonalities in policymaking across political
regimes than dichotomous theorizations of democratic and autocratic
politics would suggest. As I develop in this book, the gap between
political discourses, policies on paper and policy implementation or the
role of crisis in creating a window of opportunity for change are examples
of such generic policy processes that are at play regardless of the political
regime in place or the policy area at stake.

Second, the typology identifies *issue-specific policy processes*, which are
inherent to the policy area of immigration and therefore at play across
political regimes. In fact, these policy dynamics arise because immigra-
tion poses fundamental questions to state sovereignty that result in
specific interest alignments of actors both within domestic and inter-
national policy spheres. By definition, immigration challenges the efforts
of nation-states to maintain their sovereignty through control over
people, borders and national identity narratives – be they democracies
or autocracies. Scholars have therefore suggested that the modern
nation-state is, in fact, a 'migration state' (Hollifield 2004), where
attempts to control individual mobility through passports, visas and
border controls 'contribute to constituting the very "state-ness" of states'
(Torpey 1997: 240). Given the centrality of immigration control for

modern statehood, the analysis in this book suggests that state formation trajectories and national identity conceptions structure immigration policymaking in every state, regardless of the political regime in place. Another issue-specific dynamic explored in this book is that immigration policy triggers specific inter-institutional conflicts within state bureaucracies worldwide – for instance, between Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs. And, as immigration is an intrinsically transnational issue, policies regulating the entry and stay of foreigners seem to offer unique opportunities for states across the globe to instrumentalize them in diplomatic relations.

Lastly, in contrast to policy processes that are at play across political regimes – either because they are tied to the nature of modern nation-states or because they are intrinsic to immigration as a policy field – the typology identifies *regime-specific policy processes* that are fundamentally shaped by a country's position on the democracy–autocracy spectrum. The empirical analysis of Morocco and Tunisia in this book shows that three aspects of immigration policymaking are particularly sensitive to a 'regime effect': the centrality of the executive, the weight of legal actors and the role of domestic socio-political actors, such as political parties and civil society. In particular, my analysis suggests that although auto-cratic leaders also have to reconcile diverging interests in their immigra-tion policy decisions, they are less constrained by electoral processes or by courts that are central in democracies or countries with a strong rule of law. This implies that the executive has more leverage to enact rapid and fundamental policy shifts and that, paradoxically, autocracies can more easily enact liberal immigration reforms compared to democracies if it fits their broader economic agenda, foreign policy priorities or nation-building goals.

I call this dynamic in autocracies 'the illiberal paradox'[*] – as a coun-terpart to the liberal paradox Hollifield (1992a) introduced to capture the conflicting drivers that democracies are confronted with when develop-ing their immigration policies. Hollifield argued that while the dominant ideology of liberalism pushes liberal states to globalize their labour markets, to enshrine international human rights in national law and thus to liberalize immigration, the political logic of democratic nation-states is

---

[*] In this book and earlier publications where I introduce and investigate this hypothesis in depth (Natter 2018a, 2021b), the illiberal paradox refers to immigration policymaking. Tsourapas (2018, 2020) has developed the idea of an illiberal paradox in relation to autocracies' emigration policies, whereby states' political and security imperatives drive them to restrict and surveil emigration, while economic and developmental interests push them to encourage emigration and secure good relations with the diaspora to attract remittances, alleviate unemployment and reduce political discontent through emigration.

dominated by electoral objectives and national identity claims and thus pushes states to restrict immigration (see also Hampshire 2013). In this view, immigration restrictions are attributed to the democratic dynamics of elections, party politics and public opinion – which are less prevalent in autocratic contexts. By introducing the illiberal paradox, I do not want to suggest that autocracies *do* enact more liberal policies than democracies. There are numerous examples where autocracies have drastically restricted immigration and violated immigrants' rights. Instead, I argue based on the Moroccan and Tunisian case studies that autocracies *can* open their immigration regimes more easily than democracies *if* they wish to do so because of their relative freedom from legal constraints and restrictive domestic demands.

Immigration Policy, a Lens into Modern Statehood and its Transformations

My typology of generic, issue-specific and regime-specific immigration policy processes provides a first attempt at systematizing insights on the commonalities and differences in immigration politics across political regimes. What stands out from this exercise is the range of issue-specific processes that showcase the centrality of immigration policy for modern statehood. As Hassenteufel (2008: 13) suggests, 'the state constructs itself through the production of public policies'. This is particularly valid when it comes to immigration. For Abdelmalek Sayad (1999: 6–7), 'immigration – and this is probably why it disturbs – forces us to unveil the state, to unveil the way we conceive of the state and the way it conceives of itself'. To systematically explore the imbrication of political regimes and immigration politics, we therefore need not only to examine how immigration policymaking is influenced by the type of regime that regulates political life in a certain country. We also need to analyse what immigration politics reveals about the functioning of democratic and autocratic structures, and of modern statehood more broadly.

Examining Tunisia, this book demonstrates that the depoliticization of immigration and the restrictive immigration policy continuity after 2011 in fact reflects the imperative of Tunisian political actors to preserve the democratic transition. In the wake of the revolution, immigration was set on the political agenda because large numbers of refugees and migrants arrived from neighbouring Libya and societal actors used their newly gained freedom of expression to voice their demands and concerns. However, the democratization of political processes did ultimately not spill over into more open policies towards foreigners, as security concerns overshadowed efforts by civil society organizations (CSOs) and international organizations (IOs) to initiate liberal immigration

reform. Moreover, conflicting domestic demands – for and against immigration liberalization – cancelled each other out and compelled policymakers to reactivate a national unity narrative, to put 'Tunisians first' and to ignore immigration altogether because of its potential to polarize Tunisian society. In addition, the proliferation of state actors involved on immigration propelled institution-specific interests, such as future political and economic cooperation with Libya, to the foreground. Ultimately, as democratization required political leaders to legitimize policies before an electorate, strategic depoliticization and restrictive policy continuity seemed the safest option for Tunisian political elites.

While the absence of immigration reform in Tunisia provides central insights into the intricate dynamics of democratization, the liberal immigration reform in Morocco is exemplary of the inner workings of the monarchy and ongoing dynamics of authoritarian consolidation. As I show, the top-down politicization of immigration and the liberal immigration reform were, in fact, part and parcel of the monarchy's strategy to consolidate its power at home and abroad. Diplomatically, immigration was turned into political capital towards both Europe and Africa, principally to advance Morocco's foreign policy goals to rejoin the African Union, to strengthen its position as regional leader against its historical rival Algeria and to increase its bargaining power towards the European Union (EU). Domestically, the immigration reform bolstered the regime's legitimacy in front of liberal, progressive parts of Moroccan society who saw migrants' rights as intrinsic to Morocco's democratization agenda. The analysis in this book shows how the room for manoeuvre of pro-migrant CSOs was strategically increased and how relations between the monarchical institution and the Moroccan administration were instrumentalized to foster a progressive image of King Mohammed VI. The depth and speed of the liberal reform were thus driven first and foremost by the royal agenda to promote Morocco as a 'liberal monarchy' at home and abroad.[2]

In both Morocco and Tunisia, the analysis of immigration policymaking therefore offers a privileged lens to revisit political regime dynamics from the inside and to examine how trends of autocratization and democratization play out in practice. This showcases how, ultimately, studying immigration policymaking is always a study of the essence and transformation of the modern state.

Researching Immigration Politics in Morocco and Tunisia

The book's contribution to rethinking immigration politics across political regimes draws on one decade of empirical research on immigration policy, and in particular on the paired comparison of Morocco and

Tunisia. Paired comparisons are widely used in social science for theory-building (Tarrow 2010: 243). Also called 'controlled case comparison' (George and Bennett 2005), they have the advantage of providing intimacy and depth of analysis similar to a single-case study, but with more analytical power to identify mechanisms or processes that connect contextual differences to particular outcomes, in my case political regime dynamics to immigration policymaking.

Of course, Morocco and Tunisia are not representative of the variety of political regimes that make up the world. On a spectrum between liberal democracy and closed autocracy, Morocco's hereditary monarchy and Tunisia's presidential one-party autocracy have shifted back and forth over time according to levels of repression and political freedoms, with Tunisia experiencing a qualitative jump towards democratization in 2011 (see Figures A.6 to A.8 in Appendix 2). However, Morocco and Tunisia are particularly fruitful cases to explore the role of political regimes in immigration policymaking because each country can be classified as a 'deviant' case (George and Bennett 2005; Seawright and Gerring 2008) in light of dominant theoretical expectations: in Morocco, authoritarianism drove immigration policy liberalization; in Tunisia, democratization drove restrictive policy continuity, while common sense and existing theories would have expected the contrary. At the same time, while Morocco and Tunisia differ on the outcome (immigration policy) and one crucial dimension (political regime dynamics), they are similar with regards to other potentially important immigration policy drivers: human and economic development trajectories, colonial histories or the position within regional migration systems (see Appendix 2).[*]

The resulting most similar systems design (Seawright and Gerring 2008) allows to almost isolate the role of political regime dynamics on immigration policy and to develop hypotheses on the boundaries of the 'regime effect' in immigration policy. Needless to say, the paired comparison of Morocco and Tunisia does not in itself offer generalizable conclusions on the role of political regimes in immigration politics. However, the typology of immigration policy processes advanced in this

---

[*] It would have been interesting to also include Algeria in this comparison: In Algeria, immigration is subject to negative politicization (compared to depoliticization in Tunisia and positive politicization in Morocco), and political regime dynamics differ from those in Morocco and Tunisia, with a socialist republic in the post-independence decades, a civil war opposing Algerian security services and Islamists in the 1990s, and a military regime since then that has been challenged by the country's youth in 2019 and 2020. However, fieldwork access to civil servants and civil society representatives is almost impossible in Algeria's closed political context. To guarantee the quality and comparability of insights across the in-depth case studies, I decided to focus on Morocco and Tunisia.

book hopes to serve as an intermediate step in a 'building-block strategy' (Becker 1968) that moves from exploratory, hypothesis-generating single-case studies towards more systematic theory-testing in view of generalizability.

To trace immigration policy processes in Morocco and Tunisia, I combine insights from 144 semi-structured interviews and 48 informal conversations conducted in Morocco and Tunisia in 2011–2012 and 2016–2017 with rigorous policy, legal and media analysis covering the period until the end of 2020. I interviewed three categories of actors involved in immigration policymaking:[*] first, high-level civil servants within Morocco's and Tunisia's Ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs, Migration, Labour, Higher Education and Health, and within local administrations in Rabat and Tunis, as well as representatives of political parties and Morocco's National Council on Human Rights (CNDH). Second, civil society actors, such as representatives of migrant-led collectives, local migrant and human rights associations, labour and employer unions, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Morocco and Tunisia. And third, international and diplomatic actors, such as representatives of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations High Commissariat for Refugees (UNHCR), local EU delegations and European embassies, as well as development aid organizations. Moreover, I attended workshops, seminars and roundtables on immigration policy in Rabat and Tunis, allowing me to observe inter-actor dynamics and conduct forty-eight additional informal conversations with a diverse range of respondents.

Access to most interviewees – especially at a high level – was surprisingly easy in Morocco and Tunisia. The main difficulty was to identify the right interlocutors in the first place and to get their contact details – at best a mobile phone number or private email address. But once contacted, most people were available for an interview – including the former head of the CNDH in Morocco as well as three former State Secretaries for Migration in Tunisia. Only two institutions proved difficult to access: Tunisia's Ministry of Interior (MoI) and Morocco's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA). In Tunisia, most respondents discouraged me even to try to get in touch with the MoI, as despite the revolution, the autocratic heritage is still palpable, and the MoI is said to 'function with the same mental configuration as before' (T17-I1). Although I did secure the contact of a key person in the MoI, I did not ultimately succeed in

---

[*] For a comprehensive list of interviewed actors, see Appendix 1.

arranging an interview. I experienced similarly closed doors at the Moroccan MoFA during my 2016/2017 fieldwork. While access had been relatively easy back in 2011/2012, respondents emphasized a change in the overall political climate, making access to the MoFA almost impossible for researchers at the time of my later fieldwork.

To complement my rich interview material, I also conducted systematic documentary research. Although this book is not historical per se, it integrates, whenever possible, the historical depth, roots and origins of contemporary developments (Bayart 1996; Migdal and Schlichte 2005). Indeed, understanding continuities has been as important to me as understanding change in immigration policy, and so it was crucial to gather archival data. I collected primary sources such as immigration laws, minutes of parliamentary discussions, action plans and reports of state institutions in Morocco's parliamentary archives and national library, as well as in Tunisia's national archives. I also analysed Morocco's and Tunisia's online databases of laws and decrees to search for changes in immigration policy since 1956.[3] On this basis, I built a comprehensive immigration policy chronology for Morocco and Tunisia spanning more than a century – from the early 1900s until the end of 2020 (see Appendices 3 and 4).

Moreover, I systematically screened six national and two regional news outlets for articles on immigration.[*] The analysis covers the entire period of these outlets' online archives, generally starting between 2005 and 2008, and going on until the end of 2020. Media analysis provided insights into the level of politicization of immigration in the public sphere and the core themes of interest. Finally, I collected secondary and grey literature, such as books and doctoral theses from Moroccan and Tunisian scholars, reports from associations and local institutions, as well as scholarly work on state formation, national identity and migration in Morocco and Tunisia. These sources' historical and descriptive depth allowed me to better evaluate actor motives and to contextualize the information gathered through interviews and primary documents.

Yet, doing fieldwork and tracing policymaking in (semi-)autocratic settings brings its own challenges (Art 2016; Glasius et al. 2018; Koch 2013; Shih 2015), as documents are not always openly accessible, the media biased, and people do not dare to speak up. Although Morocco's political context is more authoritarian than Tunisia's nowadays, Ben

---

[*] In Morocco, *Le Matin* functions as the mouthpiece of the state, *TelQuel* is more independent and critical, and *Yabiladi* more neutral in its reporting. In Tunisia, *BusinessNews* keeps to neutral and factual reporting; *Nawaat* and *Inkifaya* are investigative, online journalism platforms that have emerged after 2011. I also systematically screened *HuffPost Maghreb* and *Jeune Afrique* for regional coverage.

Ali's security state has left its marks, and so guaranteeing respondents' anonymity was crucial in both countries. Particularly on immigration, a topic closely linked to territorial integrity and national identity, the risk of crossing 'red lines' was high. While respondents were willing to talk to me, half of them did not want to be recorded. Also, because my respondents – activists, journalists, politicians and bureaucrats – represented antagonistic interests on immigration, I was alert in navigating 'reverse interviews' (Glasius et al. 2018: 61), whereby respondents would turn the interview situation around and question me about the people I talked to.

To not compromise my respondents' security, I therefore generally refrain from revealing their identity (names, job descriptions) throughout the book. Instead, I identify respondents through a code – the code M16-I1, for example, refers to Interview 1 in my 2016 Morocco fieldwork. I only reveal respondents' position within the cartography of actors when statements were made during public events or when it is imperative to contextualize the quote and does not in any way compromise the respondent's security. In these cases, I retract the number code to avoid cross-referencing.

Apart from the broader political context, the political salience (or non-salience) of immigration also shaped my fieldwork. In Morocco, many respondents seemed to have a set narrative on the 2013 policy change. The fact that immigration had been turned into a prestige project by the King meant that many respondents, especially within the state but also within civil society, took up the official policy framing. In contrast, in Tunisia I was in fact researching a 'no policy' (Rosenblum 2004b). I was often confronted with empty faces once interviewees realized I wanted to talk about Tunisia's approach towards immigrants, not about Tunisia's emigration and diaspora politics. Almost always, Tunisian respondents understood the word 'immigrant' as referring to Tunisians abroad, not to foreigners in Tunisia. While this non-politicization of immigration was at times challenging, as people felt they had nothing to say, it also provided an opportunity, as respondents were taken by surprise and did not have ready-made opinions or scripted responses.

Finally, my positionality inevitably shaped my fieldwork. Being a young woman, for instance, very likely played out to my advantage, facilitating my access to respondents given the (unfortunate) gendered assumptions that I would not be too inquisitive, too threatening or too politicized in my work. As Glasius et al. (2018: 64–66) write, 'Naivety is a commonly used interview strategy …, typically more available to young women and foreigners. … Women are considered less threatening, and may sometimes have greater access to officials precisely in authoritarian circumstances'.

I also sensed that being a White European facilitated my access to more high-level actors, as well as to workshops, receptions and seminars organized by Moroccan and Tunisian institutions. Back in 2011, when I was visiting the Mohammed V University in Rabat for the first time, a Moroccan student told me, 'Everything is easy access if you are a foreigner in Morocco. All doors are open'. This became particularly evident during my observation of the Moroccan regularization campaign in 2017 – had I been Black, I would likely not have been allowed to roam around the regularization office for several hours without being approached by local policemen. Such dynamics of White privilege that are at play in everyday life in Morocco and Tunisia (Hannoum 2020; Pouessel 2012b) have crucially affected my fieldwork.

Being a White European, however, also meant that some respondents probably perceived me as one of the numerous Western academics and journalists who arrived in Morocco and (to a lesser extent) Tunisia over the past years to investigate immigration politics, and thus as a vehicle to transmit specific messages to European publics, funders or politicians. While I remained alert to such dynamics in my interviews and analysis, ultimately, every researcher has to 'work with what [they] have' (Glasius et al. 2018: 64), and the question of 'what respondents would have told me was I Black, Moroccan or a man' will remain unanswered.

Altogether, the rich interview and archival material I gathered in Morocco and Tunisia over the past decade provide the backbone for this book. To empirically trace policymaking processes in Morocco and Tunisia and connect them to political regime dynamics, I focused the analysis on the shifting constellations of interests, ideas and institutions in Morocco's and Tunisia's immigration policy field (see Hall 1997; Palier and Surel 2005). I also paid particular attention to power relations between state, societal and international actors to understand how certain immigrant groups were turned into legitimate objects of political concern (or not). For this process tracing exercise (Hall 2006; Tansey 2007), I mobilized abductive data analysis, 'a qualitative data analysis approach aimed at theory construction' (Timmermans and Tavory 2012: 169) that focuses on the iterative process between data collection, data analysis and theory-building (Charmaz 2014). In practice, this meant that I built a back-and-forth between empirics and theory into my fieldwork set-up and coding strategy. Such 'duel process tracing' (Tarrow 2010), whereby I iteratively juxtaposed, contrasted and compared immigration policy processes in autocratizing Morocco and democratizing Tunisia provides the methodological foundation for examining immigration politics across political regimes.

The Book Outline

In this introductory *Chapter 1*, I made the case for rethinking the politics of immigration beyond the liberal state and for leveraging immigration policy as an analytical lens to explore the inner workings of political regimes. I introduced the empirical puzzle that motivated the book and sketched the research design and methods I adopted to trace immigration policy processes in Morocco and Tunisia. I also outlined the empirical and theoretical contributions of the book, particularly the three-fold typology of immigration policy processes that seeks to systematize insights into the boundaries of the 'regime effect'. Next, *Chapter 2* delves into the conceptual foundations of the book: by tying the vast immigration policy scholarship on the Global North and Global South to broader comparative politics, international relations and political sociology reflections on power, politics and modern statehood, I offer a first attempt at rethinking theories of immigration politics across political regimes.

The book then immerses the reader in the contrasting cases of Morocco and Tunisia. *Chapter 3* offers a concise account of Moroccan and Tunisian state formation and national identity trajectories, as well as focused overviews of immigration and emigration patterns and policies from the early twentieth century until the end of 2020, including Morocco's and Tunisia's treatment of migrants during the first year of COVID-19. The chapter hereby substantiates the empirical puzzle of the book, namely the contrast between liberal immigration reform in autocratizing Morocco and restrictive immigration policy continuity in democratizing Tunisia. The empirical analysis itself is structured as follows: Chapters 4 and 6 focus on the drivers of immigration policy in Morocco and Tunisia, respectively, and explore which institutions, interests and ideas have shaped policymaking since independence in 1956 and particularly since the turn of the twenty-first century, when immigration became increasingly salient in domestic and international policy spheres. Chapters 5 and 7, then, dissect how Morocco's 2013 policy change and Tunisia's 2011 revolution, respectively, affected the power dynamics on immigration among state, civil society and international actors.

Specifically, *Chapter 4* shows that Moroccan immigration policy is primarily driven by the monarchy's foreign policy and domestic regime legitimation goals. In the post-independence period, Morocco used selective immigration facilitations to strengthen diplomatic ties with European and African countries. In 2003, a restrictive immigration law successfully instrumentalized so-called 'sub-Saharan irregular transit migrants' for Moroccan diplomatic relations with the European Union

(EU) and for its domestic security goal of increasing control over population movements. And in 2013, enacting a liberal immigration reform has been instrumental in sustaining the regime's legitimacy at a moment of regional political turmoil after the 'Arab Spring' and in advancing Morocco's foreign policy interests in Africa. Even the inconsistent implementation that has mitigated the reform's impact on migrants' everyday lives has not jeopardized but only reinforced the King's power position at home and abroad.

Chapter 5, then, demonstrates how immigration policy liberalization not only emerged out of Morocco's autocratic political structures – a dynamic I call the illiberal paradox – but also consolidated them. In particular, it shows that the monarchy mobilized the expansion of migrants' rights, as well as its relations with the administration and an expanding civil society to portray King Mohammed VI as a 'liberal monarch'. In this process, legal actors and elected politicians have only played a subordinate role. However, the top-down, centralizing dynamic initiated by the King did not absorb resistances and diverging views within the administration and civil society, where actors kept their room for manoeuvre regarding agenda-setting and policy implementation.

Chapter 6 on Tunisia explores the drivers behind the continuity of restrictive immigration policy through the democratic transition. It shows that under Tunisia's autocratic leaders Bourguiba and Ben Ali, foreign policy priorities, sovereignty concerns and strategies for regime legitimation dominated immigration policy choices, leading to the generalized criminalization of immigration and an elaborate system of exceptions for particular migrant groups. While such foreign policy interests and state imperatives have remained powerful immigration policy drivers after 2011, the democratic transition increased the weight of domestic factors such as public opinion and civil society activism in policymaking. Despite initial attempts to translate democratic ideals into liberal immigration reform, however, conflicting popular demands have compelled policymakers to sideline liberal immigration reform. As the chapter demonstrates, the minor and mostly informal policy changes that were enacted after 2011 have ultimately not challenged the core of Tunisia's restrictive immigration regime in the first decade of democratization.

Chapter 7, then, dissects the power dynamics among state, societal and international actors on immigration in Tunisia and shows how democratization affected immigration policy processes in ambiguous ways. Under Ben Ali's authoritarian regime, the lack of real counterpowers reinforced the security-driven immigration policy of the Ministry of Interior. After 2011, the role of Tunisia's Parliament and civil society was strengthened as policy processes became more inclusive. However, democratization

also brought to the fore inter-actor dynamics that put a break on immigration reform plans, such as turf wars within the administration, governmental volatility or competition within an expanding civil society. Ultimately, then, democratization has not delivered more rights for migrants in Tunisia.

Chapter 8 systematically compares immigration politics in Morocco and Tunisia and brings to the fore some striking continuities and parallels between democratic and autocratic contexts. The comparison shows that regime strategies to ensure political legitimation as well as territorial and institutional sovereignty provide the foundation for immigration governance. It also demonstrates the importance of national identity narratives and histories of state formation to understand contemporary immigration politics. Furthermore, the chapter teases out how Morocco's and Tunisia's political regime dynamics shaped immigration policymaking over the twenty-first century. It shows that while the decision-making leverage of the executive and the weight of domestic political and civil society actors were closely intertwined with political regime dynamics, the internal workings of the state apparatus as well as the influence of foreign policy interests or international norms in national policymaking remained largely unaffected by regime dynamics.

In the concluding *Chapter 9* I return to the key theoretical propositions of the book and summarize its contributions to research on Moroccan and Tunisian migration politics, to theories of immigration policy as well as to broader comparative politics, international relations and political sociology scholarship. I hereby showcase the value of immigration policy research as an analytical lens to study state transformations and political change. I end the book with a reflection on the most promising avenues for consolidating theory-building on immigration policy across the Global North/South and democracy/autocracy divides in the future.