

FAQ: Morocco's 2011 Parliamentary Elections

Morocco has held [free and fair elections](#) monitored by US and international observers in the past. How is this election different?

The upcoming elections are the first following broad constitutional reforms passed by a national referendum in Morocco in July. As in the past, [nearly 4,000 Moroccan, US, and international observers](#), including the National Democratic Institute and Morocco's National Human Rights Council, are working with Moroccan civil society leaders to train and assist in carrying out the elections as well as ensuring against irregularities on election day.



What are the Constitutional reforms and how will they strengthen Morocco's democracy?

Some of the [key reforms](#):

- ☑ Establish that the Head of Government will be appointed from the party that wins the most seats in the Parliament in the upcoming elections.
- ☑ Expand the powers of the Head of Government and the Parliament, giving them broad legislative powers.
- ☑ Empower Moroccans with more control and leadership at the local government level—making local and regional officials directly accountable to voters.
- ☑ Establish independent agencies to guarantee civil and human rights protections.
- ☑ Establish an independent judiciary with a newly mandated Constitutional Court.

Were the Constitutional reforms the King's response to the unrest of the Arab Spring?

KEY DATES

March 9, 2011 – [King Mohammed VI announces](#) the creation of an advisory commission tasked with consulting with government and civil society leaders, political parties, trade unions, and youth groups to make proposed reforms for Morocco's Constitution.

June 17, 2011 – The King announces the drafting of a new Constitution with [unprecedented and far-reaching reforms](#).

July 1, 2011 – The proposed reforms are approved in a [national referendum](#).

July 30, 2011 – The King [calls](#) for prompt parliamentary elections.

November 25, 2011 – Moroccans vote in [national parliamentary elections](#).

[Reform has been under way in Morocco for decades](#) and these efforts have improved women's rights, civil and human rights, press freedom, the business environment, social development, and education. [The most recent reforms were in the making well before the Arab Spring began](#). [Moroccan leaders acknowledge](#) that the peaceful demonstrations provided a robust space for its citizens to express their views on reforms under way in Morocco, thus quickening the pace of their implementation.

How is Morocco's reform process unique in the region?

Other countries in the region have suffered uprisings, violent repression, and the overthrow of governments. In Morocco, reforms have been proposed, debated, passed, and have begun to be implemented without regime change, and [through largely peaceful demonstrations](#). These reforms are part of an ongoing process that has made Morocco a model of reform and stability for decades.

Is the King really giving up significant powers?

Like other Constitutional monarchs, the King will now be obliged under the [new Constitution](#) to appoint the Head of Government from the party with the highest number seats in Parliament. He will also make appointments in consultation with or on the recommendation of the Head of Government. The current reforms reflect the King's vision for Moroccan subjects to become empowered Moroccan citizens.

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What will the elections mean for women in Morocco?

When the King of Morocco came to power a little over a decade ago he [publicly acknowledged](#) the lack of rights for women in his nation, declaring, "How can society achieve progress while women, who represent half the nation, see their rights violated and suffer as a result of injustice, violence, and marginalization[...]"

Since he came into power, there have been [major achievements for women's rights](#). Seven Ministries are headed by women, and 12% of Morocco's Parliament are women. Reforms to the electoral law require that a minimum of 60 of the 395 seats (15%) in Parliament go to women. The new Constitution enshrines women's equality as a [national principle](#) and provides safeguards and initiatives aimed at guaranteeing their equal status and opportunity in all aspects of society.

What role will youth have in the elections?

[Youth in Morocco are a key to its successful future](#) and their vocal activism and grassroots awareness campaigns have played an important role in the vibrant national dialogue on democratic reform and social development. Reforms to the electoral laws require that 30 seats in the new parliament be set aside specifically for candidates under the age of 35 to ensure young people's participation in the new government. Moroccan leaders have widely acknowledged that attention to demands of the youth—and their participation as registered voters and potential candidates—are key elements of the new reforms and the consultative process that produced them.

What is the likely political leaning of the new Parliament?

It is unknown which party or coalition of parties will win the highest number of seats in the election. It is certain is that Moroccans will have the opportunity to freely exercise their Constitutional right to elect leaders whom they believe will best lead the country to implement social, political, and economic reforms. At this moment, lively, public campaigns are underway by a diverse group of political parties [promising reforms, jobs, and social and civil protections](#).

What do the elections and democratic reforms mean in the context of the Western Sahara dispute?

Unlike Sahrawis, people from the Western Sahara, held in refugee camps controlled by the Polisario in Algeria, the Sahrawis who live in the Moroccan-administered Western Sahara enjoy the full rights and responsibilities guaranteed by the new Constitution—including full and equal participation in the upcoming elections to choose representatives in Morocco's national Parliament. In the past, [voter participation by Sahrawis in the Moroccan-administered Western Sahara](#) has been higher than in any other region and several of the most active and prominent members of Parliament are Sahrawis.

Isn't there a call to boycott the elections?

As in any free society, there are a small number of people in Morocco exercising their right to call for a boycott. While it is counter-productive for these small groups to attempt disrupt the reform process—instead of actively participating in it—their call does represent the broad expansion of the right to free expression that has occurred in Morocco over the last decades.

How can the US/International Community support Morocco's democratic reform efforts?

Morocco, [recently elected as a Non-Permanent Member to the UN Security Council for 2012-2013](#), continues to play a [pivotal role internationally](#) in finding peaceful, durable solutions to conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. Its track record of reforms and its ongoing efforts to strengthen its democracy—such as the upcoming elections—provide an example for the region which should be enthusiastically and publically supported by the United States and the international community.

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