

FAQ: Morocco's 2011 Parliamentary Elections

What was the turnout for the recent parliamentary elections and who won?

The voter turnout in Morocco was 45%—an increase of more than 20% from the last parliamentary elections held in 2007.

The Justice and Development Party (PJD) won the most seats, 107, at least 16 of which will be held by women; followed by Istiqlal (Independence Party, Morocco's oldest political party) with 60 seats; the National Rally for Independents (RNI) with 52 seats; and the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM), Morocco's newest political party, which ran for the first time in national elections, with 47 seats.

(Visit <http://www.moroccoonthemove.com> for a complete tally of winning parties and seats.)



Who are the PJD? Aren't they Islamists?

The Justice and Development Party (PJD) is an Islamist party active in Morocco since the early 1990's. The PJD platform focuses on educational reform, fighting corruption, international trade and investment, democracy, and human rights. The PJD fully supports His Majesty King Mohammed VI's role – unique for a ruler in the region – as Commander of The Faithful and final arbiter of religious matters in Morocco.

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.

November 29, 2011 – King names Abdelilah Benkirane, leader of the Justice and Development Party (PJD), as Prime Minister.

Under the new Constitution, the King has appointed Abdelilah Benkirane, leader of the PJD, the party which won the most seats, as Prime Minister and tasked him with forming a government. While the PJD won the most seats in the election, they must still work with other political parties to form a governing coalition.

What did the elections mean for women and youth in Morocco?

Recent reforms to Morocco's Constitution sought to increase political participation of women and youth by setting aside 60 national seats for women, including 16 from the PJD, and 30 for candidates under 40 years old. As the new government forms, women's participation is expected to continue to increase—currently seven Ministries are headed by women and the percentage of women in Parliament has now risen to 15%.

Morocco has held free and fair elections monitored by US and international observers in the past. How was this election different?

The recent elections were 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, worked with Moroccan civil society leaders to train and assist in carrying out the elections as well as ensuring against irregularities on election day.

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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?

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 is 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.

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 recent 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.

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 recent elections—provide an example for the region which should be enthusiastically and publically supported by the United States and the international community.

For more information, visit <http://www.moroccoonthemove.com/> - Follow on Twitter @MorocOnTheMove