



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

## BACKGROUND

### Land and Climate

Morocco lies on the northwest corner of Africa, across the Strait of Gibraltar from Spain. The country roughly covers an area twice the size of the United Kingdom or about the size of the U.S. state of California. Western Sahara, a disputed region that Morocco claims and administers, is 102,703 square miles (266,000 square kilometers) in area. Spain controls two coastal enclaves (Ceuta and Melilla) in the north.

Traversing the middle of the country from north to southwest are two snowcapped mountain chains: the Middle Atlas and the High Atlas, which includes Mount Toubkal, North Africa's highest peak, at 13,671 feet (4,167 meters). South of the High Atlas Mountains lie the Anti-Atlas Mountains. In the north, along the Mediterranean Sea, runs the Rif Massif range. Most of the country's agricultural areas are found between the mountainous interior and the Atlantic coastal lowlands, into which flow the Oum er Rbia and Tensift rivers.

Morocco's climate varies by region, but the country generally experiences mild winters and hot summers. Coastal areas experience a typical Mediterranean climate. The average temperature in Casablanca ranges from 73°F (23°C) and higher in the summer to 55°F (13°C) in the winter. Temperatures tend to be more extreme in the country's interior and near the Sahara, regions which are very hot in summer and near freezing in the winter. The rainy season lasts from October to April, while the dry season runs from May to September.

## History

### Early Inhabitants and Invaders

The earliest known inhabitants of the Maghreb (Northwest Africa) were an ethnic group known as the Imazighen (meaning "free men"; the singular form is Amazigh). Their origins are unclear, but the Imazighen have lived in the region for thousands of years. Because of its strategic location near the mouth of the Mediterranean (known as the Strait of Gibraltar), the area now known as Morocco has a history replete with foreign invasion and rule, beginning with the Phoenicians in the 12th century BC and continuing with the Romans, Vandals, Visigoths, and Greeks.

The Arabs invaded in the seventh century AD and introduced Islam to the Maghreb. The Imazighen fought off direct Arab rule and established an independent kingdom in the eighth century. Two powerful dynasties prospered until the 13th century and even expanded the kingdom into other regions for a time. Following other invasions, the Alawite Dynasty, which claims descent from the prophet Muhammad, took control in 1660. In 1787, Morocco signed a peace and friendship treaty with the United States. This treaty, which made Morocco one of the first independent nations to recognize U.S. sovereignty, is still in force, and Morocco and the United States maintain strong ties today.

### European Colonization and Independence

Morocco's location at the crossroads of Europe, Africa, and the Middle East attracted interest from European nations that sought to control the region's trade routes. In the 19th century, Spain colonized areas in northern Morocco, and France made Morocco a protectorate in 1912. The French and Spanish ruled until Morocco's independence in 1956, when King

Mohammed V, a direct descendant of kings in the Alawite Dynasty, established a constitutional monarchy. Following the unexpected death of his father, King Hassan II came to power in 1961. French and Spanish cultural influences are still strong in Morocco.

#### ***Western Sahara Conflict***

In 1975, Morocco annexed Western Sahara (formerly known as Spanish Sahara) after staging the Green March, a popular demonstration in which 350,000 Moroccans crossed into the desert territory in support of Moroccan control. These actions sparked a long-running conflict with the Polisario Front, the military wing of the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic, which opposes Moroccan control of Western Sahara and wants self-rule. During the fighting between Moroccan forces and Polisario guerillas, most of the indigenous Saharan population, known as Saharawis, fled to western Algeria. Today, it is estimated that between 90,000 and 160,000 Saharawi people live in UN refugee camps in Algeria.

Negotiations between King Hassan's government and the Polisario guerrillas opened in 1989 as part of a UN effort to solve the problem. A 1991 cease-fire ended 16 years of fighting and was to have preceded a UN-sponsored referendum in 1992 in which residents of Western Sahara were to accept or reject annexation by Morocco. However, the referendum has been repeatedly postponed because the two sides cannot agree on who should be allowed to vote: all current residents or only those who were residents in 1974. Renewed tensions erupted into armed clashes in 2020, ending a 29-year truce. The status of the Western Sahara territory remains unsettled.

#### ***Modern Morocco***

In 1996, Moroccan voters decided in a referendum to support constitutional reforms that created a directly elected parliament and shifted some authority to local councils. Through elections in 1997, a Chamber of Representatives became Morocco's first freely elected legislative body. King Hassan II died in 1999; he was succeeded by his son Mohammed VI, who has maintained many traditional values but is considered less authoritarian than his father.

In February 2011, protests erupted throughout the country, with demonstrators demanding political reform. Unlike the governments of neighboring Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, Morocco's government remained stable during the events of the Arab Spring. Though the king remains the most powerful member of the government, in July 2011, Moroccans approved a new constitution that gave some of the king's power to a prime minister, who is appointed from the majority party in the legislature.

Despite recent reforms, many Moroccans desire greater change as the country continues to face a number of social and economic challenges. Issues such as corruption, high unemployment, domestic violence, and limits on free speech and expression persist. Additionally, Morocco remains a key route for migrants attempting to reach Europe; however, stricter European policies have forced many migrants to stay in Morocco. While the government has granted many migrants legal residency, full integration into society remains a major challenge for immigrants.

## **THE PEOPLE**

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### **Population**

The population of Morocco is composed of three main ethnic groups, the largest being the Indigenous Imazighen (also known as Berbers) and Arabs. Due to centuries of intermarriage, many Moroccans have mixed Arab-Amazigh heritage. A sizable group of Akkablajn, descendants of enslaved West Africans, lives throughout the southern part of Morocco.

The Imazighen are geographically divided into three main groups: people of the Rif region refer to themselves as Irifin, people from the Middle Atlas Mountains refer to themselves as Imazighen, and people of the High Atlas refer to themselves as Ashilhayn. Most inhabitants of Western Sahara are ethnic Saharawi. Traditionally, they are nomadic peoples who live by animal husbandry and subsistence agriculture. Today, some Sahrawi people live in large modern cities.

Rabat is the capital and second-largest city; Casablanca is the largest. Other major cities include Fez, Salé, and Marrakesh. Urban migration is swelling city populations.

### **Language**

The official languages of Morocco are Arabic and Tamazight (a Amazigh dialect). Moroccan Arabic, called Derija (literally, "dialect"), is the most widely spoken language. Derija is quite different from the classical Arabic of the *Qur'an* (Islamic holy book). Due to satellite television access, many Moroccans understand the Arabic dialects of neighboring countries. Hasaniya, an Arabic dialect, is spoken around Goulmima and in the south, including Western Sahara.

Imazighen peoples speak their own Amazigh dialects in addition to Arabic. Prominent dialects include Tashilhayt (spoken in the High Atlas and Sous Valley), Tarifit (Rif region), and Tamazight (Middle Atlas region). French is used widely in business, government, and education. Spanish can still be heard in the north, which was formerly under Spanish control. English is gaining popularity.

### **Religion**

Islam is the official religion of Morocco, and conversion to another religion is not recognized by the state. The king is both the political and spiritual leader of his people. The majority of Moroccans are Sunni Muslim. Popular religion mixes aspects of various folk beliefs with traditional Islamic practices. Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam, is also widely practiced. Before World War II, Morocco had a large Jewish population, but in the decades since, most Jewish Moroccans have emigrated to Israel, France, and Canada. A small but diverse number of Christians live in the country; most have European roots, others are from sub-Saharan Africa, and some are Moroccans who have converted to the religion.

Muslims believe in a monotheistic god (*Allah*). Islam shares many biblical figures with Judaism and Christianity, but Muslims cite Muhammad as the seal of the prophets, meaning he was the last prophet to receive divine revelation from God. Muslims believe he received God's revelations

through the angel Gabriel in the form of the *Qur'an* (Islamic holy book).

Religion is a matter of daily practice. The Five Pillars of Islam that Muslims strive to accomplish are to profess there is no god but *Allah* and Muhammad is his prophet, pray five times daily, give alms to help the poor, fast each day during the month of *Ramadan*, and make at least one pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Friday is the Muslim day of worship, when a sermon is given at the mosque during the noon prayer. Men and women pray in separate designated areas in the mosque. Mosques are often full on this day and during *Ramadan*.

### General Attitudes

Moroccan culture is deeply rooted in Islam. When people suffer misfortunes or experience success, they tend to attribute the cause to God (*Allah*), and the phrase *Insha' Allah* (God willing) is frequently heard when discussing the future. Moroccans tend to value family, honor, dignity, generosity, hospitality, and self-control (particularly of one's temper). A calm attitude gains respect.

Many feel that Moroccan society has gradually become more materialistic in recent years. People in rural areas tend to be closer to each other. Educated Moroccans are acquainted with other societies and cultures, but most Moroccans' knowledge of outside cultures comes from movies, satellite television, the internet, or information shared with them by relatives who live abroad. Their views of other societies are usually seen through the lens of their religion. For example, it is not uncommon for a Moroccan to look down on another society because of its excessive alcohol consumption, which is prohibited by Islam.

### Personal Appearance

Moroccans generally believe it is important to be neat, well-groomed, and appropriately dressed so one will be treated with respect. Revealing clothing is not commonly worn in public; shorts are reserved for the beach. The national garment is the *djellaba*, a hooded, ankle-length garment with long sleeves. Some people may wear a *djellaba* over their clothing in place of a jacket. Men and women also wear them on religious holidays and for other special occasions. Many Moroccans also wear traditional leather slippers, which usually have a pointed toe. Western-style clothing is common throughout Morocco, especially in urban areas and among young Moroccans. Women may cover their heads with scarves, but some do not. When entering a mosque, Moroccans wear clothing that covers the entire body (except the head and hands), and they remove the shoes.

## CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

### Greetings

Moroccans generally shake hands when greeting, after which one might touch the heart to express pleasure at seeing the other person or to show personal warmth. Children conventionally kiss the right hand or forehead of their parents or elders to show respect when greeting. People often greet

close friends or relatives by brushing or kissing cheeks multiple times.

*Assalaam 'alaikum* (May peace be upon you) is commonly used as "Hello." People also use *Sabah al-khayr* (Good morning) and *Masa' al-khayr* (Good evening). More formally, one might say *Ahlan wa sahlan* (You are welcome here like family). Friends may exchange the phrase *Labess* (literally, "no harm"), which means both "How are you?" and "Fine." Greetings between friends also include inquiries about each other's well-being and that of their families. Hosts often extend repeated enthusiastic phrases of welcome; less fervent greetings might be considered rude. It is polite to greet an acquaintance when passing on a street, but people do not greet strangers.

Moroccans always use titles in formal situations and to address acquaintances. Friends typically address each other by first name. Elders might be referred to by a title such as *haj* (an honorable title for those who have completed a pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia) or the equivalent of "aunt" or "uncle." Strangers are sometimes addressed by family titles, such as "sister," "grandmother," "uncle," or "brother." Moroccans will often put the titles *Si* (Mr.) or *Lalla* (Ms.) in front of a person's first name in order to show respect or affection.

### Gestures

Moroccans often use hand gestures and facial expressions to communicate ideas and feelings. For example, touching the tips of the fingers to the thumb can accentuate a point. The same motion may also mean "a little" or "slow down." It is considered impolite to point at people or to let the bottom of the foot point toward a person; Moroccans might cross the legs at the knees but would not place an ankle over a knee. One beckons someone by sweeping fingers into a downward facing palm. To express the concept of "a lot," Moroccans flick their thumbs out from their chins; this can be used to express fullness at a meal. People eat with the right hand only.

### Visiting

Frequent visits to friends and relatives are considered necessary to maintain strong relationships. Visiting is most popular on holidays but may occur at any time. Between family members, it is acceptable to visit unannounced. Sometimes, friends make arrangements to visit in advance.

Moroccans have a reputation of being warm and gracious hosts. Social visits can last several hours. Guests invited for dinner in urban areas are not expected to take gifts. However, a gift of candy or a small toy for the hosts' children is appreciated. If urban residents visit a relative or friend in a rural area, they are expected to take a gift (such as staple foods, clothing, or household items); rural people visiting friends and family in the city will take gifts from the countryside (such as herbs, honey, fresh milk, eggs, or meat). Guests may please their hosts by complimenting them on their home.

Guests generally are offered refreshments. Refusing them is impolite, although guests sometimes give a token refusal before accepting the offered item. Milk and dates were

traditionally served as a sign of hospitality, but now cookies, bread, coffee, juice, or tea are more common. Mint tea is often offered to guests, business associates, or anyone with whom one might spend a few minutes during the day. It is considered a friendly, informal gesture that is affordable and easily prepared.

Men and women do not always socialize together. Men often associate in public coffeehouses, especially on weekends, holidays, or evenings during *Ramadan* (holy month of fasting).

## Eating

In most homes, the family eats lunch, the main meal of the day, together. Moroccans gather again at around five or six in the evening for coffee or tea and a snack, followed a couple hours later by a light dinner of soup or leftovers from lunch. Because meals are considered an important social time, everyone in the family is expected to be present during mealtimes.

Before and after eating, people wash their hands. In both rural and urban areas, a traditional basin and pitcher of water is provided for guests during special events or to show hospitality; otherwise, Moroccans wash their hands at the sink. Moroccans scoop up food with pieces of bread from a large communal dish, using the right hand only. Diners eat from the section of the dish directly in front of them.

Moroccans consider hospitality and eating etiquette very important. Hosts encourage guests to eat as much as they like. If the hosts think guests have not eaten enough, they urge them to eat more. In traditional homes, it is impolite for guests to finish eating before the hosts, as this can imply the food did not taste good. However, neither should a host finish before a guest, because it could be interpreted as telling the guests to stop eating. Mealtime is an important time for conversation; guests who do not join the discussion may embarrass the hosts.

In restaurants, the person who extended the invitation to dine out usually pays the bill. Tipping is unnecessary. During *Ramadan* (holy month of fasting), it is considered impolite for those who are not fasting to eat in public during the day, and most restaurants are closed.

## LIFESTYLE

### Family

#### *Structure*

Moroccan social life centers on the extended family, and family relationships are more important than any other. One's family is a source of reputation and honor, as well as financial and emotional support. It is considered one's duty to provide financial support to other members of the extended family when it is necessary or requested. Respect for parents and elders is an indication of true piety and manners. Extended family members often live together.

#### *Parents and Children*

Children are indulged but are also expected to contribute to the family by attaining a respectable position in society. The bond between parents and children is considered the most

important relationship. Boys and girls may begin helping around the house at a young age. Boys are usually in charge of outside errands like running to the market or taking the garbage out. Girls often help their mothers with cleaning, laundry, and making bread.

When sons reach maturity, they are expected to care for their parents and siblings. Children often remain with the family until they marry, even after they have graduated from high school and have a profession of their own. A married son sometimes brings his wife to live with his parents in order to care for both of his family obligations at the same time. When necessary, adult children are expected to care for their aging parents.

Even if they live separately from their parents, married children continue to maintain close contact with them. Parents may help newly married children buy an apartment upstairs from them or in the same neighborhood so as to be close. However, parents do not generally interfere with the domestic or private affairs of their children's families.

#### *Gender Roles*

The father is the head of the family and provides the financial support. The mother's responsibilities include managing the home and providing care for the husband and children. Some women work outside the home and share the responsibility of providing for the family's financial needs. Since the 1980s, women have been encouraged to be involved in community and political affairs. Women currently hold significant positions in government and business. While Morocco's family code protects the rights of women in marriage, divorce, and matters of child custody, some traditional interpretations of laws limit women's legal rights in practice, especially in regards to inheritance and domestic violence.

### Housing

Wealthy Moroccans may be able to afford spacious villas, but most Moroccans live in apartments. Regardless of size, homes usually have a formal living room, where guests are entertained, and a television room, where family members spend most of their time. The living room is furnished with comfortable couches and pillows. Most urban housing has electricity and running water, but access to water is less common in rural areas. Poor urban families may not have showers in their homes, so they go to the local public bath, or *hamam*. Families migrating from rural areas to cities in an effort to find work are often unable to afford adequate housing and so live in makeshift homes located in slums in and around Morocco's cities. Some traditional homes have been renovated and converted into hotels.

### Dating and Marriage

#### *Dating and Courtship*

Dating in the Western sense does not occur openly in Morocco, but socializing between young unmarried men and women is common. Unlike the older generation, for whom relationships between men and women were very limited, younger generations in Morocco socialize through school, at work, and in their neighborhoods. However, dating one-on-one, as practiced in many Western countries, is not socially acceptable. Some popular activities that are socially

acceptable include strolling in the evening with friends, chatting in cafés, playing sports, and discussing politics.

### **Engagements**

When a young man becomes interested in marrying a young woman, he involves his family in the marriage negotiations. The man's family will visit the woman's family home and formally propose marriage for the groom. At the official engagement party, men from both families sign a marriage contract, and the families celebrate with sweets and flowers. Before the marriage, the man pays the *mahr* (bride-price) to the woman, the amount of which depends on the man's financial situation. Some men are unable to marry because they are unable to afford this cost. The woman usually brings marriage gifts that have been given to her for her new home to the marriage.

### **Marriage in Society**

Marriage is considered one of the most important events in a Moroccan's life and signifies the union between two families. In the past, many marriages were arranged, and young men and women often did not meet their spouses until they were married. Today, most Moroccans know each other before asking their parents for permission to marry. Many Moroccans marry in their thirties because they wait to finish school and find employment before getting married. In rural areas, some men and women may marry in their late teens or early twenties. Sexual relations between same-sex partners are illegal in Morocco, as is same-sex marriage.

Islamic law allows men to marry up to four wives, although it encourages only one. The state expects that the first wife agrees to subsequent marriages, and the husband must prove that he has a good reason for taking another wife and that he can support more than one wife. Given these restrictions, very few polygamous marriages occur.

### **Weddings**

Weddings can last several days, depending on the family's financial situation. Women make most of the arrangements for the wedding before the official engagement party. The first day is for the bride's female relatives and friends to come together and sing and dance. They decorate the bride's hands and feet with henna (a red plant dye). Moroccan women usually wear a hoodless robe known as a *kaftan* for their weddings. On the second day, the groom's family and the bride's family celebrate the wedding together to show they are one family.

### **Divorce**

Divorce is allowed but not encouraged socially. Under recent changes to family law, men and women have equal access to divorce. Divorced women generally return to their parents' home, and it is easier for men to remarry than for women. Single mothers are often stigmatized.

## **Life Cycle**

### **Birth**

In Morocco, pregnancy is not usually discussed with strangers because some Moroccans believe doing so could make them vulnerable to the "evil eye," a traditional belief that someone's jealousy or envy may cause harm or misfortune to the bearer of good news. Birth is an important family event and is cause for celebration. Expectant and new mothers often

gather with female friends and family, who decorate her hands and feet with henna. Women often go back home to their parents' home before they give birth, and mothers and sisters usually care for the new mother after birth. Births commonly take place in hospitals or clinics, but some women give birth at home. The majority of births are attended by midwives.

When a child is born, the first words uttered in his or her ear are those of the Muslim call to prayer. Seven days after the birth, a celebration is held to give the baby a name. A sheep is slaughtered as the name is pronounced, and friends and family bring gifts such as blankets and clothing for the newborn and money for the mother. The mother's hands are decorated with henna again; sometimes the baby's hands are decorated too.

Most baby boys are circumcised soon after birth, but some families wait until the boy is age three or four. The circumcision is an important religious event and cause for another celebration. Young boys wear special clothing to the event, and a party is hosted with music and gifts.

### **Milestones**

Reaching adulthood does not bring with it any particular celebration in Morocco. Each family celebrates their own children's passage into adulthood differently and at different ages, depending on how quickly a child matures physically. The legal age of adulthood is 18, when an individual can apply for a national identity card.

### **Death**

In accordance with Muslim tradition, a deceased person is buried as soon as possible, usually within a day or two of the death. The body is ritually washed with water, scented with incense and perfumes, and wrapped in white cloth. Prayers are offered before the body is taken to the cemetery. Women stay at home and mourn while the men carry the body to the mosque. Passages from the *Qur'an* (Muslim holy book) are read while the body is buried. Three days after the death, and again at 40 days, friends and relatives visit to offer condolences to the family. Widows usually wear all-white clothing in public for 4 months and 10 days.

### **Diet**

Moroccans eat a wide variety of fresh vegetables and fruits, which are grown locally. Mutton, beef, and chicken are the principal meats in the Moroccan diet. Popular dishes include *kefta*, ground beef or mutton seasoned and cooked over charcoal; *tajine*, a meat-and-vegetable stew; and *harira*, a tomato-based soup with chickpeas, lentils, and beef or mutton. *Couscous* (steamed semolina made from wheat) is usually eaten on Fridays. Coastal Moroccans cook fish in a variety of ways. Bread is eaten at almost every meal. Mint tea is the national drink. Islam prohibits the consumption of pork and alcohol. Although some men drink alcohol, it is not socially acceptable and not done in public.

### **Recreation**

#### **Sports**

Young men enjoy playing or watching team sports, especially soccer. Soccer balls are inexpensive and shared by neighborhood children who play together in the street. Other

popular sports include volleyball, tennis, basketball, and running. Champion runner Hicham el Guerrouj is a national hero.

### Leisure

The basis of social life in Morocco is interaction with friends and family, and Moroccans enjoy spending time with each other. Activities are often spontaneous and simple. Spending time in cafés is one of the main social activities among men, young and old, rich and poor. They discuss politics and sports, play cards or chess, and watch soccer games. Among the older generation, or the religiously observant, men gather in or around a mosque after prayer time to chat. Strolling the main streets in the evenings is another important way to spend time, especially among women, children, and the younger generation.

Women regularly visit each other in their homes during teatime or on weekends. Young women often meet to go shopping together. Some urban families with private transportation enjoy going on picnics in the countryside or to the beach. Families do not usually go out to movies or restaurants. Instead, families stay at home and enjoy watching movies and eating food together.

### The Arts

Forms of traditional music include Amazigh, Gnaouan, Chebbi, and Arab-Andalusian. Rhythmic Gnaouan music, originally from sub-Saharan Africa, features musicians that often do acrobatic crouching and whirling dances while playing. Arab-African *rai* (opinion) music is a popular art form, especially among Moroccan youth. Its lyrics often feature the social problems of young people and romantic stories that youth can relate to. Originally from Algeria, *rai* music was founded by Cheb Hasni, who was assassinated in 1993. All singers of *rai* music are called *cheb* (young man), followed by their first name. Youth also enjoy listening to Egyptian, Lebanese, and U.S. pop music.

Morocco is famous for its pottery and ceramic tile. Artisans create silver jewelry, drums, carpets, hand-tooled leather, and wooden tables and boxes. Fine art forms such as painting and sculpture have developed significantly since Morocco gained independence in the 1950s.

Traditional literature includes histories, essays, and poetry, but other styles have been adopted. Poetry is often improvised and accompanied by a single-stringed instrument (*ribab* or *amzhad*) and a three-stringed banjo-like *lotar* or *kanza*. Oral storytelling is a traditional art form that is still practiced in some areas of Morocco.

### Holidays

Morocco's official public holidays include International New Year (1 January), Throne Day (30 July), Youth Day (21 August), Green March Day (6 November), and Independence Day (18 November). The most important holidays in Morocco are religious and are also celebrated as national holidays on which people are not required to work. Some Islamic religious holidays include *Ashura* (a special day of fasting) and *al-Mawlid al-Nabawi* (a celebration of the prophet Muhammad's birth). In addition, numerous *moussems* (religious festivals) are held throughout the year. Determined

by the lunar calendar, dates for Islamic holidays change from year to year.

### Ramadan and Eid al-Saghir

Each year, Muslims observe *Ramadan*, a holy month of fasting and prayer, when no eating, drinking, or smoking is permitted from sunrise to sunset. This month is revered as the period in which the *Qur'an* (Islamic holy book) was revealed and is considered a time to renew one's faith. Moroccans celebrate the holiday with special foods and practices. They awake before dawn to share a light breakfast, and some people begin with prayer in the mosque. Children, pregnant women, travelers, foreign visitors, and the ill are exempt from the fast; however, some try to fast for at least some portion of the day. Children attend a shortened day of school, and work hours are altered to accommodate the missing lunchtime and to allow people to rest in the afternoon. In some neighborhoods, young men organize daytime soccer matches to show off their agility even while fasting.

The fast ends each day at sundown, when participants break their fast by eating dates and drinking some water or milk, followed by a traditional soup called *harira*. Special breads and sweets are also served. Select prayers are offered each evening in the mosque, so that the entire *Qur'an* is recited by the end of the month. The streets fill with people after these prayers, and people enjoy staying up late to visit with each other. *Eid al-Saghir*, also known as *Eid al-Fitr*, is the feast day celebrated at the end of *Ramadan*. Heads of households give gifts of money or goods to the poor at this time.

### Eid al-Kabir

*Eid al-Kabir* (the greater holiday) is also known as *Eid al-Adha* and is held to commemorate the prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. It is the most important holiday in Morocco and is celebrated for three days. The holiday begins with an outdoor early-morning prayer in specially designated fields large enough to accommodate all of the community—women, men, and children. Later in the day comes the main part of the festival—the ritual slaughter of a sheep by some men of the household. Families work hard to purchase their sheep in the weeks before the holiday, and the children of the house enjoy their time with the sheep as a pet before it is slaughtered. Women then clean the meat and prepare special dishes enjoyed by the whole family in the following days. At least one-third of the meat is to be given away to the poor, and other portions are given to needy family and friends.

## SOCIETY

### Government

Morocco is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy. King Mohammed VI has broad powers as head of state, specifically over religion and security. However, a new constitution, approved in 2011, reduced some of the king's powers and strengthened the position of prime minister. The prime minister is head of government and is appointed by the king from the largest party elected to Parliament. The legislature has a 120-seat upper house (Chamber of Advisors) that can

cast a no-confidence vote against the prime minister or overturn legislation from the 395-seat lower house (Chamber of Representatives). Advisors are indirectly elected to six-year terms, with one-third of the members elected every two years, by an electoral college of local leaders and professionals. Representatives are directly elected to five-year terms. Sixty seats in the Chamber of Representatives are reserved for women. The prime minister has the power to dissolve Parliament, and elected regional councils have authority and funding to oversee development. The voting age is 18.

### **Economy**

Agriculture is the backbone of the economy, employing about 39 percent of the labor force. Most agricultural production is carried out by subsistence farmers, but a small modern sector produces enough food to export to other countries. Morocco contains most of the world's phosphate reserves, which account for a significant portion of the country's export earnings. Other major industries are food processing, fishing, leather goods, textiles, construction, and tourism. Morocco's small manufacturing sector is growing. Morocco has a small stock market, one of the first in the Arab world. Some Moroccans work abroad, primarily in western Europe. The money these workers send back to Morocco helps offset the country's foreign debt. Chronically high unemployment, illiteracy, a large government bureaucracy, and inefficient state-owned industries remain economic challenges. The currency is the Moroccan *dirham* (MAD).

### **Transportation and Communications**

Paved roads connect all major cities and provide excellent access to the rest of the country. Public buses and interurban taxis are available almost everywhere. Moroccans commonly flag a cab in the street by pointing their hand in the direction they want the cab to drive them. Rural people walk, ride bicycles or motorcycles, or ride donkeys when carrying loads. Urban dwellers use the public transit system. A rail system connects the major cities of the north. Morocco has several international airports and a number of civil airports that are used for domestic travel.

The government provides basic telegraph, postal, and telephone services. These are considerably better in cities than in rural areas. Cellular phones are common. Morocco has a number of private and government-owned television stations. Satellite dishes are common and allow access to French and Arab stations. Both national and regional radio stations serve the country. Newspapers are common, though several have been banned; the government tolerates little criticism of its policies. Internet access is growing; all major cities and some towns have internet cafés.

### **Education**

#### **Structure**

Preschools offer religious and patriotic instruction. In the past, there were *Qur'anic* schools, the equivalent of a preschool, where children ages three to five learned the Arabic alphabet and how to recite the *Qur'an* (Islamic holy book). Today, private preschools instruct children in the

Arabic and French alphabets, basic math, and the *Qur'an*.

Primary school begins at age six and lasts six years. After primary school, children attend three years of preparatory or middle school and three years of high school. Public and private education is available.

#### **Access**

Public education is free and mandatory for nine years in Morocco, but this is not strictly enforced. Since the 1980s, the government has devoted considerable resources to improving the education system. However, many Moroccans believe that the education system does not meet the needs of the job market or teach effective skills. Many people prefer private schools over public schools because the quality of education is higher, but only the wealthy elite can afford the tuition.

Many students leave school before they have acquired basic skills in reading and writing because they cannot afford the costs associated with school, such as books, uniforms, transportation, and food. Many students in previous generations did not finish high school, but a growing number of young people today obtain a high school diploma. Girls and rural children are less likely than boys and urban residents to attend school.

While the adult literacy rate is low, literacy among youth is rising due to government efforts to build schools and train teachers. Literacy rates are higher among urban Moroccans than rural residents, and a large literacy gap exists between men and women. National campaigns to combat illiteracy target older women and rural children, many of whom live far away from schools.

#### **School Life**

Moroccan students receive instruction in Arabic and French and sometimes English. The main subjects taught in primary school are Arabic, French, Islam, math, physical education, and science. Students study the same topics in middle school at a more advanced level, and history and geography are added. High school students study physics, English, Spanish, German, economics, and philosophy in addition to the basic subjects of earlier years. Secondary students choose a major, either in science or humanities, that will prepare them for attendance at a university.

Students typically have two hours of homework each night. Most learning involves rote memorization and lectures. Recent attempts have been made to use more technology in the classroom and provide higher-quality books and other materials, but funding is often insufficient. Most Moroccans highly value education, and parents and older siblings often encourage young children to do well in their studies. Children who do not finish school are often apprenticed to artisans to learn a trade, such as construction, ceramics, or metal working.

At the end of high school, a major national exam (the baccalaureate exam) is required to obtain a diploma and can be taken up to three times, once each year. Though the Ministry of Education has taken many precautions to prevent the spread of cheating, especially during the baccalaureate exams, cheating is widespread.

#### **Higher Education**

Public universities are free, and a *license* degree (similar to a bachelor's) can be achieved in three years. Morocco has a

number of private and public universities, colleges, and training institutes. Some of the major universities in Morocco include Mohammed V University, the University of al-Qarawiyyin, Al Akhawayn University, and Cadi Ayyad University.

Majors are partially determined by one’s high school major track, as well as the baccalaureate exam scores. Schools for medicine and engineering have limited spots, and competition can be intense. Exams take place at the end of each semester, with an annual oral and written exam that determines whether or not a student passes the entire year.

**Health**

Morocco lacks a comprehensive national healthcare system, but the Ministry of Health is working to provide services to every region and extend coverage to more Moroccans. The government allocates about 6 percent of its annual budget to health care. Each province has at least one hospital and some clinics, but many healthcare facilities lack qualified medical staff, sufficient medical supplies, and functional equipment. Moroccans often bribe doctors, who are underpaid, to gain access to the country's limited healthcare services. In urban areas, Moroccans who can afford it often seek medical care at private clinics because they are cleaner and provide higher-quality treatments. Facilities are severely limited in rural areas. Rural women often avoid hospitals and clinics because they are uncomfortable being examined by male doctors and female doctors are rare. While water in urban areas is usually potable, rural water supplies are often unsafe except where communities have access to fresh well water.

**AT A GLANCE**

**Contact Information**

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**Country and Development Data**

Capital	Rabat
Population	36,561,813 (rank=40)
Area (sq. mi.)	172,414 (rank=57)
Area (sq. km.)	446,550
Human Development Index	121 of 189 countries
Gender Inequality Index	118 of 162 countries
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$6,900
Adult Literacy	83% (male); 65% (female)
Infant Mortality	19 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	75 (male); 78 (female)
Currency	Moroccan Dirham

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