

Understanding Moroccan Political Discourse through Citizens' Cognitive Reception: A Critical Linguistic Study

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Abstract:

This critical analysis study addresses political reluctance among Moroccan citizens. In light of the existing multi-pluralistic political spectrum in Morocco, the study examines the language used by Moroccan participants to understand the main cognitive factors that lead to the continuing social demotivation toward politics. Adopting a mental model perspective, the study investigates how Moroccan citizens perceive and interpret the discourse of three major political parties representing the country's principal ideological poles: the CU, the PJD, and the SUPF. The analysis draws on Van Dijk's (2008) cognitive framework, through which we argue that citizens' interpretations of party discourse are constructed and/or patterned by preconditioned "mental models" (pp. 11, 16–18, 22). Based on participants' responses to a cognitively guided questionnaire, the findings reveal that participants interpret parties' discourse through the adoption of referential cognitive mechanisms. These mechanisms draw on personal or culturally ingrained images, sets of mental representations, fragments of past experience, and socially shared knowledge (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 161). The findings further explain the existence of a misalignment between the cognitive frameworks of politicians and those of citizens.

Introduction

Morocco's pluralistic political system, combined with the notable public resilience reflected in voting polls and public attitudes toward politics, has aroused our interest in understanding how the public conceives the received political discourse. In essence, despite the large number of political parties in Morocco, each disseminating a wide range of ideological discourses, we notice a communicative disconnection between politicians and the public. Several Moroccan scholars, including Abdelkader Alami, 2005; Atlati, 2008; Bourqia, 1999, 2011; Boukhars, 2011; Daadaoui, 2010; Darif, 1996, 1998; Darif, M., 1996, 1998; Elimadi, 2021; Mohamed Alami, 1997; Slaoui, 2014, to name a few, have addressed Moroccan political issues. In addition to tracing the evolution of parties' ideologies through socio-political and historical lenses, these scholars have raised concerns about the consistency of political ideologies in Morocco and the parties' deficiency in circulating a convincing discourse to the public. For instance, Abdelkader Alami (2005) highlights that most of the parties claim to follow Islamic principles but often stray from these values, showing inconsistencies in their actions and goals (p. 234). Boukhars (2011) points out that Moroccan parties frequently shift their discourse and form alliances to stay relevant, even if it means deviating from their original doctrines. He notes that many socialists, for example, question whether their parties still embody the ideals they once did (pp. 75–76, 88). Slaoui (2014) observes that these parties often fall short of reflecting the true development of Moroccan political consciousness, suggesting that they sometimes prioritize political gains over genuine ideological commitment, leading to

what he describes as “ideological poverty” (p. 23). Nonetheless, these analyses remain within the socio-political and historical frameworks and have not fully addressed the linguistic dimensions of the parties’ ideological expression. What is still important to discover is the cognitive way in which the parties’ discourse is received by the Moroccan public. The current linguistic study seeks to bridge this gap by examining Moroccan political discourse from a socio-cognitive perspective. The purpose is to look into whether the social cognition of Moroccan political discourse goes through logical understanding in the first place. To explore this issue, we adopt a mental model approach, that is, Van Dijk’s (2008) analysis that places priority on mental abilities, memory use, and socio-cultural interpretations throughout the decoding process of the received discourse.

Discussion of relevant literature

1. *Political discourse as cognitive process*

Prior to the analysis of social cognition of the parties’ discourse, we should conceive how political discourse is approached in relevant academic studies. Beyond its communicative function, political discourse is analyzed in the literature for its ideological dimension, and for its utility in enabling proponents to achieve social legitimacy and maintain control over social behavior, the economy, and national policies. Here, political discourse is seen as influencing power relations. That is why political scientists such as Wodak (2009, 2018), Wodak and Forchtner (2018), Obeng and Hartford (1997, 2008), to name a few, use multimodal analysis to understand how discourse gains symbolic validity among the public. Fairclough (2013), in this regard, offers a practical illustration of CDA, emphasizing the importance of both local and global contexts and processes in maintaining social and political power. According to Fairclough (2013), language, which encompasses discourse, functions as a rhetorical process that can either reinforce or transform social relations. He argues that “consciousness is the first step towards emancipation,” highlighting the critical role of political discourse in guiding such emancipation (Fairclough, 2013, p. 1). Van Dijk argues that discourse producers, including elites and politicians, play a crucial role in manipulating public knowledge, beliefs, and ideologies (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 32) in order to legitimize their power and maintain existing social structures. Chomsky (2006) points out that the essential scientific reason for studying discourse is to “provide some insight into general properties of mind” (p. 162). Fairclough (2013) supports this view, asserting that “ideology is the prime means of manufacturing consent” (p. 3). Following this assumption, we contend that political discourse inherently embodies a party’s ideology and is strategically crafted to advance political objectives. These objectives include enhancing social legitimacy, increasing public support, legitimizing existing social relations, and reinforcing political dominance.

2. *Social cognition Vs political discourse*

Given the cognitive dimension of political discourse, the question that arises is how such discourse is socially conceived, or how it is cognitively received by the public in a deliberate manner. This social perception, which we refer to as social cognition, depends on mental representations and socially shared norms and knowledge coined by Chilton (2004) as “presumptions” (p. 80). In this vein, Chilton points out that “The cognitive approach considers political discourse as necessarily a product of individual and collective mental processes” (Chilton, 2004, p. 51). Here, political discourse is claimed to be elicited in a rhetorical way, attempting to create biased social cognition. According to Van Dijk (2008), social cognition is the product of the interaction between collective mental representations and the tactics employed to implement them in social contexts. This insight illustrates how discourse applies ideological influence over social cognition. Van Dijk points out: “I shall henceforth use the term social cognition to refer to the

combination of socially shared mental representations and these processes of their use in social context” (p. 47). Here, Van Dijk (2008) stresses the utility of considering cognitive conditions of social subjects, including wishes, desires, plans, and beliefs. This control is often reinforced through persuasion or the imposition of fear and sanctions on those who do not adhere to the rules established by those in power, who possess authority, wealth, expertise, or other privileges. As Van Dijk explains, “Power is a form of social control if its basis consists of socially relevant resources” (p. 30). Van Dijk also notes that social control extends to mental manipulation, leading dominated groups to become more attuned to the desires and intentions of their controllers. However, this does not preclude resistance; controlled groups may challenge excessive domination through acts of counterpower, which can manifest as protests and revolutions that threaten existing power structures.

Building on the existing literature, looking at Moroccan citizens’ language from a cognitive perspective therefore helps uncover the mental processes behind their limited social and political engagement, which this study aims to identify.

The study’s theoretical framework

According to Van Dijk’s (2008) mental model approach to political discourse, politicians use political discourse to reshape perceptions, beliefs, and social attitudes, reinforce or challenge existing social norms, invoke shared values, and frame specific issues within historical and cultural contexts. Cognitive processes at this level can be interpreted through what Van Dijk (pp. 160–162) terms short-term memory (STM) and long-term memory (LTM). At the micro level, Van Dijk emphasizes the role of STM in perceiving, understanding, and producing discourse (pp. 159–160). At the macro level, he points out that while politicians rely on social and cultural events and symbolic virtues to shape the social cognition of political discourse, recipients tend to interpret discourse through episodic models stored in LTM. These mental models can be either subjective or socially based (pp. 160–162).

Accordingly, the current study relies on Van Dijk’s (2008) cognitive perspective to guide the analysis. Based on the mental model framework, we believe that social cognition is both constructed and interpreted—created and comprehended, encoded and decoded—by both discourse producers (political parties) and receivers (target populations) through their “mental models” (pp. 11, 16–18, 22). As Van Dijk explains, these models serve as referential cognitive mechanisms activated during communication, whereby individuals draw upon personal or culturally ingrained images and sets of mental representations (such as personal knowledge, personality, and self), fragments of past experiences (old models), and socially shared information—all of which are used to interpret the discourse addressed to them (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 161).

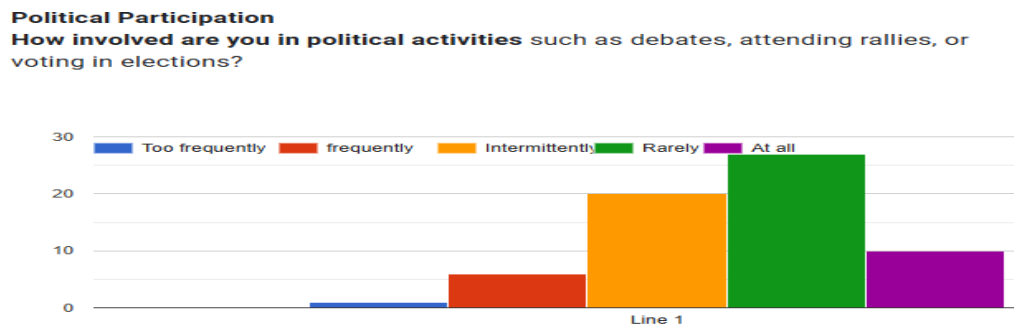
Data analysis

Following Van Dijk’s (2008) mental model approach, our critical analysis explores how Moroccan citizens perceive political discourse. To ensure that the analysis remains grounded in the theory of cognitive processes, we addressed the Moroccan public with a comprehensive questionnaire consisting of sixteen (16) questions, each designed to capture various aspects of respondents’ understanding and perceptions of the three main political ideologies that represent the major political poles in Morocco. The first party in question is the Constitutional Union (CU), which officially claims to adopt a social-liberal ideology. The second party to discuss is the Party of Justice and Development (PJD), which articulates a right-leaning, conservative ideology. The third party is the SUPF, known for its left-wing ideology. Amongst ninety-six (96) answers, a total of sixty-five (65) were collected and examined as the primary data for analysis. The chosen replies were purposefully selected because the participants showed more interest and interaction

with the survey topic and questions. Another reason for the choice of these answers lies in the categorization of the responses collected, as the first three questions will explicate; a fact we believe enhances the credibility of the findings.

Questions One and Two were designed to gather demographic data about the participants. The replies show that 69% of respondents were men, and that the majority of participants were between 46 and 55 years old. Question Three was designed to determine participants' education level. The results indicate that 58 participants have attained a graduate-level education, while the remaining 7 participants hold either secondary or baccalaureate-level qualifications.

Question Four of the survey, as illustrated by Graph 1 below, measures the participants' engagement in political activities:

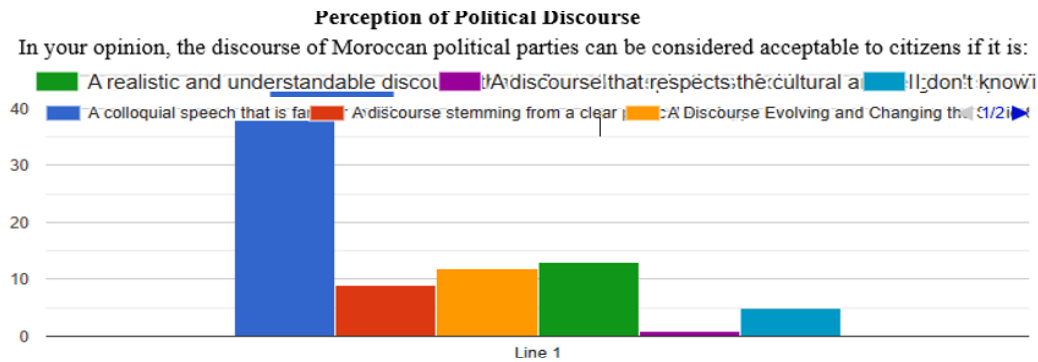


Graph 1- Frequency of public participation in political activities.

The bar graph presents the frequency of public participation in political activities across five levels: “Never,” “Rarely,” “Occasionally,” “Frequently,” and “Very Frequently.” As shown, a small segment of participants, represented by the tallest green bar, rarely engage in political activities. A slightly smaller group, indicated by the second tallest orange bar, participates occasionally. A moderate number of respondents, shown by the pink bar, fall into the “Never” category. In contrast, the “Frequently” category, represented by the red bar, and the “Very Frequently” category, shown by the blue bar, indicate that a very small portion of participants are highly active in politics, which demonstrates that a considerable number of participants remain distant from political activities.

Question Five aimed to explore the participants' *perception* of the effectiveness of Moroccan political discourse, offering five distinct descriptions: “A colloquial and familiar discourse to citizens,” “A discourse stemming from the party’s clear political ideology,” “A discourse that evolves with the current socio-political situation,” “A realistic and comprehensible discourse reflecting citizens’ aspirations,” and “A discourse that respects the cultural and religious particularities of the country,” with an additional option for those who were unsure: “I don’t know.” The responses are depicted in Graph 2 as follows:

Graph 2- Public perceptions of what constitutes effective political discourse.



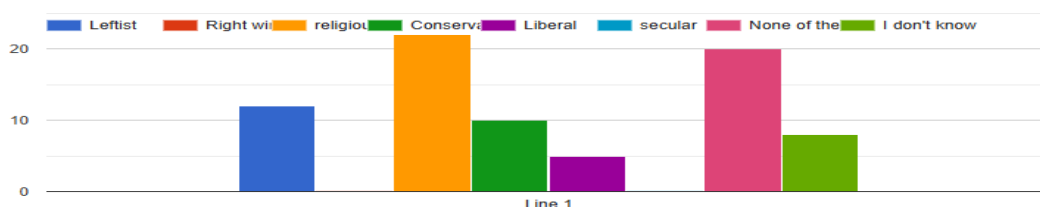
Examining Graph 2, we notice that a significant majority of participants (37 responses, represented by the longest blue bar) approach the effectiveness of political discourse through its *familiarity* and *accessibility*. This indicates a preference for political communication that resonates with their everyday experiences and is easily understood. In addition, 13 participants (depicted by the green bar) emphasized the need for a discourse that is *realistic* and aligns with citizens' aspirations, highlighting the importance of relevance and relatability. 12 responses (shown by the orange bar) indicated that political discourse should adapt to changing socio-political conditions, suggesting that flexibility is crucial for maintaining its effectiveness. Meanwhile, 8 participants (featured by the red bar) said that a clear ideological foundation is essential for effective discourse, 5 participants (shown in the light-blue bar) expressed uncertainty or lack of familiarity with the issue, and the smallest number of responses (shown in the purple bar) were for the discourse that respects cultural and religious specificities. These results show that most participants prioritize a discourse that is *familiar* or *realistic*.

Moving to Question Six, we aimed to evaluate the participants' perceptions of parties' political discourses. Graph 3 below provides a detailed view of these responses, which are categorized into six distinct options: "Secular," "Liberal," "Leftist," "Conservative," "Religious," and "Right-wing." The vertical axis measures the number of participants, ranging from 0 to 20. As noted in the options provided, to deepen the understanding of the participants' *ideological awareness*, the question includes "Religious" and "Secular" as options. These categories are significant because religious discourse typically aligns with conservative values, while secularism often represents a broader social perspective rather than a specific political ideology. In our context, secularism may be linked to leftist or liberal ideologies, which are often viewed in Morocco as challenging traditional conservative or right-wing views.

Graph 3- Participants' views on effective and persuasive Moroccan political discourse.

Which political discourse of Moroccan parties do you think is effective and socially persuasive?

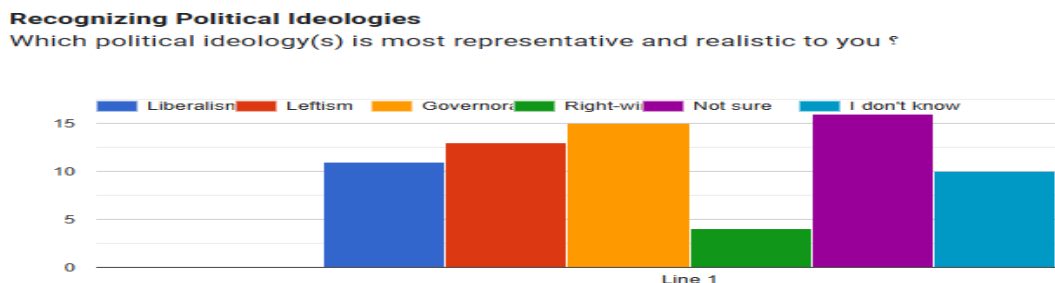
(More than one possible answer)



The results reveal a preference for “*Religious*” discourse, with more than 22 participants selecting this option, as indicated by the longest orange bar in Graph 3 above. In contrast, 20 participants, represented by the pink bar, said that none of the current ideological positions are effective or convincing. The third most notable choice was *leftist* discourse, favored by 12 participants, as shown by the green bar. *Conservative* ideology garnered support from 10 participants, while 5 participants leaned towards *liberalism*. Additionally, 7 participants expressed uncertainty with the response “*I don’t know.*” With a significant concentration of responses in the orange and pink bars, the graph highlights a clear divide among participants. It reveals that almost 34% of participants view *religious* discourse as the most impactful, while 30% of them express skepticism about the effectiveness of existing ideological options. The difference in views highlights the diverse perspectives participants have on what constitutes effective political communication in Morocco.

Question Seven, presented below aimed to explore participants’ clear recognition of and familiarity with the main political ideologies present in Moroccan politics. Building on the perceptions of ideologies examined in Question Six, this question offers a more focused and straightforward set of choices: liberal, leftist, conservative, and right-wing. The remaining options were “Not sure” and “I don’t know.” The goal was to provoke the participants’ thoughts and encourage them to use *prior knowledge* and preconditioned perceptions to identify which ideology they find most representative and realistic.

Graph 4-Participants’ awareness of key ideologies in Moroccan politics.

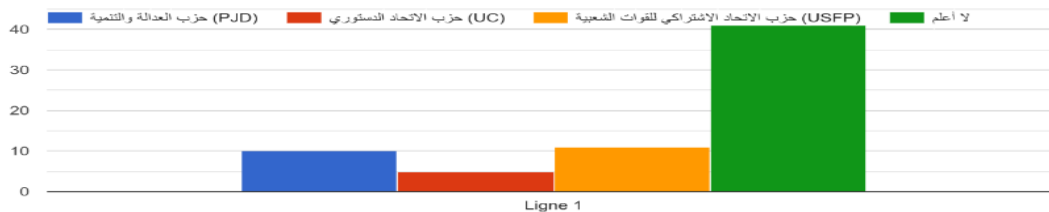


Graph 4 above reveals diverse perceptions among participants regarding the ideologies in question. 15 participants, represented by the longest orange bar, identified conservative ideology as the most representative. 13 participants, shown by the red bar, opted for socialist ideology. 11 participants, illustrated by the dark blue bar, chose liberalism. Interestingly, given the total number of participants is 65, more than 15 participants selected the “Not sure” option, represented by the longest pink bar, while 10 participants, indicated by the light blue bar, responded with “I don’t know”. In terms of ideological awareness, the variety of responses is expected and may be considered reasonable, as it reflects each participant’s individual perspective and political affiliation . However, the significant number of participants who are either unsure or do not know the ideologies in question raises concerns about their knowledge and engagement in politics.

Shifting from a general overview to a detailed focus, the analysis now investigates the participants’ perceptions of the three selected political parties examined: the CU, the PJD, and the SUPF. Question Eight assesses how participants view the social efficiency of the political discourse of these parties. As depicted in Graph 5, the findings are very interesting regarding the mental images participants may use to interpret the discourse of the parties in question.

Graph 5- Participants' recognition of the discourse of the CU, PJD, and SUPF parties.

Of these following Moroccan parties, which political party delivers a socially persuasive speech? (More than one possible answer)

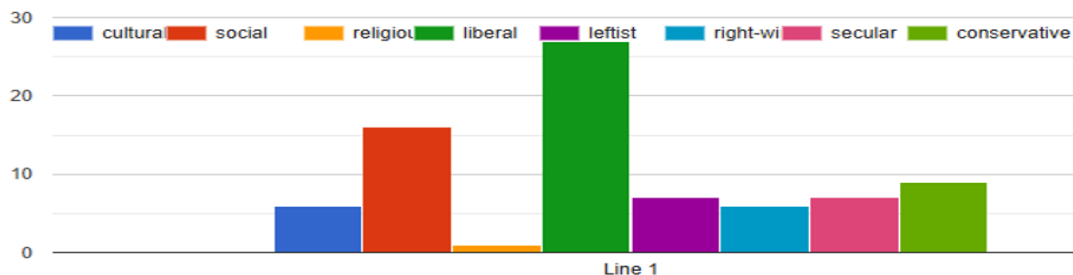


Statistically, nearly 40 participants (out of 65 participants), represented by the longest green bar, indicated that they “don’t know” these parties. This high percentage of participants admitting their lack of knowledge suggests a widespread unfamiliarity with these parties and potentially the discourse they present. The remaining participants were almost evenly split between the SUPF and the PJD, with about 10 participants each, as shown by the orange and blue bars, respectively, while only 5 participants indicated by the red bar preferred the CU party.

Questions Nine, Ten, and Eleven are designed to clearly grasp the public’s awareness of the ideologies of the parties in question. The questions are in a multiple-answer format to help determine whether the participants have a singular view of each party’s ideology. This means that if the participants choose multiple options, it may indicate that they are uncertain or hold a clearer understanding of the parties’ ideological positions. Consequently, Graphs 6, 7, and 8 below summarize the participants’ perceptions of the ideologies adopted by the CU, PJD, and SUPF parties in their discourses.

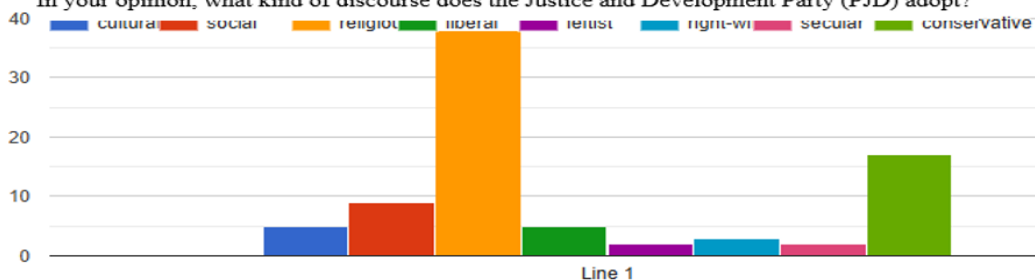
Graph 6- Participants' views on the ideological orientation of the CU party's discourse.

In your opinion, what kind of discourse does the Constitutional Union Party (CU) adopt?



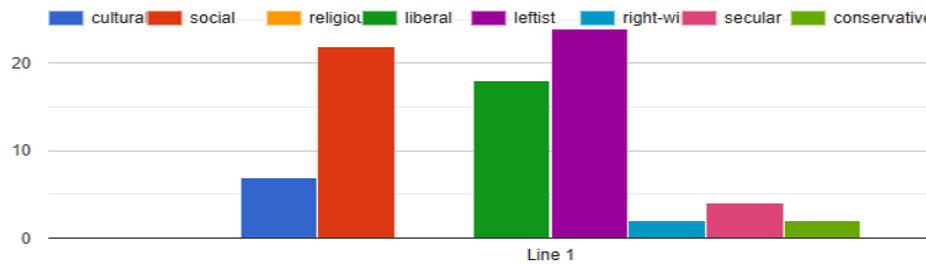
Graph 7- Participants' views on the ideological orientation of the PJD party's discourse.

In your opinion, what kind of discourse does the Justice and Development Party (PJD) adopt?



Graph 8- *Participants’ views on the ideological orientation of the SUPF’s party’s discourse.*

In your opinion, what kind of discourse does the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (SUPF) adopt?



Graph 6 above reveals that the participants perceive the CU party’s ideology differently. Over 25 individuals perceive the party adopts a liberal discourse, as shown by the longest green bar. In contrast, nearly 23% of the participants, represented by the red bar, believe that the CU espouses a socialist discourse. About 13% of respondents, indicated by the light-green bar, consider the CU’s discourse conservative. Additionally, more than 6 participants, depicted by the purple bar, think that the CU adopts a leftist narrative, while an equal number, shown by the pink bar, considers that the party promotes a secular discourse. Furthermore, 5 participants, represented by the light-blue bar, believe that the CU has a right-wing discourse. Notably, almost 10% of the participants, illustrated by the dark-blue bar, identify the CU’s discourse as rooted in cultural values.

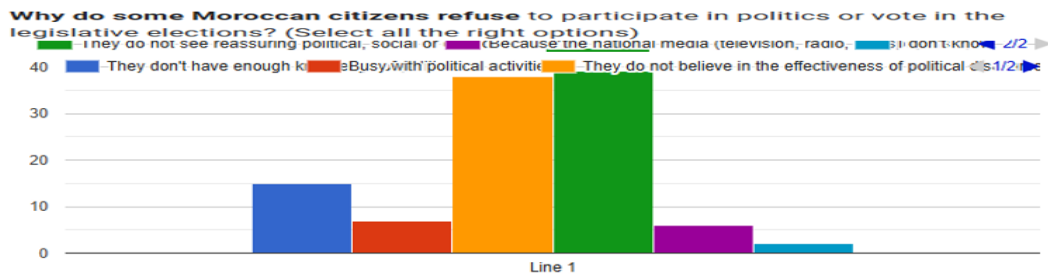
Moving on to the participants’ perceptions of the PJD’s political ideology as reflected in its discourse, Graph 7 presents the results for Question Ten and reveals diverse views as well. Almost half of the participants, approximately 53%, perceive the PJD as having a religious discourse, as indicated by the longest bar in the graph. In contrast, more than 26% of the participants, represented by the green bar, believe that the PJD adopts a socialist discourse. The remaining responses show a range of opinions: 9 participants consider the discourse to be socialist, 5 perceive it as cultural, and another 5 view it as liberal. Additionally, 2 participants each identify the PJD’s discourse as leftist or secular, while 3 respondents perceive it as rightist.

Examining the participants’ perceptions of the SUPF’s discourse, as detailed in Question Eleven and illustrated in Graph 8 above, we notice that there is a close distribution between those who view the SUPF’s discourse as leftist (approximately 36%, represented by the longest purple bar) and those who identify it as socialist (about 33%, shown in the right bar). Additionally, 27% of the participants, depicted by the green bar, associate the SUPF with liberalism. Notably, some participants selected “cultural,” “secular,” and “rightist” to describe the SUPF’s discourse. It is crucial to recall here that these terms are deliberately used as distractors in Questions Six, Nine, Ten, and Eleven to assess whether the participants might select them due to unfamiliarity with the ideologies of the parties in question. As the results in Graph 8 show, 10% of the participants perceive SUPF’s discourse as cultural, about 6% think it is secular, and 3% each as rightist or conservative.

Question Twelve focuses on the participants’ perspectives on the reasons behind public reluctance to participate in political activities, particularly voting in legislative elections. This question offers multiple answers and allows participants to express whether they see themselves as partly responsible for this reluctance. As illustrated in Graph 9 (p. 214), the aim of this question is to assess the social impact of

Moroccan political discourse and its effectiveness in encouraging public engagement in politics.

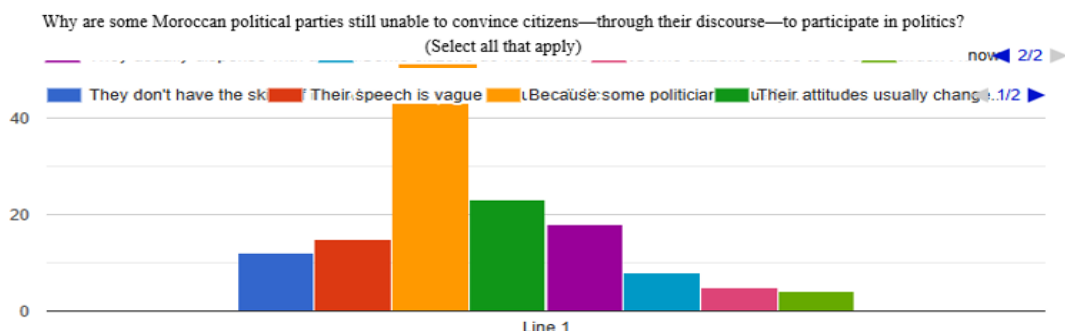
Graph 9- Participants' perspectives on social reluctance to political engagement.



Graph 9 reveals that over 56% of the participants, represented by the long orange bar, do not believe in the social effectiveness of the parties' discourse. More than 58% of the participants, illustrated by the longest green bar, point out that reluctant individuals do not believe in the role of politics to ensure social, economic, and political reforms. The graph also shows that 15 participants attribute this reluctance to insufficient political knowledge, while over 7% believe it is because people are preoccupied with other activities and not engaged in political activities. These findings indicate a dual vision: first, most participants express mistrust in the Moroccan political discourse; second, a significant number of participants express a shared responsibility for the public's lack of political interest.

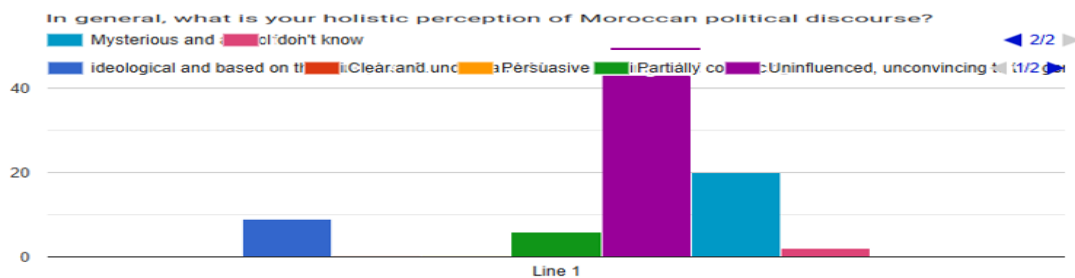
Question Thirteen, closely related to Question Twelve, focuses on the role of Moroccan political parties in disseminating a convincing discourse to encourage public participation in politics. Linguistically, Question Thirteen, as illustrated in Graph 10 below, examines whether the participants attribute their political disinterest to their level of engagement or to the perceived lack of effective communication skills and persuasive methods among politicians. According to the collected answers, most participants opted for multiple answers, despite the fact that each answer option represented a different potential reason. In analyzing the participants' responses, over 66% of the participants, represented by the longest orange bar, believe that politicians usually do not keep the promises they make in their discourse. More than 22 participants, represented by the green bar, think that most politicians frequently alter their ideological perspectives and political stances. Over 27% of responses reflect the belief that politicians do not remain loyal to their party's principles, which highlights the participants' sense of mistrust in the parties' ideologies. Another notable aspect is that 22% of participants perceive politicians' discourse as *unrealistic* or *vague*, while nearly 18% believe that politicians lack accurate communication skills and effective persuasive methods.

Graph 10- Participants' perspectives on the main reasons behind social reluctance toward political engagement.



Questions Fourteen and Fifteen are designed to reinforce our understanding of how the participants view Moroccan political discourse in general, with Question Fourteen focusing specifically on the discourse’s social impact. As Graph 11 below illustrates, the participants were asked to evaluate whether the Moroccan political discourse is clear, understandable, convincing, and influential. The responses reveal that none of the participants selected the options “Clear and understandable” or “Convincing and influential.” Conversely, more than 65% of participants, represented by the longest purple bar in Graph 11, categorized the discourse as “Unconvincing and not influential to the general public,” while more than 30%, shown by the light-blue bar, described it as “*Vague and metaphorical.*” Still in relation to the participants’ perceptions, we see that fewer than 10 participants believe that the discourse is “Ideological and based on party principles,” while fewer than 5 participants consider it “Partially convincing.”

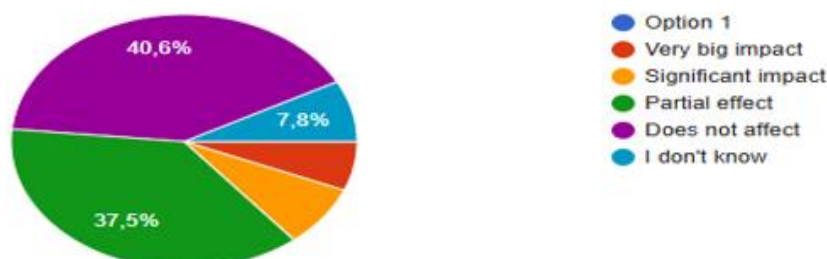
Graph 11- *Participants’ General Perception of Moroccan Political Discourse.*



In Question Fifteen, we questioned the participants about the effectiveness of Moroccan political discourse on a scale ranging from “not effective” to “very effective.” The results highlight the participants’ *doubtful view* of the social efficiency of Moroccan political discourse. As shown in Graph 12 below, the largest purple section of the graph shows that 40.6% of participants consider the discourse “not effective.” More than 37% of participants, illustrated by the green section, consider it “partially effective.” Only a small fraction of participants perceives Moroccan political discourse as effective or very effective, and more than 7% of participants selected the option “I don’t know.” Based on the collected answers, we notice that most participants chose terms with *negative connotations* to describe the discourse, such as “Partially convincing,” “Unconvincing,” “Not influential,” “Vague,” and “Metaphorical.” Similarly, the majority of participants in Question Fifteen reaffirmed their mistrust in the social effectiveness of the discourse. This prevailing sentiment among responses indicates that most participants hold a *pessimistic* view of the effectiveness of Moroccan political discourse.

Graph 12- *Participants’ Reinforcement of Unfavorable Perspectives of Moroccan Political Discourse.*

To what extent does the Moroccan political discourse affect the percentage of citizens' interest in politics?



The last question of our survey, Question Sixteen, examined the participants' views on the current political situation in Morocco. This question provided participants the opportunity to express their *perceptions* and offer suggestions regarding the primary reasons behind the reluctance of some Moroccan citizens to engage in politics, and to participate in elections in particular. This question, in keeping with the research's linguistic focus, was designed to assess whether participants would connect the ability of Moroccan political discourse to foster public involvement with the extent to which it reflects the parties' ideologies. The data reveal that a total of 35 participants responded to this question, with 5 indicating 'no' response. The remaining 30 responses provide valuable insights into the overall *social cognition* regarding political engagement in Morocco. According to these answers, a widespread "crisis of trust" is prevalent in the public. This is shown by the participants' frequent articulation of *negative phrases* such as 'فقدان الثقة' (loss of trust) and 'ثقة' (crisis of trust). Another prominent theme is the participants' disappointment with political promises and perceived *manipulation*. They express dissatisfaction with how political leaders address the needs and expectations of their voters, particularly after elections. Phrases that reflect the participants' *mental frustration* in this vein are like 'عدم الوفاء بالوعد' (failure to keep promises) and 'الكذب' (lies, monopolization, and plundering of resources). Some participants argue that there is a significant disconnection between the political elite and the general populace. The participants' answers also show that they have a *stored image* of what they called the frequently changing stances of the politicians (تغيير المواقف) and the dubious practices (الممارسات الحزبية المشبوهة) of the politicians in Morocco.

Analytical discussion

1. From political unawareness to disconnected frameworks

Analyzing the questionnaire data through Van Dijk's mental model (2008) enabled us to construe how the Moroccan public receives and interprets the parties' discourse. A preliminary remark to highlight is that a significant portion of the participants expressed their low familiarity with political issues. Throughout the analysis of the collected replies, we have come across the paradoxical nature of a great number of the participants' answers, which indicates a biased conception of the parties' discourse and ideologies. It can be argued that the limited knowledge and understanding of political discourse contributes to the current *dominant pessimistic view* among the Moroccan public regarding the parties in question. This draws attention to the mental representations that the political discourse receivers use to decode political discourse. According to Van Dijk's (2008) mental model theory, the citizens, whose *cognitive processes* are of interest here, are believed to use their *subjective mental models*, stored in memories (LTM and STM), to evaluate political parties (Van Dijk, pp. 160-162). This cognitive process involves the retrieval of *episodic memories* and *cultural symbols* that influence the citizens' understanding of political discourse. This suggests that *negative episodic memories* are present in the participants' cognition of discourse. We have noticed that the participants refer to political scandals or broken promises to decode the parties' perspectives, regardless of whether this judgment is true or not. This shows that, arguably, the participants' mental models are insufficiently equipped to process or decode the complexity of the received ideologies of the parties in question.

At this point of analysis, it is crucial to highlight the conviction that politicians often use particular ideological constructs to reflect their own cognitive frameworks. Van Dijk (2008) argues that politicians typically tailor their discourse to align with the mental models of their audience, using *familiar linguistic registers* and symbols to facilitate understanding and persuasion. This means that, as Van Dijk points out (pp. 159-160), when discourse producers (politicians) articulate a language that is familiar to their

recipients (the public), this language promotes a more intuitive *cognitive process* in which the recipients are guided to focus on specific information and follow directives. However, in the case of the questionnaire's findings, the issue is as follows: the participants lack familiarity with the ideologies being presented. This disconnect complicates their ability to engage with the political discourse effectively, because their cognitive frameworks do not align with or interact meaningfully with the received political content. The implication of this cognitive misalignment is significant, as it creates a communication barrier that causes participants to perceive politicians' narratives as unclear or incoherent.

2. *Static social cognition to politics*

The questionnaire findings show that there are gaps between what parties are trying to communicate and how the public perceives their messages. Most participants find Moroccan political discourse to be vague, inconsistent, and unconvincing. Van Dijk (2008) emphasizes the important role of *social dimensions* in shaping *public perceptions* (p. 213). Based on this, it can be posited that participants construct their understanding from *social images* and contexts. According to the examined responses, the reliance on these *pre-determined images* of the parties' social roles explains why participants perceive political discourse from a single static dimension. The issue with these social dimensions is that participants focus on social roles rather than the ideologies of the parties in question. This perception, which appears biased, fosters a continuous sense of political disaffection among the public. This trend is evident in the analysis of Question Sixteen, which allowed participants to express their overall perceptions of the social effectiveness of Moroccan political discourse and the underlying reasons for their reluctance to engage in politics. Most responses lead us to construe a *static social cognition* centered on the following themes: lack of trust, unfulfilled promises, deceptive practices, monopolization, and resource exploitation. It is important to recall that the analysis of parties' official and public discourse reveals that parties often shift their ideological stances to make their discourse more adaptable and persuasive. This balancing act adds further confusion and reinforces the existing social cognition.

Conclusion

The research concludes that most participants demonstrate limited political engagement and familiarity with political ideologies, as evidenced by vague and sometimes contradictory responses that reflect a broader misunderstanding among the Moroccan public. This highlights the misalignment between the cognitive frameworks of politicians and citizens, which contributes to miscommunication. For this reason, participants interpret political discourse through their own biased social cognition and thus perceive party ideologies as often obscure. Another point to highlight is that participants tend to evaluate political discourse based on the perceived social roles of parties rather than their stated ideologies. Here, participants' evaluations of parties' discourse are shaped by pre-existing mental models that incorporate negative social dimensions. Practically, instead of focusing on ideological content, the observed social dissatisfaction with political discourse is frequently expressed through a choice of linguistic terms imbued with negative connotations, such as mistrust, unfulfilled promises, and unclear political messages. The research therefore indicates that misconceptions about Moroccan political discourse are filtered through socially ingrained, pre-existing, biased mental models, which do not enable citizens to accurately interpret or grasp the foundational ideologies and disseminated messages of the political parties in question. Considering the ideological challenges, we highlight the role of increased political literacy among the public as a key mechanism to align citizens' mental models with parties' cognitive frameworks, a process that can lead to more coherent and effective social awareness of political communication in Morocco.

Limitations

This study is limited by its focus on the discourse of only three political parties representing the main ideological poles in Morocco; consequently, the findings may differ according to the degree of ideological flexibility of other parties' discourse if they were included in the study. Moreover, in our current study, our linguistic analysis may seem general because it focused on the language of recipients who displayed an overall ideological misalignment and static social cognition. However, another portion of the public, although likely small, may decode Moroccan political discourse effectively based on a rational understanding of party ideologies rather than on negatively constructed episodic memories and mental images, which limits the applicability of our findings to all Moroccan citizens.

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