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Parliamentary elections in Morocco: PAM well ahead of RNI and Istiqlal

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On 23 September 2026, Morocco held elections to the House of Representatives, thereby laying the party-political foundations for the next government. There were 395 seats up for election; approximately 15.8 million people were registered to vote, of whom 38 per cent turned out. For the first time, the PAM emerged as the strongest force from the election, whilst its previous coalition partners, the RNI and Istiqlal, came off second best. However, the political significance of the election extends beyond the distribution of seats. The central question is whether the accelerated economic and infrastructural development of recent years is also being reflected in the everyday lives of those sections of the population who have so far benefited from it only to a limited extent. Expectations are therefore high for the new government.

The 2011 Constitution defines Morocco as a constitutional, democratic, parliamentary and social monarchy. Under Article 47, the King appoints the Head of Government from the party that has won the most seats in the House of Representatives in the election. Since 2021, the RNI has led the government in a coalition with the PAM and Istiqlal.

The PAM has now clearly overtaken the RNI as the strongest force (97 seats to 66), although both parties continue to advocate a similar fundamental course of modernisation and investment. The transfer of power between the two parties should therefore be understood less as a choice between fundamentally opposing models of development, and more as a shift within a political framework in which the strategic objectives of national development are largely already set.

The relationship between the royal palace, the government and the political parties is crucial to this interpretation. The parties do not, in principle, compete over differing visions of the direction in which the country should develop. Rather, a significant part of the competition centres on the question of how the strategic objectives set by the palace for the country's economic and social development are to be implemented politically. This gives rise to a specific logic of accountability: if major modernisation projects are successfully implemented and economic improvements become apparent, the monarchy can claim credit for these successes. If promises are not kept or if projects lead to social and economic burdens, political responsibility falls more heavily on the government and the political parties. The election is thus a decision as to which political force will be entrusted with implementing the modernisation agenda set by the Royal Palace.

Election campaign: tough on the issues, tame on the topics

The situation in the run-up to the elections was characterised by a marked contrast. Morocco recorded real economic growth of 4.9 per cent in 2025, with around 4.4 per cent expected for 2026. At the same time, unemployment in particular remains a structural weakness. This is all the truer for 15- to 24-year-olds, whose unemployment rate stood at 37.3 per cent in 2025. Economic growth is therefore increasingly measured by whether it creates concrete opportunities for the population. The extent to which people's everyday lives can be improved formed the core of the debate during the election campaign.

Foreign, security and religious policy, by contrast, played no part in the election

campaign. The ministries responsible for these areas are regarded as 'sovereign ministries' and are appointed by the King, regardless of the election result. Consequently, migration policy and the events in Ceuta at the end of July had no significant impact on the election campaign. Essentially, the focus – if there was one at all – was on the social difficulties that leave young people, in particular, facing an uncertain future. However, first-time voters have little confidence in the political parties. Only 4 per cent of the registered electorate were aged between 18 and 24.

However, even beyond this age group, the turnout of 38 per cent (2021: 50 per cent, although regional and local elections were held at the same time; 2016: 43 per cent turnout) indicates a prevailing disillusionment with the party system. The 38 per cent figure relates solely to the population registered to vote. In fact, 56 per cent of those eligible to vote were registered before the elections. Extrapolated to the entire eligible voting population, the turnout therefore stands at 21 per cent.

PAM in the lead: Faouzi Lekjaa the new head of government?

The election has, in particular, altered the relationship between the social-liberal PAM and the economically liberal RNI. Since 2021, the RNI had been the strongest party in the governing coalition and had defended its political record primarily through its focus on economic policy and investment. During the election campaign, however, the PAM sought to position itself more strongly as an independent counterweight within the coalition. The PAM's attacks were directed primarily at the RNI and its leading figures. Despite years of cooperation, the personal attacks were unusually harsh. The PAM was thus attempting a balancing act: to position itself as part of an economically successful government, whilst claiming that progress on social policy had been thwarted by its coalition partners. The election result of **97 seats** (an increase of 10 seats compared with 2021) and thus the clear victory now appears to be a mandate to maintain economic continuity whilst setting a new course in social policy.

Faouzi Lekjaa epitomises this realignment. The president of the Moroccan Football Association served as Minister of the Budget during the previous parliamentary term. The modernisation of Moroccan football's structures and its successes are largely associated with him. His reputation surpassed that of all other leading politicians, including PAM chairwoman Fatima Ezzahra El Mansouri. It was only this summer that the previously independent technocrat joined the PAM. Although he did not run for a parliamentary seat, he was the leading figure in the PAM campaign. Across party lines, he was credited with sound budgetary management. A growing number of voters now appear to see him as capable of leading a government. A parliamentary seat is not required to be elected as head of government. Should Faouzi Lekjaa manage to secure a government majority, he is likely to be appointed as the new Prime Minister in October.

RNI in a period of uncertainty: opposition as an option?

The PAM's attacks on the RNI make normal and constructive cooperation with the current leadership seem highly unlikely. Whilst the parties are ideologically very close, personal differences are now complicating the formation of a coalition. The slump to just **66 seats** (a loss of 36 seats) in parliament is a bitter blow for the party, which is in the midst of a period of upheaval. Prime Minister Aziz Akhannouch had declined to run for re-election and, at the start of the year, handed over the party leadership to Mohamed Chaouki – until then the parliamentary group leader, but a relatively unknown figure. For him and the RNI, the aim was now to usher in a new era following Akhannouch's departure, but without the financially powerful manager, the prospects seemed bleak. A significant loss compared with the highly successful result of 2021 (102 seats) seemed to have been factored in from an early stage. The party is therefore attempting a generational shift and, whilst drawing up its candidate lists, has in some cases dropped high-

ranking or older candidates in favour of younger ones. Given the circumstances, second place can certainly be seen as a respectable achievement. However, this was also aided by a strongly entrenched voter base in rural areas, which traditionally leans towards the RNI. The majority of parliamentary seats are allocated in these regions.

After five years of a coalition between the RNI and the PAM, a continuation of their cooperation is by no means guaranteed. The fierce mutual attacks during the election campaign have strained their relationship. However, even setting that aside, the RNI, as the largest opposition party, could seek to drive forward renewal. Attention is already turning to the 2031 elections. With its 66 seats, it could form a visible counterweight to the new government, a factor the party could already benefit from in the 2027 regional and local elections.

Istiqlal disappointed, but still in government?

The conservative Istiqlal party has lost political ground to PAM. Just a year before the election, the party was widely regarded as a promising force; during the election campaign, however, its performance was subdued. It had only limited success in establishing an independent profile within the existing governing coalition. In the head-to-head contest between PAM and RNI, however, it appeared to fade into the background. The fact that it ultimately secured **65 seats** (down 16 seats), just one seat behind the RNI, says more about the weakened state of the RNI. Party leader Nizar Baraka will have to address internal party issues. In recent years, there have been repeated criticisms directed at him; most recently, several influential families have turned their backs on Istiqlal. For this proud party, which carries a historic claim to leadership, coming third is a disappointment. A swift entry into government and access to a number of ministerial posts could, at least in the short term, help to close the ranks. Should the RNI, in particular, fail to join the coalition, Istiqlal will be expected to play a stabilising role in supporting the state.

PJD recovers in opposition, but without a claim to leadership

Early on election night, the Islamist-conservative PJD declared a clear lead in the major cities. This was intended to secure the narrative early on: it is the biggest winner of the election, now holding **54 seats** (an increase of 41 seats). The PJD, which led the government between 2011 and 2016, plummeted to the lower ranks in the 2021 elections. Many had expected the PJD to make a comeback under its long-standing chairman, Abdelilah Benkirane. Despite the small size of its parliamentary group, the PJD distinguished itself as a vocal opposition party that not only focused on social issues but also called for a different approach to normalisation with Israel. In doing so, the party entered foreign policy debates, which are not actually intended for political parties in Morocco. The PJD's mobilisation has now propelled it into fourth place. Given the Moroccan electoral system in place since 2021, no better result could have been expected. Parties with a strong voter base in urban areas, such as the PJD or left-wing parties, are unable to gain an advantage due to the electoral arithmetic (which is based on the registered electoral roll rather than the actual votes cast). The decisive differences in the distribution of parliamentary seats occur in rural areas, where the three major parties – PAM, RNI and Istiqlal – are able to capitalise on their deep-rooted advantages.

It seems unlikely that the PJD will join the government, given its strong opposition to the leading parties. Although it is repeatedly cited as a possible signal for a 'World Cup government', the PJD's participation in government could deter international investors, particularly from Europe and the US. The political centre will therefore attempt to form a majority without the PJD. This would see the PJD strengthened, but it would remain in opposition. It could also be denied the role of opposition leader if the RNI moves into opposition. Whilst this would allow the PJD to enjoy a resurgence, it would remain far removed from political influence.

From the MP to the USFP to the UC – who will join the government?

If the current three-party coalition does not continue, some smaller parties may stand a

chance of joining the government. If PAM forms a coalition solely with RNI or Istiqlal, to secure a majority, two further partners will be needed. The social-democratic USFP, with **26 seats** (down 8), could bring a clearer focus on social policy to the government, thereby demonstrating that certain social issues raised during the election campaign are now being given greater consideration. However, it has suffered the heaviest losses amongst the opposition parties and will therefore have to contend with internal tensions. Consequently, the two liberal parties, the MP and the UC, are also potential coalition partners. Both are ideologically close to the PAM and have confirmed their results from the last election. The MP has **29 seats** (up by 1) and the UC has **17 seats** (down by 1).

The left-wing PPS fared particularly well amongst urban and younger voters. However, it is unlikely to commit to a government with a strong market-oriented agenda. Moreover, with **19 seats** (down 3), it has suffered slight losses. In addition, a further six parties have managed to secure between one and eight seats. The pluralistic party system is thus expanding once again. These small parties are primarily situated on the far left and will have no part in the formation of a government.

Whichever combination of parties emerges, there will be no lengthy exploratory or coalition talks. Coalition agreements are not customary in Morocco, and the palace wishes to appoint a government capable of taking action as quickly as possible. The formation of the government will be completed by the end of October at the latest. Traditionally, King Mohammed VI opens the new parliament in mid-October with a highly anticipated speech on the country's priorities. This is normally also the time when the new government is presented.

The 2030 World Cup as the new government's horizon

Hardly any other project encapsulates the diverse expectations for the coming parliamentary term as strongly as the 2030 FIFA World Cup. By co-hosting the tournament with Spain and Portugal, Morocco is linking its foreign policy, economic and domestic policy objectives. The tournament is intended to boost the country's international profile and position Morocco as a bridge between Africa and Europe, as well as a destination for investment and tourism. At the same time, it is accelerating an ongoing modernisation agenda through investment in transport infrastructure, stadiums, tourism, digitalisation and energy supply.

For the new government, the World Cup is particularly relevant because it creates a long-term horizon of expectations. The new parliament's regular term of office runs until 2031, meaning that the crucial preparatory and investment phase of the tournament will fall under the responsibility of the next government. This government will have to decide on financing, contract awards and construction progress, as well as on how economic opportunities can be distributed more widely.

The World Cup thus ties in with the key social issues of the election campaign. For young people, the question is whether the investments will lead to regular and long-term employment. For women, the question is whether new jobs can increase their employment rate, which remains low. For regions outside the major urban centres, it is crucial whether infrastructure investments and public services will have an impact beyond the host venues.

Following the election, political responsibility for this development now lies more heavily with the future government. This applies in particular to PAM, which emerged as the strongest party from the election and will provide the head of government in future. Should this person be Faouzi Lekjaa, football will, more than ever, be elevated to the status of a unifying force for the country.

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