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Paper Title: **The Western Sahara: Governance and Rights in a Disputed Territory**

**Abstract:** The paper addresses the legal standards for self-determination and analyzes whether the Sahrawi people are legally entitled to determine their own form of governance. It then elaborates on the self-determination analysis by describing the shift in attitudes among the Sahrawi over time, concluding that growing disenchantment with the Polisario leadership and ideals ultimately undermines the self-determination cause. The paper further addresses Morocco's territorial claims to Western Sahara and describes the Moroccan Autonomy Plan, its investments in the region, and its use of the region's natural resources. The paper then broadens the inquiry to discuss the involvement of other nations, particularly Algeria, in the Western Sahara dispute, thereby adding regional context to the analysis. Finally, the paper describes past and present human rights violations in the region and discusses options to curb such abuses during the time it takes to resolve the geopolitical conflict over territorial control.