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The Great Escape: When the Sea Becomes an Alternative to the Ballot Box

An Analytical Reading of the Moroccan Political Situation in Light of the September 23, 2026 Elections

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When we look closely at Morocco's political scene today, it may be tempting to place the blame entirely on "the impotence of political parties" or "elite corruption." But this diagnosis, however partially true, remains insufficient, because it focuses on the symptoms while ignoring the root of the illness. The truth that many in the Moroccan street have come to understand is that the problem runs deeper than this: we are not simply facing a passing "crisis of representation," but rather what appears to be a tightly engineered political structure, one that preserves its central balances of power while leaving the peripheries and the political tools alone to bear the burden of every failure.

Power and Wealth Intertwined

The core of this problem begins from a point that cannot be ignored: the clear entanglement of political authority and economic influence. When the royal institution, through its vast investment arms, controls vital sectors of the national economy; from banking and insurance to mining and energy; it is not merely exercising political power; it is also setting the rules of the economic game itself. In such a context, it becomes difficult to speak of "fair political competition" or "genuine accountability." How can a political party, or even an independent businessman, effectively compete with or criticize an entity that combines the power to set political direction with the power to control the arteries of the economy? In this way, political action is transformed from a space for proposing alternatives and shaping policy into little more than "the administration of municipal and local affairs" within pre-drawn limits.

The Engineering of the Party Landscape

To ensure the continuity of this arrangement, the system has relied on a precise engineering of the party landscape, which manifests itself through two main mechanisms.

The first is what is known as the "administrative parties"; entities widely seen as receiving logistical and media support to guarantee the existence of loyal parliamentary blocs, and to fragment any opposition voice that might gain genuine popular momentum.

The second mechanism is the more cunning of the two: the "absorption" or "domestication" of opposition parties that succeed in building a popular base or articulating a critical discourse. Once such parties are drawn into the circles of governance and made to share responsibility for it, they lose their critical edge and become hostages to compromise; gradually leading the voter to the conviction that "they are all the same," and that change through the ballot box is nothing but a mirage.

Power Without Accountability

The inevitable, logical outcome of this design is to hollow political action of its substance. The system succeeds masterfully in separating "power" from "accountability": governments and parties are left to bear the burden of rising prices, weak public services, and unemployment, while the major strategic decisions remain entirely beyond the reach of genuine parliamentary debate. This creates an enormous gulf between citizens and institutions, one in which electoral abstention shifts from being a sign of indifference to becoming a form of "conscious boycott", a silent protest against the futility and meaninglessness of the political process.

With the approach of the September 23, 2026 elections, Morocco's political scene does not appear headed toward any fundamental transformation. Elections, in their current context, are no longer that decisive moment in which voters shape their own history; they have instead become a tightly choreographed institutional "ritual," whose features are cooked up in advance in the corridors of central decision-making, then executed with precision by the administrative and security apparatus.

The illusion of "change" promoted by election campaigns collides with a solid wall of pre-existing engineering. The role of the administrative apparatus is not limited to "securing" the voting process; it extends to being a principal actor in sorting political players and steering the compass. This is achieved through well-tested and familiar mechanisms: drawing electoral districts in ways that serve the desired balances of power; "taming" individual ambitions through the lure of official posts; and channeling hidden logistical and financial support into the veins of the "administrative parties" to guarantee their survival as loyal voting blocs, ones capable of fragmenting any wave of genuine protest or opposition that might emerge from the street.

The Earthquake of July 30

But all of this precise calculation, all of this carefully engineered design, collided with an earthquake no one had anticipated, the earthquake that shook the country on July 30, in what has rightly been called "the Great Escape."

The attempt by approximately 70,000 citizens — men and women, young and old — to storm the border at Ceuta is not merely a "security incident" or a passing "migration crisis" that can be filed away with ministerial reports or condemnatory statements. At its core, it is a harsh political verdict; a clear and thunderous message sent by the Moroccan people to the political system as a whole. It is an "early and explicit vote" ahead of the September 23

elections; indeed, one more powerful than any ballot, because it was not cast in sealed boxes, but on the open sea, beneath barbed wire, and with the lives of the innocent.

These 70,000 did not merely flee; they collectively and explicitly cast their votes: "No" to the proclaimed development model, "No" to the parties that take turns managing failure, and "No" to the official rhetoric of reassurance that stands worlds apart from reality. They withdrew their confidence from the entire system; before the ballot boxes were even opened, before the election campaigns had even begun, before millions were spent on logistics and propaganda.

A Bill Paid in Blood

What compounds the harshness of this "early vote" is the blood-soaked bill paid for it. More than 150 of those fleeing with their dreams fell victim, losing their lives to drowning at sea. These lives are not a mere "statistic" to be entered into security reports, nor are they "collateral damage" that can be filed away with condemnations of smuggling networks. They are a "bill of blood," paid by citizens for the collapse of the state in performing its most basic existential duty: providing a dignified and secure life for its people.

This is no longer simple labor migration in search of a better job, it has become an escape from "moral and material death" at home. When a person chooses to risk drowning at sea rather than remain, it means they have come to see "certain death" in their own homeland (through extreme poverty, despair, and a foreclosed future), and have preferred to it a "possible death" in pursuit of a glimmer of hope. This terrible equation is the strongest indictment that can be leveled against any system of government.

A Crisis of Legitimacy

A state derives its legitimacy, before any constitution or election, from the "social contract" that guarantees the protection and dignity of its citizens. When the system proves unable to prevent hundreds of thousands from risking their lives, and hundreds of them fall victim at sea, it loses its moral legitimacy entirely. No administrative party official and no government minister can stand at a podium asking for trust, or speak of "growth" and "stability," while the nation's shores turn into graveyards for its citizens' dreams, their bodies tossed by the waves.

It is certain that the official machinery will try to handle this event through a security crackdown and a tightening of the noose around smugglers, entirely ignoring the political and social root of the disaster — attempting to portray the matter as mere "organized crime." This is, without doubt, a clear evasion of responsibility. Smuggling networks do not create despair; they exploit it. And despair is the natural product of an economic and political system that has crushed the fragile classes, destroyed the middle class, and turned vast regions of the country into pockets of poverty and exclusion.

Elections in the Shadow of Mourning

This tragedy casts its bleak shadow over the September 23 elections. How can elections be held in a country still searching for the bodies of its children? What electoral discourse can

hold any meaning before families who lost fathers or sons at sea, fleeing the reality of this system? Against this tragic backdrop, these elections will not merely be read as a "farce" or "an exercise in managing continuity" — they will appear as a silent memorial service for a squandered national dignity, and for a political system that paid a heavy price in innocent blood to preserve the balances of its own power.

Beyond Despair

And yet, despite all this pain, surrendering to despair is not an option. Behind these numbers and analyses lies a painful human truth: more than 150 souls were lost to drowning; not in search of adventure, but in search of dignity and life. Compassion for these victims and their grieving families is not merely an emotional stance; it is a moral duty that requires us to reject any justification that reduces human lives to "collateral damage" in political or economic equations.

True hope does not lie in the perpetuation of the same closed cycle, but in openness to positive, peaceful, and radical change; change that rebuilds the "social contract" on genuine foundations of justice, transparency, and accountability, and those grants elected institutions and civil actors real space to serve the citizen. Only through this peaceful and courageous transformation can human dignity be restored, and the country's trajectory shifted from "fleeing reality" to "building a future" worthy of the sacrifices and dreams of all its children.

Conclusion

When a people choose to flee their own homeland in massive numbers, they are not merely voting against a government; they are declaring the bankruptcy of the entire political system. And any attempt to present the September 23 elections as "a victory for democracy" or "a renewal of trust" will collide with one indisputable fact: when the sea casts its vote, no voice can rise above the sound of the waves that swallowed its dreams.