

Morocco faces new reality

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Moderate Islamists may have lost the Moroccan elections this week, but they have proved a point: they are a formidable force to be reckoned with in Morocco's political system. Many analysts view the results as a setback for the Islamists-backed Party of Justice and Development (PJD) as at the height of electioneering it seemed poised for sweeping the polls. Despite not achieving the desired results and seats, PJD's popularity and surge in elections must've caused enough discomfiture to their rivals. However, the conservative nationalists, the Istiqlal party, which was part of Morocco's ruling alliance, have improved their position in the 325-member Majlis Al Nuwab, the assembly of representatives, by securing 52 seats.

The Islamists were hoping this time to romp home with 70-80 seats in the assembly to put their claim to form the government with the support of fence sitters by becoming the largest single party in parliament. PJD had won five seats more than the last elections to take their tally to 47 to finish second behind Istiqlal party. The leftists lost 14 of their traditional seats and had to content with 36. The performance of Islamists was below par in the wake of a low polling percentage of 37, arguably the lowest in the history of the country. PJD also blamed the government of widespread corruption and vote rigging that had eventually hampered their chances in the elections.

Morocco's secularists had campaigned for banning PJD four years ago, following a spate of suicide bombings that had claimed 45 lives in Casablanca, as they suspected Islamic jihadists' role in the tragedy. Luckily, PJD survived this crisis, dispelling the charges levelled against them by the conservatives and liberals, and fought the last elections with renewed vigour and nonchalance. Now, PJD is in a strong wicket to put forward their claim to become a coalition partner in the next government though much depends on the whims and fancies of their arch foes who had kept PJD at bay from joining the five-party government in 2002.

Many Moroccans are quite frustrated with the increasing corruption and lack of progress in education and health sectors and were looking at Islamists with lots of expectations. But the country has divided and confused electorate as a vast majority citizens thought elections would not serve any purpose though voting was considered a civil right.