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MOROCCO COPING WITH THE **COVID-19** PANDEMIC: FROM TRUST TO ANXIETY

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Introduction

The data presented in this Policy Brief focus on the Moroccan population's perception of the Covid-19 pandemic and the public policies designed to curb it. These data are derived from a survey conducted by the Policy Center for the New South based on 3 waves of public attitude surveys carried out by IPSOS Morocco in June, July and September 2020. This survey is part of the « Attitudes Towards Covid-19 » research program, conducted with a consortium of international academic partners (Sciences Po, Harvard Business School, Bocconi University, among others)¹. This program aims to compare data collected in 8 European countries, 7 African countries – including Morocco – as well as Brazil, Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand².

At the beginning of the pandemic, Moroccans welcomed the intervention of His Majesty King Mohammed VI to mobilize the nation against the pandemic. They also welcomed the instructions given to the Royal Armed Forces (FAR) to support the health authorities with military health logistics, as well as the guidance extended to the government to support vulnerable populations and the national economy.

The 3 waves of surveys carried out under this study give indications on the period from the end of the lockdown (June) to the second half of September. The analysis of these 3 waves shows that, at the end of the lockdown, Moroccans expressed confidence in the management of the epidemic by the governance institutions (Police and Gendarmerie) and the (civil and military) medical corps and in the policies implemented to cope with it. In addition, Moroccans had relatively limited fears about the health future of the country, although they expressed concern about the economic repercussions of the pandemic. In the following period, (from June to the second half of September), confidence in the institutions remained strong. But, doubts about the effectiveness of the policy and, more broadly, feelings of concern about the future have grown over the weeks. A similar trend was observed in other countries, with the resurgence of a persisting pandemic which made its health, economic, psychological and social effects increasingly felt.

1. For a presentation of this program and the partners it has brought together, see: <https://www.sciencespo.fr/cevipof/fr/content/attitudes-des-citoyens-face-au-covid-19>

2. Each program partner submitted the same questionnaire in the country surveyed, while adapting it to local circumstances.

A survey on Morocco in three waves: June, July and September 2020

The survey is based on an analysis of the responses provided to the same questionnaire in the three waves. The sample for each wave is representative of the Moroccan population over 18 years of age in terms of age, gender, region of origin and occupation³. The questionnaire was submitted online or over the phone. The questions asked are related to the perception of the pandemic, its present and future consequences and the public policies implemented to deal with it⁴.

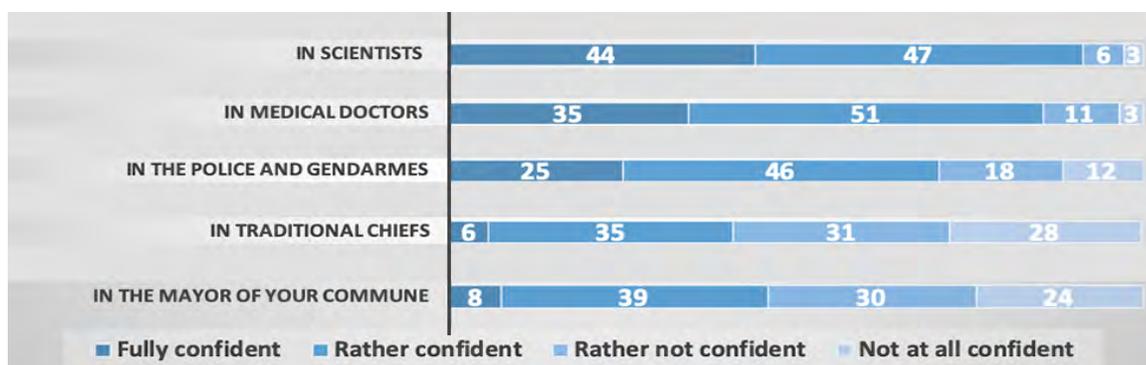
The three waves of surveys focus on key moments of the pandemic in the country: the end of the lockdown period (survey wave 1, in June), the beginning of deconfinement (survey wave 2, in July) and, finally, the second half of September (survey wave 3), during which the pandemic resumed in Morocco in a critical way.

June (survey wave 1): strong confidence in the institutions and groups involved in the fight against the pandemic

The major lesson learned from the first wave (June 2020) is the confidence that the interviewees showed, just before the end of the lockdown, in the institutions directly involved in the fight against the pandemic as well as in the measures taken by the authorities to combat the disease. Concerns for the economic future and a sense of unease also appeared in this difficult context.

– Confidence in the governance institutions and in the (civil and military) medical corps is, first of all, to be seen clearly in the data collected. Thus, 71% of the respondents said they have « full confidence » or are « rather confident » in the « police and gendarmes »; 86% express the same opinion about « doctors » and 91% about « scientists ». Confidence in « traditional chiefs », or elected officials such as mayors amounts to 41% and 47% respectively (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Level of confidence in the groups



3. For the first two waves, the sample was adjusted to be representative in terms of occupation. For the third wave, the original sample was representative of the population for this criterion. The first two samples consisted of about 1,000 people; the third sample consisted of about 1,500 people.

4. The questions, as well as the answers given in each of these three waves, are presented exhaustively in three separate documents on the web page of the survey. The following data used, as well as the tables, are derived from these three documents. See <https://www.policycenter.ma/content/attitudes-des-citoyens-face-au-covid-19>.

– The measures taken by the government seemed to be broadly approved by the respondents in June, with 87% of them saying they were « strongly in favor » or « rather in favor » of a « general lockdown », 86% in favor of « establishing a curfew », 90% in favor of « closing schools and universities », 88% in favor of « closing non-essential businesses » and 92% in favor of « banning non-essential travels » (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Opinion on the general lockdown of the population with the prohibition to leave one’s home (except for medical reasons and for food)

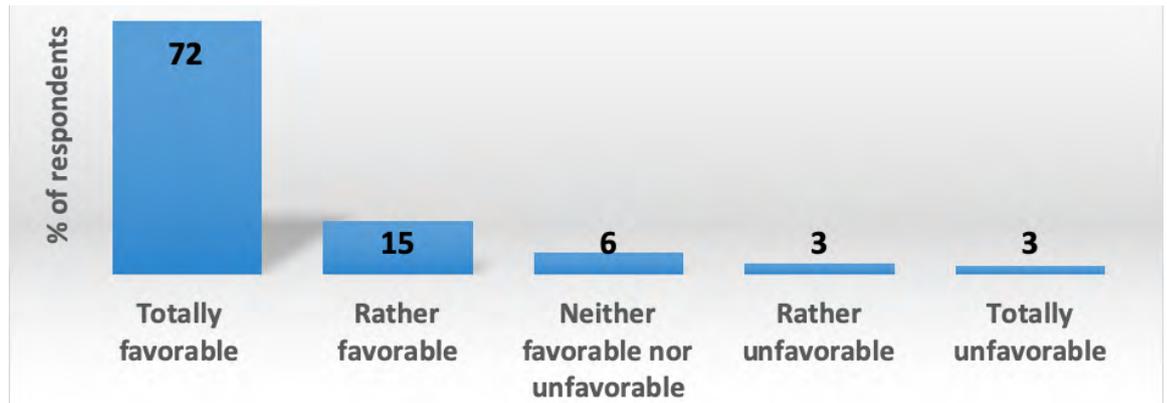


Figure 2: Opinion on the closure of non-essential businesses (cafés, non-food and health stores)

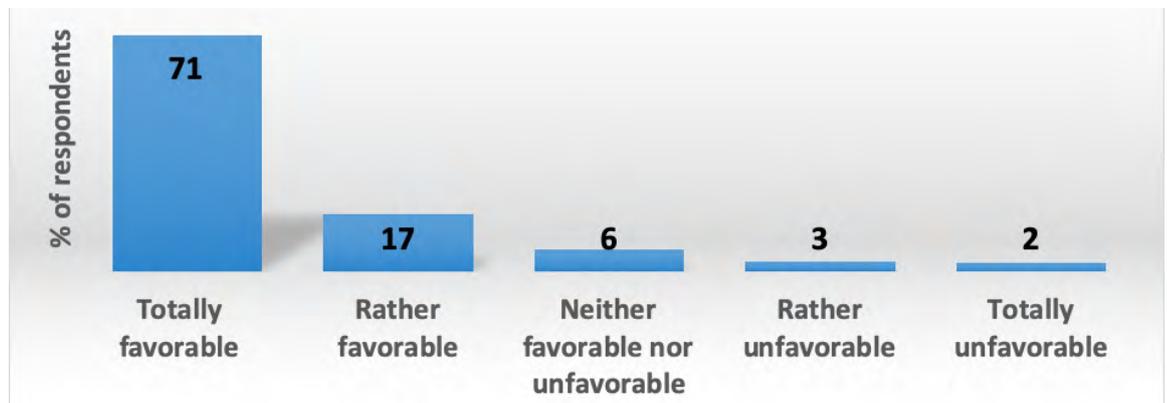


Figure 2 : Opinion on the establishment of a curfew and movement control by the police, gendarmerie, and armed forces

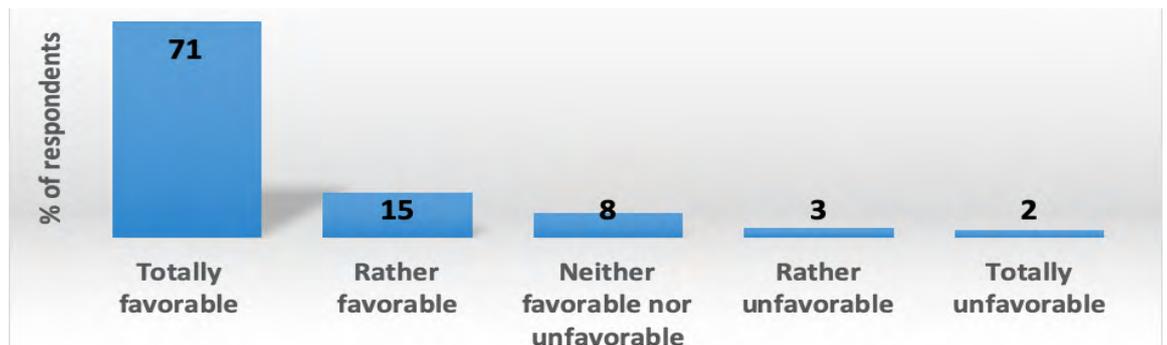


Figure 2 : Opinion on closing schools and universities

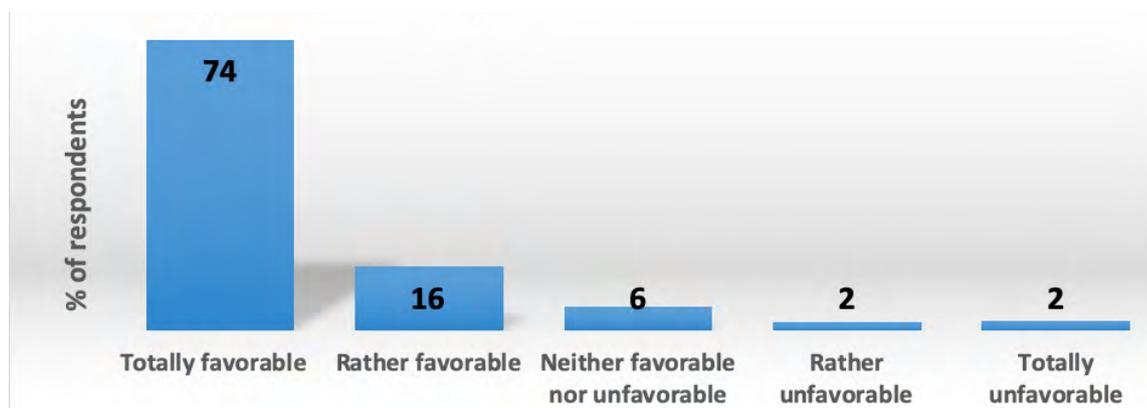
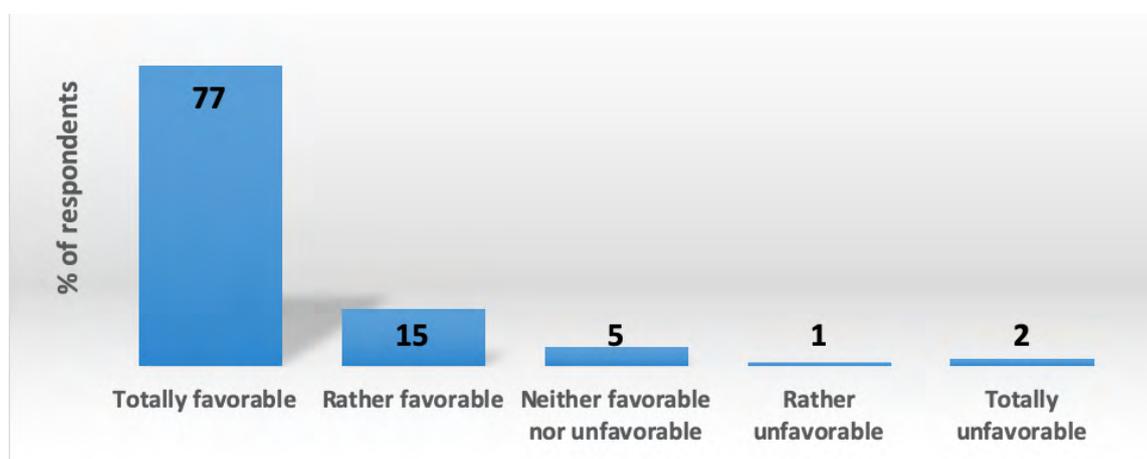


Figure 2 : Opinion on the prohibition of non-essential travels



– Adherence to these measures goes hand in hand with a positive evaluation of « government action » in managing the health crisis – 81% of respondents said they were « completely satisfied » or « rather satisfied » – and, to a lesser extent, of « the action of the head of government »: on a satisfaction scale graded from 0 to 10, 24% of respondents rated their level of satisfaction between 0 and 3, while 43% of respondents rated their level of satisfaction between 4 and 6 and 24% of respondents rated their level of satisfaction between 7 and 10.

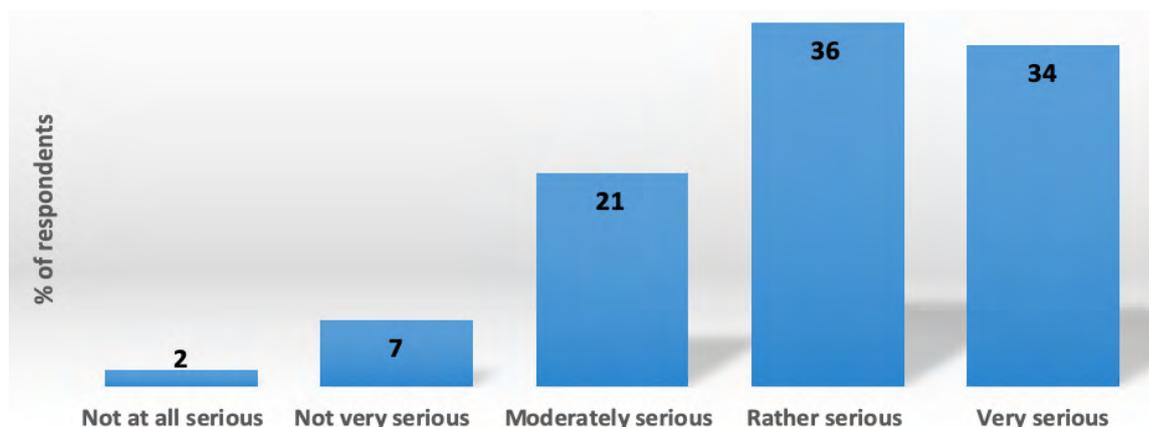
– The answers given in this first wave also show a relatively moderate concern about the future health situation: 68% of the respondents considered that they had « no chance », or « a moderate chance », of catching the disease one day; 76% considered that the consequences of Covid-19 on health in Morocco were « moderately serious » or « not at all serious ». Finally, 62% of the respondents considered as pessimistic⁵ the prediction of a total of 1,000 deaths caused by the pandemic in Morocco⁶.

5. The level of pessimism attributed to this prediction is measured on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 standing for maximum pessimism. 62% of the respondents assigned a value between 0 and 4 to this prediction, with 35% of them assigning a value of 0. In other words, 35% consider it extremely pessimistic, i.e. they estimate that there will certainly be less than 1,000 deaths in total caused by the Coronavirus in Morocco.

6. As of 25 October, 3,301 people were officially reported dead from Coronavirus in Morocco.

– On the other hand, there was a clear concern about the economic situation. While the measures taken by the government seemed to be broadly approved by the population (Figure 2), 36% of the respondents considered them to be « rather insufficient » or « truly insufficient » in economic terms; and 70% of the respondents said they believe the pandemic will have « rather serious » or « very serious » consequences for the economy in Morocco (Figure 3). The financial situation of the households probably explains this concern: 40% of the people questioned reported to be currently in the absolute incapacity to face an expenditure amounting to MAD 2,000 that they would not have foreseen. Only 21% considered they would certainly or probably be able to do so⁷.

Figure 3: Perception of the consequences of the epidemic on the economy



– From a psychological point of view, the survey reveals, first of all, that the overall assessment of the quality of daily life, as reported by the respondents, is not radically negative during this very last period of the lockdown. Regarding the level of satisfaction with the life currently experienced, measured on a scale of 1 to 10, 56% of respondents rated it between 6 and 10. However, a perceptible sense of uneasiness nevertheless emerges in the responses as soon as we go into detail: 67% of respondents said they had experienced during the last two weeks « at least several days of despondency, depression or loss of hope », and 81% « several days of markedly diminished interest or pleasure in activities ».

From June to the second half of September: a growing sense of concern and mistrust, modulated differently depending on the institutions and areas concerned

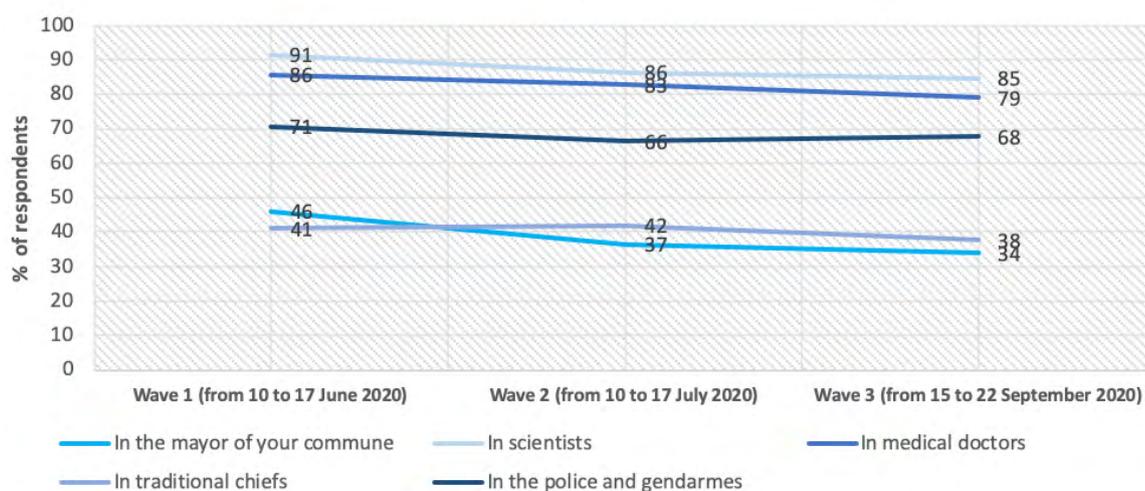
As of July, the number of cases of Covid-19 and deaths related to the disease continued to increase in Morocco. In correlation with this evolution, the second wave of the survey and, even more so, the third, showed a decrease in all confidence indicators and an increase in the sense of anxiety among the populations surveyed. However, the extent of this change varies, depending on the institutions, groups and areas concerned.

– Confidence in the governance institutions – the Police and Gendarmerie – the (civil

7. On a scale of 0 to 10, 21% of respondents answered this question with a value between 10 and 7 (inclusive).

and military) medical corps and scientists, decreased slightly, but remained at a high level: 68% of respondents said they « rather trust » or « completely trust » the police and the gendarmes (71% in June), 79% trust doctors (86% in June) and 85% trust scientists (91% in June). The decline in confidence also affected traditional chiefs (-3% compared to June, to reach a level of 38% who « rather trust » or « totally trust ») and, more significantly, mayors (-12% par rapport compared to June, to reach a level of 34 % of those who « rather trust » or « totally trust ») (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Level of confidence in the groups: % of respondents who said they “Total trust” or “Rather trust” (change from wave 1 to wave 3)



– Measures taken by the government after the lockdown to loosen the stranglehold of restrictions on schools, universities, businesses and travels seem to be in line with the changing wishes of the population on these issues: for example, in June, 90% of those surveyed were strongly in favor or somewhat in favor of closing schools and universities; by the end of September, only 55% were in favor.

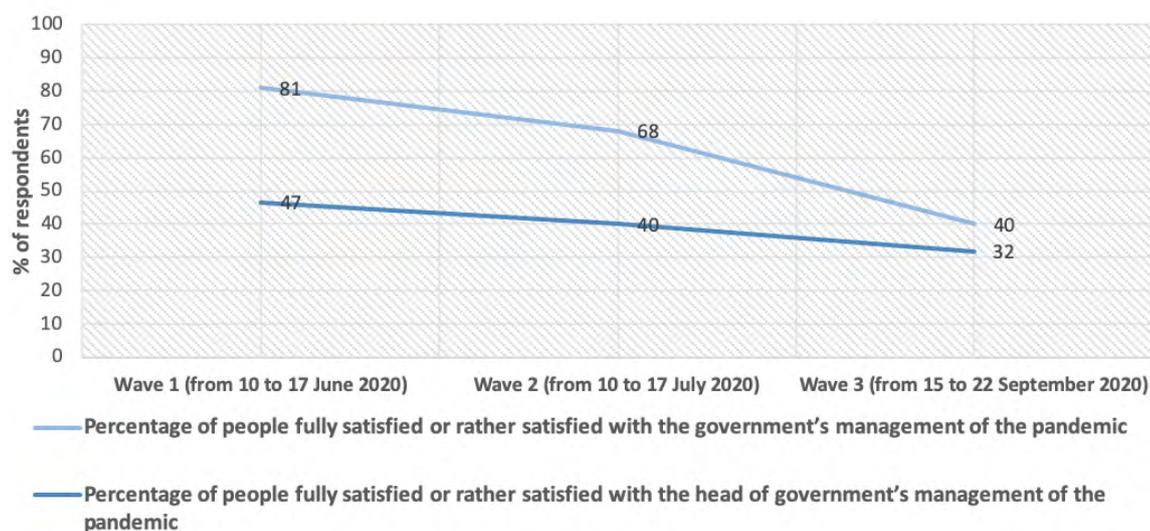
– However, the overall assessment of « government management of the pandemic » has deteriorated. In June, 81% of those surveyed said they were « fully satisfied » or « rather satisfied ». In September, they were 40% (Figure 5). Among those who were not satisfied, 29% said they were « not at all satisfied ».

The same applies to the assessment of the « action of the head of government ». In June, 47% of those surveyed gave a positive or rather positive⁸ evaluation of it. In September, they were 32% (Figure 5). And 43% of the respondents had a high level of dissatisfaction⁹.

8. The evaluation of the « action of the head of government » is measured here on the basis of the answers to a question in which respondents were asked to evaluate it on a satisfaction scale graduated from 0 to 10.

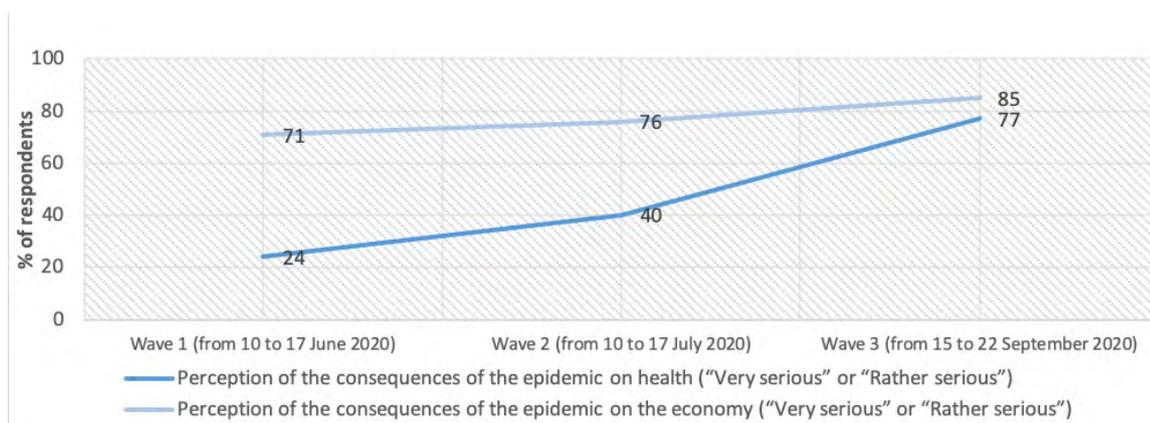
9. 43% of respondents rated their level of satisfaction with the action of the head of government between 0 and 2 (inclusive), on a scale of 0 to 10.

Figure 5: Level of satisfaction with the government's management of the pandemic and with the action of the head of government (evolution from Wave 1 to Wave 3)



– The percentage of people who consider that they have « no chance » or « a moderate chance » of catching the disease has decreased from 68% to 55% between June and September. At the end September, 77% of those surveyed considered the health consequences of the pandemic in Morocco to be « rather serious » or « very serious », compared with 24% in June (Figure 6). In addition, 37% of people considered as pessimistic the prediction of a total of 1,000 deaths caused by the pandemic in Morocco¹⁰, compared to 62% in June¹¹.

Figure 6: Perception of the consequences of the epidemic on the economy and health: % of people who answered "Very serious" or "Rather serious" (evolution from Wave 1 to Wave 3)"



10. As of 25 October, as noted above, 3,301 people were officially reported dead from Coronavirus in Morocco.

11. The level of pessimism attributed to this prediction is measured on a scale of 0 to 10, 0 standing for maximum pessimism. 37% of the respondents assigned a value between 0 and 4 to this prediction, of which 18% assigned a value of 0. In other words, 18% consider it extremely pessimistic, i.e. they estimate that there will be certainly be less than 1,000 deaths in total caused by the Coronavirus in Morocco.

- Concern about the economic situation also increased from June onwards. In September, 85% of respondents considered the pandemic to have « rather serious » or « very serious » consequences for the Moroccan economy, compared with 71% in June (Figure 6). Finally, 39% of respondents said they were currently unable to meet an expenditure amounting to MAD 2,000 that they would not have anticipated, a percentage very close to that of June. Only 21% of those surveyed considered that they could do so with certainty or probably¹².
- Psychologically, the situation has also deteriorated. Thus, regarding the level of satisfaction with the life currently experienced, measured on a scale of 1 to 10, 49% of respondents rated it from 6 to 10 in September, compared to 56% in June. The frequency of signs of discomfort remains fairly stable between survey waves 1 and 3. Thus, 70% of respondents said they had experienced « at least several days of despondency, depression or loss of hope during the last two weeks » in September, compared to 67% in June. As to the « marked decrease in interest or pleasure in activities in the last two weeks », it went from 81% in June to 80% in September. This change reflects a form of general deterioration in the sense of well-being.

Conclusion

In total, these 3 survey waves show that confidence in the government, elected officials and the measures they have taken to combat the pandemic has dwindled between June and September in Morocco. At the same time, concerns about the country's health and economic situation increased. As in many countries, this development seems to be closely linked to the pandemic. Indeed, reported cases of Covid-19 and deaths related to the disease increased sharply in Morocco in August and September.

Beyond the evolution of the pandemic itself and its consequences, however, the Moroccan population seems to keep confidence in the governance institutions and the medical profession.

12. On a scale of 1 to 10, 21% of respondents answered this question with a value between 10 and 7 (inclusive).

About the authors,

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About the Policy Center for the New South

The Policy Center for the New South: A public good for strengthening public policy.

The Policy Center for the New South (PCNS) is a Moroccan think tank tasked with the mission of contributing to the improvement of international, economic and social public policies that challenge Morocco and Africa as integral parts of the Global South. The PCNS advocates the concept of an open, responsible and proactive « new South »; a South that defines its own narratives, as well as the mental maps around the Mediterranean and South Atlantic basins, within the framework of an open relationship with the rest of the world. Through its work, the think tank aims to support the development of public policies in Africa and to give experts from the South a voice in the geopolitical developments that concern them. This positioning, based on dialogue and partnerships, consists in cultivating African expertise and excellence, capable of contributing to the diagnosis and solutions to African challenges.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author.



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