

## Fatima Zahra Mansouri: On the Brink of Leading Morocco's Government



As Morocco gears up for the 2026 parliamentary elections, one name has emerged to disrupt traditional calculations and reignite a question long postponed: Can a woman become head of government?

With every step Fatima Zahra Mansouri takes within the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM), debate deepens over the trajectory of her rise and whether it signals a historic turning point in the country's relationship with women in power.

The Minister of National Planning, Urban Planning, Housing, and Urban Policy commands significant attention in Moroccan political circles. As PAM's national coordinator, Mansouri is increasingly positioned by party members and officials as a leading contender to head upcoming government coalition talks, potentially paving the way for her to be nominated as a prime ministerial candidate after the upcoming vote.

This growing momentum is fueling a renewed conversation about whether Morocco is ready to entrust a woman with executive authority. What once seemed purely theoretical is now viewed as an increasingly viable scenario,

particularly in a global context that has seen female leaders navigate high-stakes crises with exceptional skill.

Examples abound: In Taiwan, President Tsai Ing-wen earned global praise for her proactive, science-driven leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic keeping infection rates among the world's lowest despite geographic proximity to the outbreak's epicenter.

In New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern exemplified a blend of empathy and decisiveness, while in Germany, Angela Merkel guided her country through multiple crises with calm precision and scientific rigor, resulting in lower mortality rates than those seen in many other European nations.

### From Law to Public Life

Born in 1976 into a family steeped in diplomacy and public service her father, Jihad Abdelrahman Mansouri, served as Pasha of Marrakech and later Morocco's ambassador to the UAE Fatima Zahra Mansouri's career reflects a steady progression through both academic and political institutions.

She earned a law degree from Mohammed V University in Rabat in 1998, followed by a postgraduate diploma in Business Contracts from the University of Montpellier in 1999. In 2000, she completed a program in Anglo-Saxon commercial law at New York University.

By 2005, she had joined the Marrakech Bar Association, focusing her legal practice on real estate issues. However, her interest in public affairs soon drew her beyond the courtroom and into the political arena.

When PAM was founded in August 2008, Mansouri quickly aligned with the new political force. The following year, she ran in the municipal elections and became the first woman to serve as mayor of Marrakech, and only the second woman to hold such a position nationwide. She entered Parliament in 2011 and was re-elected in both the 2016 and 2021 cycles.

In 2015, she was elected president of PAM's National Council, the party's highest consultative body. Her re-election to the same post solidified her role in helping to stabilize the party during a period marked by internal conflict and factionalism following the departure of its founding leader.

### Leadership Shifts Within PAM

The Authenticity and Modernity Party was formed by Fouad Ali El Himma and a coalition of local officials as part of broader efforts to restructure Morocco's political landscape and address fragmentation in the early 2000s.

When El Himma was appointed senior advisor to King Mohammed VI in

December 2011, he distanced himself from PAM's internal affairs, leaving the party to chart its own course.

Since then, several figures have cycled through the party's leadership: Mohamed Cheikh Biadillah, then Ilyas El Omari who resigned after failing to counter the rise of Islamists in the 2016 elections followed by Hakim Benchamach, and then Abdellatif Ouahbi, currently Minister of Justice under Prime Minister Aziz Akhannouch. Ouahbi opted not to seek a second term as party chief.

At PAM's fifth national congress in February 2024, the party adopted a collective leadership model for the first time. This restructuring resulted in a three-person general secretariat, with Mansouri appointed as the lead coordinator.

However, that fragile equilibrium soon fractured. In September 2024, Mansouri suspended fellow party leader Salah Eddine Aboulghali after allegations surfaced that he defrauded a senior member out of a substantial sum related to a land deal.

A month later, the National Council elected Fatima Saadi to replace Aboulghali in the leadership troika, joining Mansouri and Minister of Culture Mehdi Bensaïd.

Aboulghali publicly disputed the accusations, accusing Mansouri of turning the party into a "private estate" governed by personal interests and powerful connections. He claimed she pressured him to resign by linking his party role to a personal financial dispute, effectively politicizing a private matter.

### The Al Haouz Earthquake

Mansouri has also come under scrutiny over her handling of the post-earthquake reconstruction project in Al Haouz, following the devastating 6.8-magnitude tremor in September 2023 that damaged or destroyed around 59,674 homes.

While she has touted the ministry's achievements such as the construction of 51,000 new homes and major investments in roads, schools, and hospitals critics argue that progress has been uneven across regions. Many displaced families, they say, remain excluded from compensation or housing programs.

The divergence between official narratives and the lived experiences of earthquake survivors has reignited questions about the effectiveness of reconstruction policies. Victims report ongoing delays and a lack of clear communication, casting doubt on the ministry's responsiveness and Mansouri's ability to connect with affected communities.

### The Second-Place Strategy

Within PAM, there appears to be a growing consensus that Mansouri is best positioned to lead the party into the 2026 elections. Her supporters are pushing

to position her as a prime ministerial frontrunner, seeing this as a step toward gradually normalizing the idea of a woman occupying the kingdom's second-highest executive role.

But the path is steep. According to Morocco's constitution, the king appoints the head of government from the party that wins the most seats in the House of Representatives. Given the country's multiparty landscape, achieving an outright majority remains extremely difficult.

Mansouri now faces a crucial test. If PAM can rally its base and engage meaningfully with voters, it may expand its electoral appeal. But if internal divisions persist or the party fails to present a compelling platform, it risks settling once again for second place.

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