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Local Election Results Underscore Morocco's Model of Reform: Voters Deliver Gains for Women, Youth, Local Communities, Assert Moroccan Identity in Western Sahara

Contrast with other elections in region noted by *Washington Post* column, "In Morocco, An Alternative to Iran;" Morocco cited as positive model on democracy, human rights

Washington, DC – With follow-up community council action and polling results now in, the message from voters who turned out in very high numbers for Morocco's recent local elections is seen as validation for key elements of the nation's ongoing reforms and political transformation—elevating women and young candidates to positions of leadership, empowering local communities to take more control of their future, and ensuring elections are transparent, free, and fair. Voters in the Western Sahara region sent a strong message asserting their identification with Morocco, registering the nation's highest level of voter participation in the internationally monitored elections.

The contrast with other recent elections in the region was noted by [Washington Post](#) columnist Anne Applebaum in a June 30 column written from Rabat, "In Morocco, An Alternative to Iran." She credited Morocco for finding both the will and a way to change democratically, which offered a model for other Muslim and Arab nations:

"[Morocco] has over the past decade undergone a slow but profound transformation from traditional monarchy to constitutional monarchy, acquiring along the way real political parties, a relatively free press, new political leaders—the mayor of Marrakesh is a 33-year-old [woman](#)—and a set of family laws that strive to be compatible both with Sharia and international conventions on human rights."

Large numbers of Moroccans—more than 7 million from 1,503 communities (52% voter turnout nationwide)—went to the polls for the June local elections, held every six years to fill nearly 28,000 local and regional council positions and select members of the national Chamber of Counselors. The highest level of voter turnout (67%) came in the Moroccan-region of the Western Sahara, where local residents asserted their Moroccan identity with enthusiastic participation in the elections, rejecting [a call by the Polisario Front](#) to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon to keep Sahrawis in the disputed region from voting.

Voters gave some of the most dramatic gains to women, who made up 17% of those elected—including Fatima Zahra Mansouri, [the first female mayor](#) of Marrakesh, one of Morocco's largest cities and key tourist centers. Participation by young people during this election cycle—60% of the nearly 2 million newly registered voters were between the ages of 18 to 35—was impressive, as was the election of 21-year-old Fatima Boujenah, Morocco's youngest ever female local council leader, from the southern Moroccan community of Tata.

The *Washington Post* column in particular noted the success of Morocco's Truth and Reconciliation Commission—unprecedented in the region—which was established in 2004 and held public, televised hearings to investigate alleged human rights violations from Morocco's past. The independent commission's final recommendations, including judicial reforms and compensation to thousands of victims of past abuses, were endorsed and implemented by King Mohammed VI and Morocco's parliament.

"These achievements are part of Morocco's broader success story of substantial and real reforms, promoted by King Mohammed VI and Morocco's elected leaders, and validated by voters in Morocco's local elections," said Robert M. Holley, executive director of the Moroccan American Center for Policy. "Today, millions of Moroccans are saying "yes" to both the rewards and responsibilities of a stronger democracy and increasingly open political system. That's setting a positive standard for other nations across the region."

"I was in the Sahara the last week of the election campaign and was especially impressed with the enthusiasm of local party leaders and voters promoting their candidates day and night across the region," said Holley. "Their active campaigning and high voter turnout sends a clear signal beyond Morocco about how many Sahrawis paid attention to the Polisario's repeated calls for a boycott to the UN to stop them from voting for their own local leadership."

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The Moroccan American Center for Policy (MACP) is a non-profit organization whose principal mission is to inform opinion makers, government officials and interested publics in the United States about political and social developments in Morocco and the role being played by the Kingdom of Morocco in broader strategic developments in North Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East. For more, please visit www.moroccanamericanpolicy.org

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