

Max Security Report

Morocco: Upcoming parliamentary elections expected to have limited impact on stability November, 13 2011

Current Situation

The Kingdom of Morocco is scheduled to hold parliamentary elections on November 25, amidst continuous opposition from several reform movements.

- The elections were originally scheduled to take place in September of 2012. Morocco's King Mohammed VI stated that the decision to move up elections 10 months ahead of schedule was taken in order to implement constitutional reforms. In July 2011, a referendum on constitutional reform passed by an overwhelming 98%. The referendum implemented constitutional amendments which were meant to limit the King's power.
- Among the most powerful parties is the Party for Justice Development (PJD), an Islamist party with a strong support base in urban centers. The PJD is commonly compared to Tunisia's Ennahda party, for its seemingly moderate Islamist principles. Challenging the PJD is a coalition of liberal parties known as the G8, which is lead by the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM).
- The winner of parliamentary elections will be charged with forming a coalition government. The King is still empowered with approving the candidate for Prime Minister.
- Morocco's largest protest movement, called "February 20", has called for a boycott of the parliamentary elections, stating that they only serve to legitimize a corrupt ruling system. The group has staged protests on a near-weekly basis in major cities, although attendance has been limited to several thousand at most.
- In addition, a prominent PJD official warned of widespread unrest if the government rigs elections. The official stated that if elections proceed fairly, then the Islamist party would emerge victorious.

Assessments: Campaigning season

1. Morocco's Parliamentary elections are considerably less influential as those which took place in post-revolution Tunisia. Morocco's monarchy holds considerable popularity amongst the population and the success of the July 1 referendum is largely interpreted as a display of such public approval.
2. Morocco's two main opposition movements, the secular February 20 and Islamist Justice and Charity, have both called for a boycott of the elections. These two groups will likely stage protests in major cities during the period leading up to elections. Government complexes in Rabat, Casablanca, and Marrakesh are all potential friction points in which these demonstrations may be held.
3. Security forces will likely be on high alert in these areas, possibly causing traffic congestion.
4. Despite their high-profile activity, the February 20 Movement has been unsuccessful in organizing mass demonstrations. In recent months, the attendance of their protests has been limited to hundreds to thousands of people at most.
5. We assess that protests which will be held during the election period are at risk of violent crackdowns by security forces. In addition, recent protests have come under attack by assailants in plainclothes, whom the opposition charges as being government agents. Any unrest or violence is unlikely to target foreigners.

Assessments: Election aftermath

1. The decision to hold elections 10 months ahead of schedule has drawn both praise and criticism in Morocco. Opponents charge that the move will limit the success of new opposition parties, as they will not have enough time to organize. Morocco's strongest parties have traditionally been those which are loyal to the Monarchy, including the PAM and the national rally of independents.
2. We assess that the Islamist PJD party will not win enough votes for a majority, despite their predictions. While they may win the largest share of seats, they will be forced to enter into a coalition with leading neutral secular parties, such as the Istiklal party.
3. There are two main hindrances to a PJD victory in Morocco. Firstly, the nation's electoral districts have been divided in a way which favors rural areas in which the PJD has little influence. Secondly, Islamists in Morocco are divided into two parties. In addition to the PJD, the outlawed Justice and Charity party has called for a boycott of elections, and it's disciplined following is expected to heed those calls and refrain from voting for the PJD.
4. Should the PJD fail emerge as the most popular party, or fail to form a coalition, its leaders may accuse the government of corruption. Such a scenario would increase the chances for demonstrations by PJD supporters.
5. Should allegations and popular belief of rigged elections arise, this would likely increase momentum of both Islamist and secular opposition movements in the country. The February 20 movement in particular will likely continue to hold demonstrations on weekends for the short term post election period, as they are convinced that the new electoral system is as corrupt as the last.

Recommendations

1. Travel to Morocco may continue as normal.
2. In the days preceding and following the November 25 elections, foreigners in Morocco should remain vigilant, avoiding political demonstrations.
3. Any demonstrations which take place will not likely target foreigners, yet the threat of violent crackdowns does post an incidental risk to those in their vicinity.

Sincerely,

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