

VOTER APATHY in the SEPTEMBER 2007 MOROCCAN ELECTIONS

**Qualitative study produced for the National
Democratic Institute for International Affairs
(NDI) from November to December 2007**

February 2008

“The elections are like a party that everyone talks about for a while and forgets soon after.”

(Man, slums of Casablanca, 30-40 years old)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------------------------------|
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | 3 |
| SUMMARY..... | ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED. |
| GENERAL PERCEPTIONS | 6 |
| THE ELECTIONS..... | 10 |
| VOTER ABSTENTION..... | ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED. |
| FACTORS IN VOTER APATHY | 211 |
| VOTER EXPECTATIONS | 29 |
| METHODOLOGY | 311 |
| ABOUT NDI | 344 |
| THE PEOPLE'S MIRROR | 366 |

SUMMARY

This report is based on a qualitative study conducted by the People's Mirror Strategic Research Center in partnership with the Consultative Committee on Human Rights (CCDH) for the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) on voter apathy during the legislative elections of September 2007.

Between November 2007 and January 2008, the People's Mirror performed a qualitative study of 20 focus groups comprised of citizens from urban and rural regions near Casablanca, Rabat, Tangier, Agadir, Nador, Khenifa, Benguerir, Smara and Meknes. The principle objective of the research was to determine the causes for the non-participation of registered voters, including those who did not go to the polling stations for the September 7 elections and those who cast null ballots. The principle questions posed during the study were:

- What citizens' general perceptions of the situation of the country during the electoral period?
- How did the voters who did not go to the polls perceive the legislative elections of 2007? How did they see the results of the elections?
- Why did many voters not go to the polls? What were the motivations and reasons that pushed these voters to abstain from voting? Why did voters choose to cast null ballots?
- What factors determined the electoral behavior of the citizens?
- What can be done to encourage voters to return to the polls in future elections? What are voters' expectations for the future?

The principal results of the study were:

- The country was generally described as economically and politically stagnant despite the current climate of economic development because citizens do not perceive the impact of economic development projects in their regions on their standard of living. The majority of citizens are preoccupied by socio-economic problems that directly affect their everyday lives, such as unemployment and price hikes on basic foods. Young people and urban dwellers are less optimistic than citizens living in rural environments. The young people and urban dwellers condemn the lack of infrastructure and revenue-generating activities in their regions, but nonetheless remain optimistic about the potential for further development of their regions.

- The elections were perceived as having no direct impact on people’s lives. The legislative elections of 2007 were defined as a “failure” for the politicians and a “victory” for the citizens, because, according to citizens, the most significant result from the elections was the low rate of participation. Despite this negative assessment, young respondents and those from urban areas felt that one positive element of the elections was the limited government interference in the process, while semi-urban dwellers and rural populations condemned vote-buying and the fear of retribution from local authorities in their regions.
- The choice to abstain from voting was a deliberate act of non-participation based on political motivations.
- Protest and blank ballots were an act of social and political protest and serve as a message to the political machinery to express mass dissatisfaction.
- Voter abstention was also caused by voter confusion. The large number of political parties, the similarities between campaign platforms, the lack of information during the campaign and the complexity of the ballot all contributed to the confusion of many voters, who, not knowing who to vote for or how to vote, preferred to cast a blank ballot.
- The factors that led to voter apathy during the legislative elections of 2007 were the negative perception of the political system in general and of political parties in particular, the lack of available information on the political process and the crisis of communication, all of which contributed to reinforcing a general perception of socio-political stagnation. Political parties were not seen as influential actors in the development of the country and the power to propose and implement changes is attributed to the King and those closest to him. The elections did not therefore garner much interest since, according to voters, they did not involve the true political actors.
- The juxtaposition of the limited powers and poor performance of political parties in relation to the monarchy has also contributed to general voter apathy. This image is perpetually reinforced by the media, who portray the monarchy initiating large-scale development projects while static political parties rarely hold activities and do not elicit much interest.
- In order to return to the polls, voters demanded changes to the political environment, including more youth participation in political parties and local development projects that translate into concrete improvements in the most vulnerable citizens’ standards of living. The expectations of the voters can be summarized in the following points:
 - development projects that have a concrete impact on people’s lives;
 - more innovative and revitalized political leadership that incorporates youth;
 - engagement of political parties in local development projects;

- simplification of ballots;
- continuous political awareness campaigns and more information on elections;
- constitutional reforms that permit political parties to play a more significant role in the policy environment.

GENERAL PERCEPTIONS

The point of departure for analyzing the behavior of the Moroccan electorate during the legislative elections of 2007 is an evaluation of respondents' perceptions of the general situation in the country. This perception facilitates a better understanding the voters' attitudes towards the elections and their principle concerns and priorities.

"I know there were elections in the past three months, but the elections don't do anything for the tribe. They abandoned the tribe and our relatives." (Woman, Khenifra, 40-50 years old, rural area)

In sum, the general situation in the country was described by respondents as economically and politically stagnant, despite the fact that focus group respondents came from different regions and remained more or less receptive to the development climate in the country. The perception of stagnation was present even in urban environments undergoing dramatic development because respondents do not perceive the economic development in their regions as having an impact on their standard of living. The majority of citizens are preoccupied with socio-economic problems that affect their daily lives, such as unemployment and price hikes on basic foods. Youth and urban dwellers are less optimistic than people who live in rural environments, often complaining about the lack of infrastructure and revenue generating activities, but these groups remain nonetheless hopeful about the prospects for development in their region.

Price hikes on basic foods: the most important development of 2007

Urban and rural groups expressed a particular dissatisfaction with regard to price hikes on basic foods. This rise in prices, which coincided with the electoral period, was the most often and most spontaneously cited example of economic and social stagnation. The importance accorded by the respondents to the rise in prices of basic foods reveals the majority of voters' preoccupation with socioeconomic difficulties during the electoral period. In addition, the rise in prices contributed to a further disengagement and disinterest in politics.

"The raised prices during the elections!" (Woman, slums of Casablanca, 30-40 years old)

"You want to know the results of the elections? Well, the result, it's that we woke up the next morning and realized that the price of bread had risen again!" (Man, Agadir, 20-30 years old, rural area)

"The surge in prices is disastrous for Moroccans." (Woman, Meknes, 20-30 years old, urban area)

The country is undergoing development, but citizens do not perceive the economic development in their regions as having an impact on their standard of living

Urban groups, of all ages and social classes, described a situation of social, political and economic stagnation. As such, urban respondents spontaneously associated the general situation with a recurring expression, that "nothing changes," a comment particularly common among semi-urban groups. Certain respondents in cities such as Casablanca, Meknes, Tangier and Rabat, where large government construction projects are underway, found that urban development in their regions does not have a direct impact on their quality of life. On the other hand, the respondents did not observe a direct link between large government projects and their daily lives because they did not understand the repercussions of these projects on their regions, resulting in the opinion that nothing is changing. The focus groups in Tangier, for example, said they are satisfied not to be hosting the 2012 Expo because the last Expo had contributed to a rise in prices of housing and food. This general perception of stagnation largely contributes to the apathy of urban groups of all ages toward the political processes.

People in rural environments, however, had more negative impressions of the status quo, but felt that government investments in civil society and local development projects can improve the quality of life of citizens. In effect, rural respondents felt left out and roundly criticized political parties and local authorities for the lack of infrastructure and development, particularly in the Nador, Khenifa and Benguerir regions. Nonetheless, the majority of respondents expressed their faith in civil society's work, notably in the rural region of Agadir. Others hope for the launching of development projects similar to those that exist in large urban centers, on the condition that these projects have positive effects on infrastructure, services and the economy of their regions. The respondents from Benguerir mentioned the highway

between Casablanca and Marakech, which, for many respondents, had catastrophic repercussions and led to the closure of many businesses.

“The highway killed us. It killed Benguerir. It only profited the rich. ”
(Man, Benguerir, 35-45 years old, rural area)

“Mega-projets were created in Rabat and Casablanca, Fes, Meknes...but why not us? The government forgot us?” (Woman, Nador, 25-35 years old, rural area)

“They should launch a project here. That way we will avoid immigration problems.” (Woman, Nador, 25-35 years old, rural area)

In conclusion, the perception of the situation in Morocco on the eve of the 2007 elections was marked by general dissatisfaction and aggravated by price hikes and by the lack of communication surrounding the beneficial impact of large development projects in the country. This perception has exacerbated the disinterest of the respondents in the electoral process, which is also seen as lacking vitality.

THE ELECTIONS

The elections were perceived as having no direct impact on people's lives. The legislative elections of 2007 were defined as a "failure" for the politicians and a "victory" for the citizens, because, according to citizens, the most significant result from the elections was the low rate of participation. Despite this negative assessment, young respondents and those from urban areas felt that one positive element of the elections was the limited government interference in the process, while semi-urban dwellers and rural populations condemned vote-buying and the fear of retribution from local authorities in their regions.

"I asked myself: if I vote, what could I change? Things will remain the same, whether I vote or not." (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

The elections will change nothing. So why vote?

Results from all of the target research concluded that the widespread perception of the elections was that they would not have a direct impact on the direction of the country. Regardless of respondents' degree of appreciation for the level of development in the country or of their expressed priorities, all respondents regarded the elections as a political process capable of changing nothing. Nonetheless, even if the respondents from the different demographic groups arrived at the same conclusion, the degree of optimism differed in accordance with their level of education. The semi-urban and rural groups link the elections to the candidates and base their negative evaluation on their negative perception of candidates in the elections. In the case of the rural groups of Nador and Khenifa, the parties are not considered important and respondents had extremely limited information about the political parties and the political process in general, and did not have direct contact with candidates.

The semi-urban groups, students and middle class, who were more exposed to political information, justified their negative assessment of the elections by pointing to the fact that the elections did not engage the real decision-makers in the country.

"First, money flows during the elections. And in addition, even after the elections, it's the monarchy that decides who is minister of what. So why would you want people to go vote?" (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

"People do not see concrete changes which would incite them to go vote." (Women, Agadir, 20-30 years old, rural area)

"There isn't an automatic relation between voting and improvement in people's daily lives. And, in addition, we do not have confidence in the political parties." (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

"The elections aren't important. It's always the same whether they occur or not. Nothing changes." (Woman, 30-40 years old, Tangier)

"The reticence of Moroccans at the polls proves that the elections will not change anything and confirms the lack of confidence in the candidates." (Man, Smara, urban)

"The elections are lies. They are a mockery." (Woman, Casablanca.)

"We participated in the elections because we wanted help, but this help didn't come. We don't have hospitals, our children left school...so we don't participate anymore." (Man, Khenifra, 40-50 years old, rural area)

"We registered on the lists, but we didn't vote, because we are conscious that no one will change the situation." (Woman, Casablanca, slums)

A failure for the politicians, a victory for the citizens

In general, the respondents in the focus groups spontaneously associated the elections of 2007 with a regression of democratization, principally due to the low rate of participation which signifies a lack of confidence in politicians according to the majority of respondents. Nonetheless, respondents in young urban groups of all social classes regarded the elections as a victory for the citizens, since the state became aware of the citizens' disengagement from politics.

The weak rate of participation was considered the most important result of the elections by respondents. It is interesting to note that, while respondents with a moderate level of education, urban dwellers and students discussed the composition of the current government, the choice of the prime minister and the results for the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), the Justice and Development Party (PJD) and Istiqlal, the majority in the rural and semi-urban groups know very little about the results for individual parties. Among the rural group of women in Smara, many respondents did not know the name of the current prime minister. Despite the limited knowledge of these demographic groups, they were all aware of the low rate of participation and the fact that it did not necessarily represent a step in the wrong direction in terms of democratization.

"It is a sign for the people in power, to tell them that Moroccans expect the government to put the train back on the track." (Man, Meknes, 20-30 years old, urban area)

"These elections are a step forward for us, because the low rate of participation was a lesson for the government, to push them to change and to learn the importance of elections to the people." (Man, Smara, urban area)

"It was progress. The rate of participation was a lesson for the government, which needs to educate people on the importance of elections." (Student, Rabat)

"It was a success for the citizens, because the low rate of participation was a defeat for the politicians. Because they make empty promises. But people are now conscious of the elections and when they didn't find anyone to vote for, they didn't vote. The parents didn't vote and neither did the children. (Man, Meknes, 20-30 years old, urban area)

"I think that the fact that people didn't vote was the most important result of the elections." (Man, Casablanca, 30-40 years old, slums)

Urban dwellers and the middle class: the neutrality of the state is a positive point for the elections

Despite the negative general perception of the elections, the middle class urban respondents and young people reacted positively to the management of the elections by the government. This perception is not shared by semi-urban and rural groups,

who complain of interference from local authorities. According to the middle class, the legislative elections of 2007 were generally better managed by the administration than past elections. The publicly-disclosed rate of participation was proof the neutrality of the administration. Urban youth respondents also appreciated the gradual announcements of the results, which were followed by voters and non-voters alike.

“The low rate of participation was a success, because it proves that there was little government intervention in the electoral process and also that the government told the truth about the numbers.” (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

“The administration was neutral during the elections. It is a fact that no one can deny.” (Woman, Casablanca, 40-50 years old, middle class)

“They correctly announced the results. It was clear. They did it little by little and we could all follow.” (Woman, Agadir, 20-30 years old, rural area)

“Before, they waited days to announce the results in order to do what they want, but now, it is much better.” (Man, Agadir, 20-30 years old, rural)

Rural and semi-urban respondents thought, however, that the administration pressured the citizens to vote. An important number of rural and semi-urban respondents in Meknes, Tangier and Benguerir admitted to having voted because of a fear of repercussions from local authorities, who were perceived to be counting the voters and punishing non-voters by refusing to deliver official papers and documents. Women seemed particularly prone to a fear of repercussion from the authorities and reported that they voted in order to avoid “problems,” all while admitting that they cast a null vote.

“There was also a sort of pressure from the *Moqaddem*, which pushed you to go vote.” (Man, Casablanca, 30-40 years old, slums)

“People are afraid of the authorities, notably the *Moqaddem* and the *Sheikhs*.” (Man, Tangier, urban area)

"The authorities pushed the old and the uneducated to go vote, because these people need their official papers." (Man, Meknes, 20-30 years old, urban area)

Rural and semi-urban groups: corruption and vote-buying still exist

Focus group participants in rural and semi-urban areas often mentioned recurrent cases of corruption and prevalent vote-buying during the elections. In particular, the respondents from Khenifra, Nador, Tangier and Smara, told of massive cases of vote-buying, mostly among the most vulnerable sectors of the population. Respondents admitted without shame that they accepted bribes from two or three candidates then ultimately cast a null ballot. The value of bribes varied between 200 and 500 dirhams (25 – 70 U.S. dollars) and had a considerable impact on voter disenchantment with the election, seeing the vote-buying as proof that the candidates did not merit their confidence.

"The candidates give us money to have our votes." (Man, Khenifra, 40-50 years old, rural area)

"They gave us money this time also, but we didn't vote because we have had enough. We took the money anyway." (Woman, Nador, 25-35 years old, rural area)

"People were bought like sheep. Each has his price: the poor man is sold like a sheep and sometimes the sheep cost more: the sheep costs 1,500 dirhams and the poor man costs only 500 dirhams." (Man, Tangier, urban area)

VOTER ABSTENTION

The principal objective of the focus group research during the legislative elections was to understand the causes behind the non-participation of registered voters, including those who did not go to the polls on September 7, 2007 and those who cast null ballots. Discussions with focus group participants revealed three different categories of voters:

- Those who deliberately refused to go to the polls;
- Those who went to the polls with the intention of voting, but who could not vote because of structural or administrative problems;
- Those who deliberately chose to cast a null ballot.

The findings demonstrate that the decision not to participate varied depending on social and professional status, geographic zone and age. With the exception of women in the rural region of Benguetir, respondents were relatively open to discuss the motivations that led to voluntary or involuntary non-participation. This discussion about voter abstention provides insights into the two reasons for voter abstention:

- Political protest by way of non-participation: prevalent among urban groups, both rural and urban youth, students and semi-urban groups. This cause was cited by the majority of respondents.
- A consequence of confusion generated by the lack of information on the political system and by the complexity of the process: prevalent among rural groups and young people voting for the first time.

“Yes, voting is a national duty. And yes, we love our country, but we cannot vote for someone who will do nothing.” (Woman, Nador, 25-35 years old, rural area)

Political protest by way of non-participation: the choice to abstain from voting

Respondents who said that they deliberately decided not to vote attributed their decision to a “political awakening.” These respondents were typically middle class,

students or youth from urban or rural areas, with a moderate level of university education. Voter abstention, according to the respondents, represents one manifestation of political participation. This category of respondents describes abstaining from voting as proof of political maturity and “good sense,” in contrast with “rural peasants,” the “old,” and the “ignorant” who continue to vote for money or based on politicians’ empty promises. Therefore, the majority of rural and urban youth respondents considered voter abstention as a source of pride.

“Only the ignorant still vote. Young people are now politically aware and can’t be had so easily. It was for this reason that they did not go vote.” (Man, Nador, rural area)

“The low rate of participation was a shock. There were entire families who didn’t go to vote and this demonstrates that people are aware of the state of affairs in the country.” (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

“Only people in rural areas voted.” (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

“I believe that it is part of our patriotism. You have to vote and you have to do your national duty, but you don’t have to give your vote to anyone unless they deserve it.” (Man, Casablanca, 30-40 years old, slums)

“The majority of those who participated in the elections were not aware of the importance of voting.” (Man, Agadir, 20-30 years old, rural)

“I believe that the rate of participation confirms that people are aware of the problems.” (Woman, Casablanca, 40-50 years old, middle class)

“People tell you: what ? You’re going to vote? Are you dumb?” (Woman, Casablanca, 40-50 years old, middle class)

“Only people in rural areas voted because they are ignorant, but the real citizens are aware of the problems.” (Man, Meknes, 20-30 years old, urban area)

Always citing the same logic of “political awareness,” certain urban and youth respondents used a moral argument to justify their refusal to vote. According to them, the act of voting for a corrupt candidate or those susceptible to bribery makes

the voter complicit in immoral acts. Therefore, abstention represents a refusal to share in the responsibility for bad management of public funds.

"I think that voting is a testimony: if I vote for someone, I entrust them with responsibility. How could I entrust someone who I do not know with such responsibility?" (Man, Smara, urban area)

"I didn't vote because I was afraid I would be acting incorrectly by voting for a person who did not deserve it. " (Woman, Agadir, 20-30 years old, rural area)

"I cannot vote for someone who will act badly afterwards. It would be as if I bore false witness, as if I had lied. It is for this reason that I cast a null vote." (Man, Tangier, urban area)

"I saw in the ballot the suffering of many people. It is for this reason that I cast a null ballot." (Woman, Smara, urban area)

Middle class respondents and rural and urban youth saw the act of casting a null ballot as evidence of a political conscience. The right to political participation is particularly important for these groups, who see the act of casting null ballots as an expression of a lack of confidence in the candidates and political actors, while still maintaining a relationship with the political process.

"I believe that if you cast a null vote you transmit the following message: we are disappointed, stop lying to us!" (Woman, Casablanca, 40-50 years old, middle class)

"If you participate with a null vote, you confirm that you are a Moroccan citizen, but you say that you do not have confidence in the system." (Man, Casablanca, slums)

"The majority of people did not vote; they cast null votes, because it's always the same political figures." (Man, Meknes, 20-30 years old, urban area)

The act of protest: abstention

Youth and semi-urban respondents interpreted the high rate of voter abstention as a deliberate act, aiming to convey their dissatisfaction to the state. According to those

who abstained, this served as an act of silent contestation, designed to express citizens' dissatisfaction. According to many respondents, abstention is evidence of courage, in particular for semi-urban and rural groups, who often reported being forced to vote by local authorities and therefore see abstention as an act of defiance. This form of protest was tied to a desire to chastise political actors, the state and local representatives. Several respondents affirmed that they boycotted the elections out of scorn for local authorities.

"The rate of participation was an insult to the government. It proved that people were not satisfied with the situation." (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

"I believe that the rate of participation demonstrates that people are unhappy." (Man, Casablanca, 30-40 years old, slums)

"It was to tell them: wake up!" (Man, Meknes, 20-30 years old, urban area)

"I did not vote because I have had enough of their lies." (Woman, Agadir, 20-30 years old, rural area)

"People have lost hope. It is for that reason that they did not vote. We have voted many times for the same people, but nothing has ever changed." (Woman, Nador, 25-35 years old, rural area)

"No one in my family voted. Politicians do not deserve it. We have lived in Tangier for 10 years and they still haven't given us a certificate of residency!" (Woman, Tangier, urban area)

On the other hand, many older, less wealthy and rural respondents said that they participated in elections for fear of repercussions from local authorities but cast null ballots in defiance. For this category of respondents, the null vote served as "vengeance," a term often employed by rural and semi-urban respondents to express a means of punishing candidates who did not keep their campaign promises. Rural and semi-urban voters were more favorable to the idea of casting a null ballot, for that permitted them to express their negative opinions of the system while evading the anger of local authorities.

"Maybe in casting a null ballot, the citizen wanted to transmit a message that he could not express in a public fashion... " (Man, Casablanca, 30-40 years old, slums)

"I didn't vote for anyone during these elections, because I voted for someone in the previous elections and I asked him for work, but he left me without anything. This year, he came again to gain my vote, but I cast a null vote so that no one can win!" (Woman, Smara, urban area)

"I avenged myself! I cast a blank ballot." (Man, Khenifra, 40-50 years old, rural area)

"I avenged myself by casting a null vote." (Man, Tangier, urban area)

"I was afraid of local authorities and so though I went to vote, I cast a null vote." (Man, Khenifra, 40-50 years old, rural area)

"My husband and I cast null votes because we do not have water or electricity. We drink contaminated water. And the problem is that the polls are located far from us. We wouldn't have got to vote even if they had opened polls near our house." (Woman, Nador, 25-35 years old, rural area)

Null ballots due to confusion of rural voters and youth: too many parties, inadequate education

For a number of rural and youth respondents voting for the first time, the number of political parties, the similarities between their platforms, the lack of information provided about the election and the complexity of the ballot contributed to the confusion of voters at the polls, who preferred to cast a null ballot because they did not know more who to vote for or how to vote. This particular category of respondents did not define their electoral behavior as a deliberate decision or a rejection of the system, but more as a result of perplexity. Many respondents, notably from rural zones outside of Khenifra and Benguerir, told of their inability to perform the functions necessary to vote, such as deciphering symbols or holding the pen to paper.

"There were many symbols and I did not know which to choose." (Man, Khenifra, 40-50 years old, rural area)

"I didn't know what to do and so I cast a null vote." (Man, Khenifra, 40-50 years old, rural area)

“People in our tribe went to vote but they were confused once in the polls and thus, left the ballot blank.” (Man, Khenifra, 40-50 years old, rural area)

“I do not vote because I don’t know how. I don’t know how to use the paper. If I knew, I would vote.” (Man, Benguerir, rural area)

For young people who voted for the first time, the high number of political parties and the similarities between their platforms invoked a negative reaction in several respondents. Most respondents belonging to this category said they went to vote as much out of curiosity as a way to express their right to vote. They were unable to choose a political party and preferred to cast a blank ballot.

“It was the first time. But when I went to the polls, I didn’t find anyone who deserved my vote.” (Woman, Meknes, urban area)

“I was happy to go to the polls. It was my first time. It was like a party. But I didn’t vote for anyone. I wanted to express my opinion.” (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

“I cast a null vote because there were too many parties and I didn’t understand the difference between them.” (Woman, Agadir, rural area)

“I went to the polls, but I didn’t find anyone interesting and so I cast a null vote. Yes, it’s a national duty, but there isn’t anyone to vote for!” (Man, Meknes, 20-30 years old, urban area)

To conclude, it is clear that the predominant reason behind the political apathy of young voters cannot necessarily be attributed to a general aversion to politics. Despite their limited knowledge of politics, many youth went to the polls only to cast a null vote. Voter abstention among youth is more a sign of interest than of rejection of the system. The pride that young respondents felt by “succeeding in sending a message,” “achieving victory,” and “waking up politicians” is a significant finding.

FACTORS OF VOTER APATHY

The focus groups demonstrated that several factors influenced voter apathy during the legislative elections of 2007. The most common was the negative perception of the political system in general and of political parties in particular, which emerged in nearly all of the focus groups, across all demographic divisions. Other prevalent causes were the lack of available information on the political process and the portrayal of the Palace and political parties in the media, which all reinforced the widespread perception of socio-political stagnation. But above all, the political parties are not seen by the majority of respondents across all demographic groups as major actors in the development of the country. The capacity to enact change is instinctively attributed to the King and his closest advisors; elections, therefore, which do not impact the most influential actors, garner little public interest.

Negative perception of the political system: the concerns of youth are not reflected in the political process

According to the large majority of respondents in youth focus groups, actors in the political system are out of touch with peoples' concerns. This perception is particularly widespread among disadvantaged urban youth in Casablanca and Tangier, cities which showed the lowest rates of participation during the elections. The respondents from these groups affirmed their general mistrust of the political system. Young people did not see their priorities reflected, did not identify with political leaders and did not detect any impact of political decisions on their lives. This sense of detachment from the political process led a considerable number of disadvantaged youth to call into question their sense of civic duty. Youth justify their disengagement from the political process by pointing to their exclusion from the system and thus from a typical citizen's role and responsibility.

"I do not feel that I am a Moroccan citizen. How do you expect me to feel like a citizen? I believe that a citizen must have rights before you can speak of his duties." (Man, Tangier, urban area)

"Young people want to vote, but they don't have work, they are hopeless and they prefer to risk a dangerous ocean journey than to stay in Morocco." (Woman, Nador, 25-35 years old, rural area)

"I don't know why they say to people: vote, it's your right! They want to give us this right, but they take away others!" (Man, slums, Casablanca)

Political parties and citizens: a crisis of confidence

Political parties were unanimously criticized across the twenty focus groups for their inattention to local issues. Respondents described parties as being invisible in their regions except during the elections, out of touch with citizens (unlike civil society) and not concerned with local development. In addition, candidates are seen as corrupt, too numerous, presenting similar platforms and hostile to the participation of young people.

"Politicians do not endure the same conditions as we do. The majority of candidates ignore our problems. They live on another planet." (Woman, Casablanca, 40-50 years old, middle class)

"Why would I remember the political parties? Nobody remembers me. Once they win the elections, they forget us and therefore I forget them." (Man, Tangier, urban area)

"We have a political problem. We have a problem of confidence. Citizens do not believe in politicians anymore, because they give nothing but empty promises." (Woman, Meknes, 20-30 years old, urban area)

"They do not remember the slums except during the elections. Once the elections are over, they forget us." (Woman, slums, Casablanca)

"Political parties can do things. They could get us water and all that is necessary, but they don't do it. Therefore, they aren't useful." (Man, Khenifra, rural area)

"Political parties don't have any role. They make us live in dreams." (Woman, Agadir, 20-30 years old, rural area)

Respondents lament the lack of youth participation in the political parties, above all as candidates in elections and as leaders. In fact, the idea of expanding youth political participation and renewing the political elite resounded in practically all of the twenty

focus groups in one way or another. Always “seeing the same faces” during the elections and during the campaign has reinforced, for the majority of the respondents, the impression of a socio-political stagnation and the sentiment that “nothing changes, so why vote?” In other words, the respondents affirmed that they hoped for the emergence of a younger political leadership that is open to youth, in order to permit young people to identify with leaders and become interested in politics.

“Political parties don’t try to make young people interested. They don’t organize meetings where they could listen to young people’s concerns.” (Man, Casablanca, 30-40 years old, slums)

“In Belgium, a young Moroccan woman is a member of parliament. I believe that it is necessary to give young people a chance to intervene.” (Woman, Casablanca, 40-50 years old, middle class)

“I see these elections as a failure because I do not see young people in these elections. Only older people voted.” (Woman, 20-30 years old, Agadir, rural area)

“If young people took the leadership positions in these parties, I would go to vote during the next election to encourage them.” (Student, Rabat)

“The political parties were not capable of producing a young political elite to face the challenges of the country.” (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

“It is the young people who must be involved in politics. But the older ones do not want to leave their posts.” (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

Above all, political parties are not seen as agents of change in the country. According to certain respondents, particularly the middle class and students, the political system in the country allocates little power to political parties and thus limits their decision-making power in areas such as local development. Young people in rural areas, primarily in the rural region around Agadir, compared the performance of political parties to civil society and found that civil society is more engaged in the local development process.

“In the villages, NGOs do fantastic things, which even local authorities cannot do.” (Man, Agadir, 20-30 years old, rural area)

"We must make the political parties responsible before evaluating their performance. Political parties do not have any power, therefore, we cannot judge them." (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

"The political parties cannot change anything because they don't have any power." (Man, Agadir, 20-30, rural area)

" You can see the work that the associations do in the villages. They do very good work—work that the political parties don't do." (Woman, Agadir, 20-30 years old, rural area)

In fact, respondents in all of the focus groups agreed that the real decision making power and ability to develop the country is in the hands of the Palace. Many respondents say that if they could, they would vote for the King because it is he who holds the power to improve their living conditions. These same respondents noted that the projects that the King launched during the campaign represented a positive step towards development, in comparison with the electoral campaigns, which symbolized stagnation and hollow discussions. This reasoning is particularly resonant among rural and semi-urban populations. Middle class and student respondents were divided over their perception of the political system. The majority of those in these groups agree that, given the negative performance of the political parties, it is most prudent and most pragmatic to concentrate decision-making power and the capacity to implement projects in the hands of the monarch and the "government of the shadows," a phrase used by respondents to connote counsels, committees and people close to the Palace. For a minority of students and respondents from the middle class, constitutional reforms, which permit parties to play a more important role in political life, are inevitable; otherwise, if the elections never effect the composition of the government itself and not only the parliament, there will never be a democratic transition.

"If I could, I would vote for the King. All the initiatives come from him." (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

"It's the monarchy that controls the political environment. It's the 'shadow government' that controls the country." (Student, Rabat)

"People do not have confidence except in the *Palais Royal* because only it can accomplish positive things." (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

“On television, we see that it is the King who launches all the development projects. All these projects come from him.” (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

“As long as there are no constitutional reforms, I do not anticipate seeing any change. The Palace will continue to control everything, and as people say, it’s the party of the Palace that always wins.” (Man, Agadir, 20-30 years old, rural area)

“We notice that change often comes from the supreme power, which is to say, the King.” (Woman, Meknes, urban area)

“It’s the King that does everything. All good things come from him. The officials have lost their credibility, and it’s for this reason that the King does everything himself.” (Man, Smara, urban area)

“The King takes care of everything himself. All that is good comes from the King. I believe that no confidence remains in the political parties, it’s for that reason that the King takes care of everything.” (Woman, Casablanca, slums)

The media and the political environment: a crisis of communication

The focus groups revealed significant shortcomings in all groups of awareness and knowledge of the political process. Aside from a minority of students and older participants in the middle class, the large majority of respondents know very little about the role and prerogatives of the parliament and parliamentarians, the importance of elections, the process of establishing a government, etc. Rural and semi-urban groups, as well as youth, possess very limited knowledge of the electoral system and politics. Some do not even associate elections with the composition of government. Others did not know if the elections were municipal or legislative and do not understand the difference between the two. The role of the parliamentarian and the role of local officials are often not understood or confused, mostly among semi-urban and rural female groups. Some say that they refused to vote in order to penalize their local official for failing to render a service or a document. This lack of information exacerbates citizens’ disengagement from a political system which seems both mysterious and out of touch with their concerns. For the respondents, this dearth of available information and awareness results from an absence of civic education programs in the school curriculum.

"The role of the members of parliament isn't sufficiently clear to me." (Man, Casablanca, 30-40 years old, slums)

"You can be sure that the majority of people know little about the elections." (Man, Casablanca, 30-40 years old, slums)

"We need to understand more about politics, so that the elections have significance for us." (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

"Media should play an important role in informing people about politics and about elections." (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

"We do not learn about elections at school." (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

"We do not have much knowledge on the elections. And there is not an association that works to inform us about this subject." (Man, Agadir, 20-30 years old, rural area)

"But I didn't know until after the elections that the government would change! I didn't know that the elections had anything to do with the prime minister or the government!" (Student, Rabat)

"Civil society had awareness campaigns for people who didn't need it. To the rich and the people who live in the city! They didn't target the masses." (Student, Rabat)

"Civil society wasn't engaged in the process in a constructive manner. They did it without substance." (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

"Daba 2007 monopolized the voter awareness efforts. There weren't any alternatives." (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

"The awareness campaign was periodic. There weren't any public debates after 2002 and it was only a little before September 2007 that we heard anything about the elections." (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

In the absence of school programs or civil awareness programs, the principle sources of information on politics remains with local and international media and from community members, according to the respondents. Urban respondents, youth and

the elderly tend to rely on international satellite channels, notably Al-Jazeera. The respondents from Amazigh-speaking regions, notably in the rural regions of Khenifra or Nador, listen to the radio, especially broadcasts in Amazigh, for information. Except for students and the middle class, respondents did not consider the press as a credible source of information. People from rural or semi-urban areas, who are often semi-literate and less wealthy, absorb information from within their communities, such as through rumors and family discussions. Local television, notably 2M and RTM, take second place in popularity after Al-Jazeera. Urban respondents and some rural respondents are constantly exposed to Al-Jazeera, which frequently covered the legislative elections. These people are also exposed to coverage from Al-Arabiya and other European satellite channels. The elections were often mentioned by groups of young people and students, who compared the electoral campaigns and the performance of French parties with those in Morocco.

“Television works against the parties. First of all, we do not see them. Also, on television, the parties argue with each other and the traditional parties are always the most visible.” (Man, Agadir, 20-30 years old, rural area)

“Al-Jazeera doesn't lie; it covers everything about the elections.” (Woman, Nador, 25-35 years old, rural area)

“Only international media is credible.” (Student, Rabat, 18-25 years old)

“The radio is the most important tool for us. It gives us information in Tashelhit and it's through this that we receive information in our community.” (Woman, Agadir, 20-30 years old, rural area)

“We know what happens elsewhere. We are a poor country and we have 30 parties, whereas France is a wealthy country and only has 15.” (Man, Agadir, 20-30 years old, rural area)

To conclude, the factors that contributed to voter apathy in the 2007 legislative elections are much more complex than a lack of confidence in political parties or a negative reaction to price hikes. Above all else, an awareness of the limits of the power of the political parties in relation to the monarchy and a general lack of interest in political parties after years of negative performance are major sources of discontent. The population refuses to vote for someone who will be unable to accomplish much. This perception is reinforced by the media in the country, which disseminates an

image of a dynamic and active sovereign launching innovative development projects, in comparison to stagnant political parties, whose activities do not elicit much interest.

VOTER EXPECTATIONS

Qualitative research on the cause of voter apathy in the elections revealed that those who did not vote condition their return to the polls on significant positive changes in the socio-political environment. Respondents yearned for the presence of more young people in political parties and local development projects that translated into a concrete improvement in the living conditions of the most vulnerable citizens. The expectations of the voters can be summarized in the following points:

- **Development projects that have an impact on peoples' lives:** It is necessary that people “feel” the impact of development projects in their lives, according to rural and semi-urban respondents. This would allow people to regain confidence in political actors and would reinforce the core civic values among youth.
- **Rejuvenation of the political elites:** discussions with the focus groups, without exception, underlined the importance of a rejuvenation of the political elite. Respondents agreed that they would be willing to return to the polls if more young people were active in political parties. This change would signal a rupture with the socio-political stagnation of the past and would guarantee a young and dynamic elite who would be ready to combat development challenges but would also enact policies which resonate positively with the youth population.
- **Engagement of political parties in local development:** political parties were criticized for their lack of collaboration with constituents in comparison to civil society, which is active at the local level. Rural respondents in particular hoped that political parties would engage them in a more significant manner at the local level and that they would permanently renew communication with their constituents, and not only during elections.
- **Simplification of ballots:** new voters and voters from rural areas complained of the complexity of the ballots and hoped that simpler ballots would be available in the future, in particular for the illiterate.
- **Continuous awareness campaigns on elections and politics:** young people and semi-urban respondents demanded more information on politics in order to be able to make informed decisions when voting in the future.

- **Constitutional reforms to permit political parties to play a greater role in the political environment:** the middle class and students regard political reforms as necessary for the democratization of the country.

"I want to participate in the elections because it's a national duty, but I wish they brought us something in return...they should make sure that if we vote, there is change." (Woman, Agadir, rural area)

"Young people can change things. If they let young people participate, I would go, right this minute, to vote." (Woman, Casablanca, slums)

"Yes, I would go vote if young people would take power." (Man, Smara)

"We hope that things will change and we wait for change. It has been only two months since the elections. We want new ideas in Morocco. We want them to integrate young people into the process." (Man, Agadir, 20-30 years old, rural area)

METHODOLOGY

Focus Groups

Focus groups were held in the form of semi-structured group interviews. Respondents reacted to open questions posed by a professional moderator. This form of flexible research explores subjects that interest the moderator, while at the same time permitting respondents to bring up other subjects and concerns that may have escaped the researcher.

The focus groups indicate not only what people think, but also *why* they feel certain ways about issues, *how* they formulate their opinions and the degree of intensity of their points of view. These discussions permit the researchers to better discern the nuanced characteristics of respondents' answers, such as hesitation, enthusiasm, anger or uncertainty. By giving the moderator the ability to listen to respondents directly, the focus groups are a precious tool in understanding the "why" that explains the statistics. The focus groups also serve to highlight the similarities and differences between points of view held by different categories of people (young and old, men and women, etc.)

The respondents in each of the focus groups were selected by a targeted and meticulous recruitment process, based on demographic criteria or common experiences, and aimed to establish a comfortable environment to permit respondents to express their opinions easily. These homogenous groups consisted of 6 to 10 individuals—large enough to stimulate discussion, but small enough that each participant had the ability to participate. The group format created an environment for ideas to surface that wouldn't emerge in surveys or in questionnaires.

While the viability of quantitative surveys relies on the representativeness of the sample, the results from the focus groups are different because they reflect the opinions of individuals who are part of particular social groups. In other words, the research aims to understand and not to measure the target's opinions. The respondents are selected by the researchers in the same process as a quantitative study in order to guarantee impartiality in the criteria of a specific group (age, level of education, etc.) Because the number of people who participated in a focus group project is more limited than the number targeted in a survey, the results from the focus groups cannot be proportionally extrapolated to explain the views of the entire

population. Nonetheless, the results are particularly useful because they offer more on the details and the nuances of opinions for particular groups than a survey.

Research specificities

The study included a series of twenty focus groups with two focus groups for each targeted group: a group of men and a group of women. The focus groups were held in 9 provinces: Rabat, Casablanca, Meknes, Khenifra, Benguerir, Nador, Tangier, Agadir and Smara. The following table summarizes the specifications of each focus group:

| Province | Zone | Gender | Age | Socio-professional category |
|-----------------|-------------|---------------|------------|------------------------------------|
| Rabat | Urban | Women | 18 - 25 | Students |
| | Urban | Men | 18 - 25 | Students |
| Casablanca | Slums | Women | 30 - 40 | Shantytown |
| | Slums | Men | 30 - 40 | Shantytown |
| | Urban | Women | 40 - 50 | Middle class |
| | Urban | Men | 40 - 50 | Middle class |
| Meknès | Urban | Women | 20 - 30 | Urban youth |
| | Urban | Men | 20 - 30 | Urban youth |
| Khénifra | Rural | Women | 40 - 50 | General target |
| | Rural | Men | 40 - 50 | General target |
| Benguerir | Rural | Women | 35 - 45 | General target |
| | Rural | Men | 35 - 45 | General target |
| Nador | Rural | Women | 25 - 35 | General target |
| | Rural | Men | 25 - 35 | General target |
| Tanger | Urban | Women | 35 - 45 | Lower class |
| | Urban | Men | 35 - 45 | Lower class |
| Agadir | Rural | Women | 20 - 30 | General target |
| | Rural | Men | 20 - 30 | General target |
| Smara | Urban | Women | 35 - 45 | General target |
| | Urban | Men | 35 - 45 | General target |

The targeting of zones and provinces is based on information provided by the Minister of Interior following the legislative elections on the official internet site www.elections.gov.ma. This information concerns the rate of participation in different provinces in Morocco and the proportion of null ballots cast.

The respondents in the focus groups were stratified by geographic zone, gender, age, and socio-professional class, ethnic group and voting status.

- **Geographic zone** : the selection of targeted zones included geographic and demographic considerations : ten focus groups were held in rural areas and ten focus groups in urban areas ; being therefore representative of the major regions in the country.
- **Gender** : The separation of men and women in the focus groups was due to cultural considerations in order to assure the spontaneity of the responses and the comfort of the respondents.
- **Age** : Given that the average age of the population of Morocco, eight focus groups were composed of respondents under 34 years old, six focus groups were composed of respondents between 30 and 44 years old, and four groups were composed of respondents older than 45 years old.
- **Socio-professional class** : eight focus groups were composed of underprivileged respondents, given the weakest rate of participation and null ballots in the poorest regions .
- **Ethnic groups** : the study included respondents from the different Amazigh ethnic groups (Tamazight, Tashelhit and Tarifit) .
- **Voting status** : each focus group contained 50 percent non-voting respondents and 50 percent respondents who cast null ballots.

ABOUT NDI

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and institutions. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

Democracy depends on legislatures that represent citizens and oversee the executive, independent judiciaries that safeguard the rule of law, political parties that are open and accountable, and elections in which voters freely choose their representatives in government. Acting as a catalyst for democratic development, NDI bolsters the institutions and processes that allow democracy to flourish.

Build Political and Civic Organizations: NDI helps build the stable, broad-based and well-organized institutions that form the foundation of a strong civic culture. Democracy depends on these mediating institutions—the voice of an informed citizenry, which link citizens to their government and to one another by providing avenues for participation in public policy.

Safeguard Elections: NDI promotes open and democratic elections. Political parties and governments have asked NDI to study electoral codes and to recommend improvements. The Institute also provides technical assistance for political parties and civic groups to conduct voter education campaigns and to organize election monitoring programs. NDI is a world leader in election monitoring, having organized international delegations to monitor elections in dozens of countries, helping to ensure that polling results reflect the will of the people.

Promote Openness and Accountability: NDI responds to requests from leaders of government, parliament, political parties and civic groups seeking advice on matters from legislative procedures to constituent service to the balance of civil-military relations in a democracy. NDI works to build legislatures and local governments that are professional, accountable, open and responsive to their citizens.

International cooperation is key to promoting democracy effectively and efficiently. It also conveys a deeper message to new and emerging democracies that while autocracies are inherently isolated and fearful of the outside world, democracies can count on international allies and an active support system. Headquartered in Washington D.C., with field offices in every region of the world, NDI complements the skills of its staff by enlisting volunteer experts from around the world, many of whom are veterans of democratic struggles in their own countries and share valuable perspectives on democratic development.

THE PEOPLE'S MIRROR

The People's Mirror is one of the premier centers for opinion research on social and political subjects in the Middle East and North African region. Based in Rabat, Morocco, the People's Mirror aims to establish a better relationship between decision-makers and citizens.

In using qualitative research methods, the People's Mirror reflects the perceptions and priorities of the citizens in a variety of important projects and with diverse clients. The People's Mirror meets these objectives by providing assistance to clients on the evaluation of concepts, political platforms, political messages, organization of campaigns, evaluation of needs, analysis of websites and elaboration on plans to supplement quantitative research. The People's Mirror works in close collaboration with its clients to translate the results of its research into concrete actions, so as to guarantee the success of projects where costs are justified by the utility of the research findings.

The People's Mirror possesses the capacity and the expertise that allows it to conduct qualitative research in its well-equipped center in Rabat, as well as through the use of portable equipment across urban and rural regions in Morocco and the broader Middle East, North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa regions. The center offers services in several languages, including Arabic, Amazigh, French and English.

Copyright © National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) 2008. All rights reserved. Portions of this work may be reproduced and/or translated for noncommercial purposes provided NDI is acknowledged as the source of the material and is sent copies of any translation.