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Morocco's New Government: Women's Political Representation and Declining Electoral Participation

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The Amman Center for Human Rights Studies (ACHRS) and the Elections Network in the Arab Region (ENAR) welcome the formation of Morocco's new woman-led government, which was sworn in at the Royal Palace in Rabat on 16 October 2026, following the parliamentary elections held on 23 September. This makes Morocco the second Arab country to have a female Head of Government.

The elections saw the National Rally of Independents (RNI) lose its position as the largest party in parliament, falling from 102 to 66 seats. The Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM), meanwhile, emerged as the largest party, increasing its representation from 87 to 97 seats. In accordance with Article 47 of Morocco's Constitution, which requires the monarch to appoint a Head of Government from the party that wins the most seats, King Mohammed VI appointed former Mayor of Marrakesh Fatima Ezzahra El Mansouri to the position. El Mansouri subsequently negotiated a governing coalition comprising PAM, Istiqlal, the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) and the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS), which was announced on 12 October. Together, the four parties hold 207 of the 395 seats in the House of Representatives, giving the coalition a nine-seat majority.

Women's Representation: Progress and Persistent Structural Barriers

ACHRS welcomes the appointment of El Mansouri as Head of Government, marking a historic milestone as she becomes the first woman to hold the office in Morocco and the third woman in the Arab world to serve as Head of Government, following Najla Bouden in Tunisia (2021–2023) and Tunisia's current Prime Minister, Sarra Zaafrani Zenzri.

More broadly, women secured 107 of the 395 seats in parliament, up from 95 in the 2021 elections. However, this increase must be considered in the context of Morocco's electoral system, which allocates 305 seats through 92 local constituencies, where candidates compete regardless of gender, and a further 90 seats through 12 regional constituencies reserved exclusively for women. Of the 305 seats contested in local constituencies, only 17 were won by women in 2026, representing approximately 5.6%. Although this marks a considerable improvement on the 2021 elections, when just six women were elected through

local constituencies, it also highlights the persistent structural barriers women face in securing electoral success outside affirmative action mechanisms. Indeed, 90 of the 107 women elected to parliament (84%) entered through reserved regional seats, underscoring the continued reliance of women's parliamentary representation on these measures.

The number of women in government has decreased from seven to six, following the dismissal of Madiha Khayr on 18 October, leaving six women among the cabinet's 31 members. While the historic appointment of Morocco's first female Head of Government is a significant development, the distribution of ministerial portfolios warrants a more cautious assessment. In the previous government, five women headed full ministerial portfolios. In the current government, this number has fallen to three, including El Mansouri as Head of Government, alongside Charafat Afailal, appointed Minister of Energy, Mines and Sustainable Development, and Najwa Koukouss, appointed Minister of Family, Social Development and Equality. The remaining three women hold delegated ministerial positions. This suggests that, despite the symbolic significance of El Mansouri's appointment, women's representation in substantive ministerial leadership has not necessarily advanced.

Political Continuity Despite a Change in Government

The change in the leading party does not necessarily signal a significant ideological or policy shift. PAM and RNI occupy broadly similar political positions, with the former generally characterised as centrist or liberal and the latter as centre-right. Both favour economic modernisation, private investment and technocratic approaches to development. Accordingly, RNI's exclusion from the governing coalition appears to have been driven less by substantive policy disagreements than by political competition and tensions between the two parties. The change in parliamentary leadership should therefore not, in itself, be interpreted as signalling a fundamental shift in the country's political or economic direction.

This continuity is further reinforced by PAM's close historical ties to the monarchy. Founded in 2008 by Fouad Ali El Himma, a close friend and former advisor to King Mohammed VI, the party has long been associated with the palace and is widely regarded as part of the monarchy-aligned political establishment. Its emergence as the largest party in parliament is therefore unlikely to translate into a challenge to the existing distribution of political power. Given the monarchy's constitutionally entrenched position and its considerable influence over key areas of governance, PAM's rise is more likely to represent a reshuffling of political leadership within the existing system than a substantive challenge to the structures of power underpinning it. ACHRS therefore cautions that electoral competition alone should not be conflated with meaningful democratic change, particularly where the underlying structures of political power remain largely intact and the monarchy continues to exercise considerable influence over governance.

Declining Electoral Participation and Growing Political Disillusionment

ACHRS expresses deep concern over the persistently low voter turnout in Morocco, which fell from an already modest 50% in 2021 to just 38.02% in 2026. This decline reflects broader disillusionment with the country's political and institutional landscape, particularly among younger generations. In October

2025, Morocco witnessed its largest wave of protests since the 2011 Uprising, with an estimated 5,780 people arrested. Led predominantly by Gen Z, protesters voiced their frustration over persistently high youth unemployment, which reached 35% in 2025, as well as the deterioration of public education and healthcare services. This growing disillusionment was further illustrated by the influx of migrants to the Spanish enclave of Ceuta in July 2026. Comprising predominantly young people, the influx reflected mounting frustration with conditions at home and a desire for better opportunities and prospects abroad.

However, low electoral participation is by no means unique to Morocco. As highlighted in ACHRS' analysis of International IDEA's 2026 Global State of Democracy report, electoral participation– measured exclusively through voter turnout– consistently ranks among the lowest-performing democratic subcategories across the Arab world. Moreover, between 2006 and 2025, it exhibited the steepest downward trajectory of any subcategory. Yet, notably, Civic Engagement ranks among the region's strongest-performing subcategories. Considered alongside the 2025 protests in Morocco, this points to an important distinction: young people are not necessarily disengaged from political life, but increasingly disillusioned with the formal political institutions and structures through which they are expected to participate. Rather than reflecting political apathy, low electoral participation may therefore signal a deeper crisis of political trust and institutional legitimacy.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The appointment of El Mansouri as Morocco's first female Head of Government undoubtedly represents a historic milestone. ACHRS hopes that more Arab countries will follow suit in this regard. Similarly, the increase in women's parliamentary representation is a welcome development, although the continued reliance on affirmative action mechanisms highlights the persistence of structural barriers to women's political participation. Nevertheless, ACHRS emphasises that greater descriptive representation does not in itself guarantee substantive political change. In this regard, the extent to which the new government's composition will translate into meaningful policy shifts warrants consideration. While the transition from RNI to PAM marks a change in the leading party, both occupy broadly similar political positions and operate within, rather than challenge, Morocco's existing political structures, including the central role of the monarchy. Consequently, the change in government does not necessarily signal a corresponding shift in the underlying distribution of political power or policy priorities. ACHRS therefore stresses that the significance of increased women's representation should ultimately be assessed not only by the number of women occupying positions of authority, but also by their capacity to influence policymaking and advance substantive reforms.

Furthermore, the legitimacy of representative institutions rests not only on their composition, but also on the inclusiveness and credibility of the processes through which they are elected. ACHRS therefore expresses concern over persistently low voter turnout in Morocco, particularly among young people, as an indication of broader challenges relating to political engagement and public confidence in representative institutions. ACHRS urges the new government to address the underlying sources of youth discontent, strengthen trust in democratic institutions and create meaningful opportunities for young people to participate in political life, including through the electoral process.