

Further into the Wilderness: The Never-ending Plight of the Left in Morocco

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The Moroccan left's poor performance in the recent elections highlighted its continued challenges in building voter confidence whilst contributing further to the dominance of pro-palace forces

Morocco's legislative and local elections presented a much-needed opportunity for smaller, leftist political parties to affirm their relevance to the political scene. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, its subsequent lockdown, and the perceived failure of the *Justice and Development Party* (PJD)-led government to adequately facilitate socioeconomic security for many Moroccans provided opposition with ample impetus to gain more seats in the election. More crucially, the new electoral law eliminated a [3 percent vote threshold](#) necessary to secure parliamentary seats, which previously seriously disadvantaged smaller parties. Instead, seat distribution is now proportionate to the total number of eligible voters, not votes cast.

Despite this, leftists performed poorly. For instance, the *United Socialist Party* (PSU), the *Socialist Democratic Vanguard Party*, and the *National Ittihad Congress*, three leftist parties comprising the *Democratic Federation of the Left* (FGD), secured just one seat each. A major contributing factor was wealthier parties' ability – particularly the victorious *National Rally of Independents* (RNI) party – to mobilise volunteers and campaigns kingdom-wide in order to forge a strong anti-PJD narrative, eventually leading to a huge protest vote. The left were also arguably the makers of their own undoing: in July, the PSU under Nabila Mounib [withdrew from the FGD](#) over disagreements about fielding candidates on the Casablanca-Settat list.

The consequences were threefold. Firstly, it severely undermined the [FGD parties' ambition](#) to cultivate a united leftist alternative to the historic *United Socialist Forces Party*, which has over recent decades been viewed as co-opted by the regime. Secondly, it entailed the PSU and remainder of the alliance competing in some districts, further fragmenting the vote and reducing their chances of securing seats.

Thirdly, Mounib's unilateral move arguably undermined a major, distinguishing leftist quality. Specifically, such parties prided themselves on presenting robust, internally-democratic mechanisms with considerable grassroots outreach, distinct from perceived top-down and closed-off leaderships like the *Istiqlal Party* and RNI. Mounib's move, un-endorsed by the PSU's Central Bureau, resulted in fierce internal opposition.

The implications for the left and Moroccan politics in general are stark. Mounib's pre-poll actions and the FGD failing to make inroads in a second major electoral test ([having won only 2 seats in the 2016 elections](#)) leaves the left fragmented, logistically weak, and lacking voter confidence. The remaining alliance will likely disband soon given these continued failings. Future attempts at rapprochement may also suffer from Mounib's actions and possible resentment she accumulated,

making reconciliation long and arduous.

Furthermore, infighting and fallout during the campaign damaged perceptions about the left offering an inclusive, democratic alternative. Such perceptions would further stymie the parties' limited abilities to build grassroots support and capture the interest of those many disillusioned with Morocco's formal politics.

Youth participation in elections remains dismally low at [8.35 percent](#). Traditionally, leftists, especially the PSU, sought to appeal to the minimal youth vote. However, many vote tactically and would rather support larger parties better-placed to unseat others like the PJD or Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM); leftists are considered a wasted vote. [\[1\]](#)

This trend will likely continue. The aforementioned implications of the left's performance will further alienate youth, which is ultimately self-defeating, as many youth will continue to feel disenfranchised from formal politics. This is crucial given [years of struggles](#) concerning youth and socioeconomic security, now compounded by the pandemic. Indeed, feelings of exclusion significantly fuelled the February 20, 2011 movement and anti-status quo street mobilisations.

As for broader politics, the left's poor performance only reinforces a coup of the *Makhzen* (an Arabic term Moroccans use to denote the palace and its allies). The overwhelming victory of pro-palace and co-opted parties like the RNI, PAM, and Istiqlal as well as the defeat of the independent PJD entailed the left being the only remaining independent opposition within formal Moroccan politics. With meagre parliamentary representation and internal division, they will likely not be able to offer significant opposition in policymaking after all. This further guarantees free reign for the new government and, by default, the palace to enact legislation as it sees fit.

This does not automatically entail socio-political stability for the regime. Unpopular legislation, failings in tackling pandemic fallouts, and a perceived expanded relationship between the government and the Makhzen may generate popular resentment. However, in light of the left's continued inadequacies, this will more likely manifest on the streets than inside policymaking avenues.

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Footnotes

[\[1\]](#) Based on author's PhD research findings conducted in Morocco.