

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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Morocco Summary 29 January 2026

Prime minister Aziz Akhannouch (2021-present) announces on 11 January that he will not seek another term as party leader and will also not contest the upcoming legislative elections in September this year, marking an unprecedented development in Morocco's politics. King Mohammed VI (1999-present) expresses regret over "unfortunate" incidents during the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) football tournament in Rabat, but stresses that they should not undermine Morocco's deep and historic ties with the rest of the continent. Morocco sets a new tourism record in 2025, with nearly 20 million tourists, solidifying its status as Africa's most-visited country and demonstrating the sector's strong recovery from the pandemic.

Akhannouch steps aside, leaving Morocco's political system in uncharted territory

Morocco's governing party, the **Rassemblement National des Indépendants (RNI)**, is entering a period of unusual political transition after prime minister **Aziz Akhannouch** (2021-present) [announced](#) on 11 January that he will not seek another term as party leader and will also not stand in the upcoming legislative elections in September this year. While he will remain head of government until the end of the current mandate, the decision marks a significant departure from typical political practice in Morocco and has broad implications for both his authority and his party's future.

Akhannouch has led the RNI since 2016 and guided it to a landslide victory in the 2021 elections, after which King **Mohammed VI** (1999-present) appointed him head of government. Under his leadership, the party has framed its time in power around major social and economic reforms, including expanded social protection, investment support, and social cohesion. At the same time, his government faced growing [public frustration](#) over rising living costs, fuel prices, inflation, and slow improvements in everyday living conditions. These pressures led to repeated protests, particularly among young people, as was seen in the **GenZ212** protests at the end of 2025 (see *ARC Briefing Morocco Oct & Dec 2025*).

The RNI has called for an extraordinary congress, to be held on 7 February in **El Jadida (Casablanca-Settat Region)**, to elect a new party president. While the party has reaffirmed its support for Akhannouch as head of government until the end of his term, his withdrawal from party leadership and from electoral politics altogether is almost [unprecedented](#).

In simple terms, this is not a resignation, but a clear political withdrawal. Prime ministers in Morocco usually stay as party leaders and guide their parties into the next election. Akhannouch's decision breaks that pattern. Until very recently, he seemed to be [preparing](#) for a second term, actively campaigning, highlighting his government's achievements, and proposing reforms that would extend beyond this legislature. The sudden timing of his announcement has therefore led to questions about whether the move was entirely voluntary or influenced by political pressure and falling popularity.

The consequences for the RNI are significant. The party now faces an election without its most influential figure and main campaigner, who is also a billionaire and one of the most recognisable people in Morocco. It must defend a record in government whose chief architect will not be present to promote it to voters. There are also issues with succession and image; while **Mohamed Chaouki**, a member of parliament (MP) for the **Boulemane** constituency (**Fès-Meknès Region**), has [emerged](#) as the sole candidate to replace Akhannouch, he does not have Akhannouch's stature. His absence risks strengthening the perception that the party is drifting away from an unpopular leadership.

For Akhannouch personally, the decision lessens his authority, effectively turning him into a lame-duck period. Leading the government without commanding a party and lacking a clear electoral future strips him of much political influence, especially within the ruling coalition, where partners are likely to distance themselves as elections near. Although he has long been seen as a figure the monarchy favours, which offers him protection and positions him as a focal point for public frustration, his withdrawal - which would not have occurred without the palace being fully aware - leaves the palace in a position where it needs to recalibrate its political strategy, as the next prime minister to emerge from the coming elections may no longer be its preferred or most reliable figure.

Importantly, this does not mean a loss of control over policy direction. Morocco's strategic agenda remains firmly under the monarchy's control. For investors, the main risk is therefore not policy reversal but short-term political and social unrest caused by public dissatisfaction and the uneven pace of reform under a visibly weakened head of government.

King Mohammed VI seeks to steady African ties after AFCON final chaos

Morocco's hosting of the **Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON)** from December to January ended in loss of the host country, but politically and economically, it reinforced the country's long-term strategy of deepening ties with the continent while positioning itself as a continental hub for investment, infrastructure, and global events. After chaotic scenes marred the AFCON final in **Rabat** on 18 January, where **Senegal** won, King Mohammed moved quickly on 22 January to contain the fallout. He [described](#) the chaotic incidents on the field as "*shameful*" and "*regrettable*" but stressed that they should not undermine Morocco's deep and historic ties with the rest of the continent. Reaffirming that Africa remains central to Morocco's identity and foreign policy, King Mohammed further stated that "*once the emotions subside, the bonds of African brotherhood will naturally prevail*".

Senegalese players left the pitch in protest after their goal was disallowed and a penalty was awarded to Morocco in the final moments of the match, leading to a clash between Senegalese supporters and Moroccan security as they attempted to enter the pitch following the penalty decision. Morocco's main human rights advocacy group, **Association Marocaine des Droits Humains (AMDH)**, also [said](#) on 23 January that following the final, there has been "*a serious surge in racist and hate speech*" directed against migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, and some had called for their expulsion from public areas, cafes and workplaces, with this rhetoric "*even appearing on some radio programmes*". The events at the final ultimately [led](#) to African football authorities fining Senegal and Morocco a total of more than \$1m by on 29 January.

Strengthening relations with African states has been a [cornerstone](#) of King Mohammed's 26-year reign. Morocco rejoined the **African Union (AU)** in 2017 after a 33-year absence, expanded its diplomatic footprint across **West** and **Central Africa**, and encouraged Moroccan banks, insurers, and industrial firms to invest heavily across the continent. Senegal, in particular, stands out as one of Morocco's closest partners, politically, economically, and socially.

In a clear signal that football tensions would not spill into diplomacy, Senegalese prime minister **Ousmane Sonko** [visited](#) Rabat on 26 January, where he was hosted by Akhannouch and signed new agreements covering energy, mining, infrastructure, and transport, and revived a bilateral cooperation commission that had been dormant since 2013. Sonko stressed that "*the Moroccan-Senegalese friendship is stronger than emotions*", while both sides framed the episode as one that should remain confined to sport. Senegal is Morocco's largest trade partner in Africa, with bilateral trade more than quadrupling over a decade to reach \$310m in 2024. Moroccan banks rank among Senegal's largest lenders by assets, and Morocco's **OCP Group**, one of the world's largest phosphate and fertiliser producers, plays a key role in supporting Senegalese agriculture through fertiliser supply and investment.

While the AFCON final exposed social tensions, the tournament itself was a major financial and logistical success. Industry and commerce minister, **Ryad Mezzour**, [said](#) on 25 January that Morocco generated more than \$1.79 billion in direct revenues from hosting the competition. This alone has covered around 80% of the infrastructure costs needed for the 2030 **FIFA World Cup**, which Morocco

will co-host with **Spain** and **Portugal**. The tournament drew roughly 600,000 visitors, contributing to a record 20 million tourist arrivals in 2025, a 14% increase compared to the previous year (see below). Spending rose across transport, hotels, restaurants, and crafts, while over 100,000 jobs were created, many of which are permanent, with workers trained to international standards. Overall, Morocco invested \$2.75 billion in AFCON-related infrastructure, including nine new or upgraded stadiums, roads, airports, digital systems, and 5G connectivity.

Mezzour further [described](#) the tournament as a “sovereign investment”, arguing that Morocco “gained a decade of development in 24 months”. With nearly 80% of the required sports infrastructure already completed, the country now enters the World Cup cycle with a significant head start. What remains to be constructed - including high-speed rail extensions and the **Grand Stadium of Casablanca** - builds upon already established foundations. Despite the emotional loss on the pitch, Morocco has emerged from AFCON financially stronger and enhanced its reputation for hosting major sporting events. King Mohammed VI has also kept his message clear: sport is a tool, Africa is a priority, and Morocco aims to turn continental engagement into a lasting economic and strategic advantage.

Morocco break records as Africa’s top tourist destinations

Morocco set a new tourism [record](#) in 2025, solidifying its status as Africa’s most-visited countries and demonstrating the sector’s strong recovery from the pandemic. Morocco recorded around 19.8 million tourist arrivals last year, a 14% increase from the previous year, easily exceeding pre-**Covid-19** levels. The figures underline the resilience of tourism in the country, despite regional instability and global economic uncertainty. Tourism remains a major source of jobs and foreign currency for the economy.

Tourism minister **Fatim-Zahra Ammor** said on 5 January that, for Morocco, the figures reflect a “*deep transformation*” of its tourism offerings that accounts for about 8% of the \$178 billion economy. Visitor numbers are now roughly 50% higher than before the pandemic, and arrivals were scarcely affected by the September 2023 earthquake near **Marrakesh**, where key tourist areas are currently undergoing upgrades.

Improved air connectivity has [played](#) a major role. National carrier **Royal Air Maroc** expanded routes across **Europe**, added new long-haul links to the **United States (US)** and **China**, and began receiving new aircraft as part of a long-term plan to expand its fleet. Low-cost airlines, including **Ireland**-headquartered **Ryanair Holdings**, have also boosted arrivals from Europe. Tourism numbers also received an additional boost from Morocco hosting the 2025 AFCON, which drew at least 600,000 football fans from across Africa and the diaspora between December and January (see above).

Looking ahead, Morocco aims to attract 26 million tourists annually by 2030. Ultimately, the figures demonstrate how **North Africa – Egypt** was the second most visited country - has decisively surpassed the rest of the continent as Africa’s leading tourism hub. Africa’s largest economy, **South Africa**, [received](#) 10.48 million tourists in 2025, roughly half of Morocco and Egypt’s values.

Planner

7 Feb 2026 **(Morocco) Rassemblement National des Indépendants (RNI)** elective conference;

2026 **(Morocco)** King **Mohammed VI** expected to make a state visit to **France**;

2026 **(Morocco)** General election

Chronology

28 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. **France’s** senate and national assembly leaders are expected to visit Morocco to reinforce bilateral relations, boosting ties across politics, economy, and culture;

28 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. The palace says Morocco will start operating the \$5.6 billion **Nador West Med**, its second **Mediterranean** deepwater port, in the

fourth quarter of this year as it seeks to replicate the success of **Tanger Med**, the Mediterranean and **Africa's** largest port;

26 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *AP News*. Morocco and **Senegal** pledge to strengthen their diplomatic and economic ties, signing 17 agreements to boost trade and investment in sectors like agriculture, infrastructure, fisheries and mining;

26 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. **United Kingdom**-headquartered **Sound Energy** advances its gas operations in eastern Morocco, completing commissioning of key surface facilities at the **Tendrra Phase I Project**;

24 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. Morocco launches a high-level economic mission to **Chile** to strengthen trade ties, deepen South-South cooperation, and expand partnerships with **Latin America** as part of its 2025-2027 foreign trade programme;

22 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Diplomatie*. Foreign affairs minister **Nasser Bourita** represents the country at the signing of the **United States (US)**-led **Board of Peace in Davos (Switzerland)**, joining other founding members in a \$1 billion initiative to address international conflicts;

22 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. **European Union** confirms it provided Morocco with \$252.1m in budget support in 2025 to help advance key reforms, reinforcing their strategic partnership;

20 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. **High Commission for Planning (HCP)** projects economic growth to rise to 5% in 2026, driven by a strong recovery in agriculture and steady expansion in non-agricultural sectors such as industry, services and tourism;

20 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Arab Weekly*. King **Mohammed VI** accepts a role as a founding member of a new **United States (US)**-led **Board of Peace**, aimed at addressing international conflicts;

16 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. **European Commission** is set to begin negotiations with Morocco on a new fisheries agreement after the previous pact expired in 2023, despite opposition from pro-**Polisario** advocates and a 2024 **European Court of Justice** ruling annulling earlier **European Union (EU)**-Morocco trade and fishing deals over **Western Sahara** concerns;

16 Dec 2025 **Nairobi (Kenya)** *Daily Nation*. Kenya signs a Sh40 billion (\$308m) deal with **Morocco**-headquartered African fund **Africa50**, and **Power Grid Corporation of India** to develop power lines, including the **Suswa Substation** in **Narok County**, aiming to boost the electricity transmission infrastructure;

15 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. **World Bank** reports that Morocco's economy grew significantly in 2025, forecasting 5% growth, boosted by a rebound in agricultural output, tourism and remittances;

14 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Reuters*. **United States (US)** suspends processing for immigrant visas for applicants from 75 countries, including Morocco, as part of the US' intensifying immigration crackdown;

14 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. Interior minister **Abdelouafi Laftit** announces that Morocco increased the share of value-added tax (VAT) revenues allocated to local authorities by 2% to 32% in 2025, with around \$543m now funding municipal investment projects annually;

13 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. **High Commission for Planning (HCP)** forecasts the economy will grow by 4.2% in Q1 2026, up from 4% at the end of 2025, driven primarily by strong domestic activity in agriculture and services;

12 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Reuters*. Water minister **Nizar Baraka** says Morocco's seven-year drought has come to an end after abundant rainfall this winter;

12 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Reuters*. Digital transition minister **Amal El Fallah Seghrouchni** says Morocco is targeting a MAD 100 billion (\$10 billion) boost to its GDP from artificial intelligence by 2030, as the country steps up its investment in training programmes, sovereign data centres and cloud services;

7 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. **Standard Chartered Global Research** forecasts that Morocco's economy will grow by 4.5% in 2026, supported by strong non-agricultural sectors, rising public and private investment, and momentum from major projects linked to the **2030 FIFA World Cup**;

7 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Reuters*. Fisheries minister **Zakia Driouich** says Morocco will halt exports of frozen sardines from 1 February to protect domestic supplies and contain prices;

6 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. Minister delegate for investment **Karim Zidane** confirms approval of 89 SME investment projects totalling over MAD 1.28 billion (\$123m) to support small businesses and create jobs;

5 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Reuters*. The tourism ministry says Morocco received a record 19.8 million tourists in 2025, up 14% from a year earlier;

2 Jan 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. Morocco introduces a rebate scheme for soft wheat imports from January to April 2026, aiming to secure domestic supply and stabilise prices amid global market volatility;

30 Dec 2025 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Arab Weekly*. A new agreement between Morocco and the **European Commission** will extend existing customs privileges to fruits and vegetables from Morocco's southern regions;

28 Dec 2025 **Rabat (Morocco)** *APA News*. Foreign minister **Nasser Bourita** and his **Egyptian** counterpart **Badr Abdelatty** discuss bilateral relations and regional issues, confirming the progress of preparations for the upcoming meeting of the joint coordination and monitoring committee;

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