



مركز الجزيرة للدراسات
ALJAZEERA CENTER FOR STUDIES

Position Paper

Morocco's Legislations: Competing for the Stability of the Regime



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The 25th November poll is being held for prior legislative entitlements aimed for the election of members of the House of Representatives in its new form according to the requirements of the new constitution that was adopted under a referendum in July 2011. Here the question becomes who will take the lead in the 25th November poll results? This is a pressing question because the new constitution provides that the prime minister will be chosen by the king from the party that takes the lead in the poll results.

The search for an answer for this question comes from conducting a comparison between the conditions of political parties running for the leadership of the new majority now and their conditions before the legislative entitlements of 7th September 2007. Hence, it should be noted that three political parties have ranked first: the Justice and Development Party, the Independence Party and the National Rally of Independents.

New Players in the Race

Before the elections of 7th September 2007, many study centres and polls chose the Justice and Development party to take lead in the results while some have spoken of a form of "Islamist" appropriation of the ballot boxes. The party's leaders went on to confirm the possibility of acquiring at least more than a quarter of the sought after seats. In addition to the fact that none of this was accomplished, the party ranked first in terms of votes as it won the votes of 500 thousand voters from a total of over 17 million as the percentage of those who chose not to vote exceeded 63 percent; thus the voter turnout was only 37 percent, 17 percent of which were annulled. The party also ranked second when it won 49 out of 325 seats in the Assembly of Representatives (first chamber). Whether in terms of obtained votes or hypothetical seats, these results silenced those who spoke of the Islamist appropriate of the ballot boxes.

Although many events occurred after the 7th September elections, it is important to particularly mention the establishment of the Party of Authenticity and Modernity in August 2008. It sought to defend the modern democratic social project and oppose "dark" projects, clearly aiming at the Justice and Development Party. The Party of Authenticity and Modernity followed a strategy composed of two fundamental elements: first, undermining the Justice and Development Party electorally, which was demonstrated during the local elections that took place in Morocco on 12th June 2009 wherein the party fell behind the Party of Authenticity and Modernity and the Party of Independence; and second, politically isolating the party by pushing numerous parties to boycotting it through the establishment of "strategic alliances" between the Party of Authenticity and Modernity and other parties, such as the People's Movement and the National Rally of Independents, that truly found its signification in the alliances forming councils of local communities arising from the poll of 12th June 2009. Furthermore, the Party of Authenticity and Modernity succeeded in impeding an alliance that could have been established between the Justice and Development Party and the Socialist Union of Popular Forces.

Although the youth movement of 20th February that arose in the context of events of the Arab spring targeted the Party of Authenticity and Modernity, which was compelled under attack to step back, the Justice and Development Party did not take advantage of the opportunity and aligned itself objectively with the Party of Authenticity and Modernity when it took an ambiguous stance on the youth movement of 20th February which the party's secretary general considered a threat to the monarchy and the stability of the country.

The imbalance of power helped the Party of Authenticity and Modernity to continue implementing its target strategy toward the Justice and Development Party but in a new manner. After the party had aspired to take the lead in the legislative elections that were meant to be held in the summer of 2012 under the provisions of the previous constitution of 13th September 1996 and with the variables imposed by Moroccan mobility, the Party of Authenticity and Modernity turned to forming a quadrilateral alliance including the People's Movement, the National Rally of Independents and the Constitutional Union, eventually expanding to include four additional parties – the

Labour Party, the Socialist Party and the Green Left Party, all leftist in character – in addition to the Party of Renaissance and Virtue, to which Islamist names belong.

This alliance, which comprises eight political parties and identifies itself as "an alliance for democracy", in fact assembled to pump new blood into the strategies of the Party of Authenticity and Modernity, which essentially works to target the Justice and Development Party, and curtail its luck whether in terms of the 25th November poll results or participation in the new majority that will come as a result of the poll.

In this backdrop, the Justice and Development Party is no longer the most auspicious party. In fact, it is now substantially rivaled by the National Rally of Independents led by Salaheddine Mezouar, Minister of Finance in the outgoing government, in the next election results. This party's auspiciousness is no more a result of its own organizational abilities than it is concerned with the capitalization on the abilities of the Party of Authenticity and Modernity, which it decided to support with a number of candidates whose chances of winning seats within the House of Representatives are certain.

In addition to the Justice and Development Party and the National Rally of Independents, there is the Independence Party which wagers on the next poll results and the continuation of its government leadership. Its chances of ranking first derive from two fundamental considerations: first, the strength of the electoral machine that the party possesses as it is the oldest party in Morocco and has a network of relations that provide it with numerous votes without regard to the negativity or positivity of its performance during its participation in previous government experiments. This is confirmed to by the 7th September 2007 poll results wherein there was no actual wager. Nonetheless, the party ranked first and was commissioned to form the government. Second, the important results that the party obtained during the previous local elections on 12th June 2009 in which it shared the first place overall with the Party of Authenticity and Modernity in terms of total number of seats acquired and in terms of its leadership of many local community councils.

Chances of a Recurrence of the Tunisian Model

Some attribute the Justice and Development Party's chances linked to the context of the new Arab mobility that pushed Islamists to the forefront through the Tunisian Renaissance Movement's lead in the constituent assembly election results. This may very well occur in Egypt and other Arab countries and thus does not exclude Morocco. However, this estimation disregards the rule of "no measure with the existence of differences" as the Tunisian Renaissance Movement suffered from repressive policies pursued by Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's regime in addition to the image that Rached Ghannouchi contributed to giving Tunisian political Islam that focus on inclusive discourse that is able to organize differences with the other.

Therefore, the Tunisian voter voted for opponents of Ben Ali's regime whether they were the moderate Islamists of the Renaissance Movement or the moderate secularists of the Congress for the Republic. This does not apply, however, to the Justice and Development Party in Morocco as it has continued to participate in elections since the legislative elections of 14th November 1997 and supported the rotational government led by Abdul Rahman Al-Yousefi since 1998 in the framework of what the party then called "monetary support" before he shifted to the opposition in 2000 in what he called the "advising opposition". Also, the Justice and Development Party participated in the arrangement of several local bodies. Thus, projecting the Tunisian case to Morocco entails a form of incorrect generalization especially because the Justice and Development Party itself in the backdrop of the Arab Spring events regards Morocco as an exception in comparison to other Arab regimes. This exception may also apply to the Justice and Development Party in comparison to Islamists in other Arab countries.

Three Moroccan political parties can lead the poll results of 25th November and can therefore be commissioned to form a government: the Justice and Development Party, the Independence Party, and the National Rally of Independents. Here a question is raised about the best manner of forming the next government that will be able to guarantee stability within the Moroccan kingdom especially with the persistence of Arab mobility in many Arab countries and the continuance of the 20th February youth movement protests.

The Next Government: Three Scenarios

Under current available indications, we will have three potential forms for the next government:

1. The first form is that of a government led by the National Rally of Independents, and is the most probable of the three. In addition to its work to contain the fears of several parties that do not wish for the Islamists to reach the government, it will depict Morocco as a country that witnesses circulation of government leadership by excluding the Independence party to practice its opposition.

This form is distinguished by two characteristics: first, the composition of a relatively consistent majority in the scope of an alliance for democracy with a solid nucleus consisting of the National Rally of Independents, the Party of Authenticity and Modernity, the Popular Movement, and the Constitutional Union; and second, the composition of a relatively consistent opposition whose solid nucleus consists of two conservative parties, the Independence Party and the Justice and Development Party.

2. The second form is that of a government led by the Independence Party whose solid nucleus consists of the parties of the democratic bloc and some Leftist parties as a front for democratic forces as well as the Popular Movement whose secretary general announced his lack of commitment to this alliance if another party ranks first. Although some indicate the possibility of the formation of a government led by the Independence Party with an alliance with the Justice and Development Party, the former will not resort to this option unless necessary.
3. The third form is that of a government led by the Justice and Development Party if it succeeds in convincing some political parties to form an alliance with it. It is indicated that if this form is effected, the Justice and Development Party will become the weakest party leading the government considering the heavy cost it must pay in return for others' acceptance of an alliance with it.

All three of these forms, despite their costs, can relatively preserve the stability of the monarchical institution owing to two fundamental considerations: first, the inclination of the balances of power towards advocates of the preservation of current conditions; and second, the King's keenness on limiting the distance between him and the government that he called in the opening speech of the last parliamentary session to bear all of its responsibilities in terms of consigning its schedule and working to apply it.

Finally, the degree of influence the 25th November poll has on the 20th February youth movement comes by differentiating between two levels: the level of results and the participation rate produced by the poll. In the first part, the procession of the 20th February youth movement will not be affected by the nature of the new majority, regardless of what it may be because it wagers not on the elections but on the opposition. This is where the second part comes: if the rate of participation is high in these elections and the 20th February youth movement's call for a boycott is not responded to, it will lose its momentum and appear marginal.

However, if the rate of abstention is high, the movement will obtain new legitimacy enabling them to continue. Still, it will not be adequate if two conditions are not met: the continuation of Arab mobility that certainly inspires the movement, and the ability to at

least preserve the consistence between its components in the future especially as many factions resisting change in Morocco seek to meddle with the contradictions of this movement to damage it internally and limit its strength.

