

Post-election Analysis

ALGERIA

Constitutional referendum of November 1. A return to the departure box

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ALGERIA: A RETURN TO THE DEPARTURE BOX¹

On November 11, 2020, the President of the Constitutional Council of Algeria, Kamal Feniche, solemnly proclaimed the results of the Constitutional Referendum held on November 1, 2020. According to this same proclamation, the constitutional revision text would have been approved upon obtaining 66.8% of the votes with a record minimum participation of 23.84%. Less than 3.5million voters out of a population that already exceeds 40 million (42 million), not counting the large diaspora abroad, would have ratified the constitutional modification (only 8.3% of the country). As striking as the minuscule voter participation numbers are, more so was the official error made in the official promulgation of the data, since according to them, the percentage obtained from registered votes is not 23.84% but 23.14%.

Results of the Constitutional Referendum of November 1, 2020

Number of registered voters nationwide: 23,559,320
Number of registered voters including those residing abroad: 24,466,618
Number of valid votes at the national level: 5,616,481
Total number of valid votes including those residing abroad: 5,661,551
Participation rate: 23.84% 23.14% (in reality)
Blank and invalid votes: 637,308
Total number of valid votes: 5,024,239
Number of affirmative votes: 3,356,091, that is, 66.80%
Number of negative votes: 1,668,148, that is, 33.20%

Source: [Constitutional Council of Algeria](#), November 11, 2020

If we take into account participation abroad, which has been traditionally low, the result is even more critical, out of slightly more than 900,000 registered voters, only 45,000 votes were cast, which indicates a percentage of less than 5% participation. All of which calls into question the presidential strategy for achieving general support for the reform of the Magna Carta. Not even

¹ The author wants to thank Barry J. Mitchell for his kind help in translating the text from the original Spanish version.

the call to go to the polls on the symbolic day of a national holiday of November 1, the date of the nationalist uprising against the French, has managed to drag citizens from their houses.

Given these figures, it is possible to affirm that the biggest winners of the referendum were the parties and movements that called for the electoral boycott, having been successful in keeping more than 70% of the electorate at home, that is to say, the Hirak. However, Algerian authorities have accepted the result and have tried to move forward with "politics as usual", but they have not been able to prevent the president's illness from disrupting the normalization of plans.

Indeed, Abdelmajid Tebboune, who fell ill days before the referendum (October 28th), as we outlined in the [pre-electoral analysis of OPEMAM](#), is, to this day in a hospital in Germany receiving medical treatment for an illness that has yet to not be clearly revealed. Although official sources pointed to a COVID-19 contagion, which related to an outbreak among officials working at the President office, some consider the length of the treatment unrelated to this disease.

The situation, of course unforeseen, brings Algeria back to the past experiences of the sick President Bouteflika (1999-2019) that saw the birth of the Hirak movement, with an equally discredited and contested political system and a head of State absent with diminished power and authority. If some in the regime counted on the disappearance of the Hirak, because of the suppressive ban on demonstrating for sanitation reasons and especially popular support for constitutional reform, today they cannot claim victory. The Hirak movement is still alive and very active. Although, it carries out its activities virtually and its promoter now seemingly orphans the new Constitution, of which its ratification cannot be obtained under these circumstances, while institutions continue to lack legitimacy. Either because of their relation to the Bouteflika era, or because of the instrumentalization of justice of which the regime boasts: one day announcing with great fanfare the arrest and the conviction of a well-known Bouteflika' era personality, and the next day arresting and throwing journalists, activists, trade union members and human rights defenders in prison, as well as ordinary citizens who have dared to protest. Contradictions that keep us perplexed and confuse the population.

The Algerian regime is on a tightrope, with a very delicate result and a host of factors: some structural and others conjunctural, such as the prolonged fall in hydrocarbon prices (to a third of the value that it had been in 2014) as well as the president's illness and/ or the COVID-19 pandemic. Maybe conscious of these dangers, the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, has allowed himself to declare in an interview with Jeune Afrique magazine this past week, that France: "I tell you frankly, I will do everything in my power to help President A. Tebboune in this period of transition. He is a person with courage"². Statements like this have caused unanimous outrage amongst the opposition and the Hirak movement. Karim Tabbou, one of the visible heads of Hirak and current spokesperson of Union Démocratique et Social (UDS), responded on the TV channel France 24h that it was a mistake for Macron to support President Tebboune and that in Algeria "there is no transition underway but rather an authoritarian regression"³, as he

² Interview published on November 20, 2020 by Jeune Afrique, curiously taken up on the official Elysee page but without any reference to Algeria and reproduced in full by the French magazine L'Express: https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/monde/afrique/algerie-rwanda-sahel-ce-qu-il-faut-retenir-de-l-interview-de-macron-sur-l-afrique_2139091.html

³ France 24h. L'Entretien: Karim Tabbou. "President Macron a tort de soutenir Abdelmajid Tebboune", November 25, 2020. The interview can be found here: <https://www.france24.com/fr/%C3%A9missions/l-entretien/20201125-karim-tabbou-le-pr%C3%A9sident-macron-a-tort-de-soutenir-abdelmadjid-tebboune>

himself, and many others, have found after being sentenced in March 2020 to a year of imprisonment, sentence later reduced, for "threatening the security of the State".

A constitutional referendum, of which the best that can be said is that it has passed without pain or glory in foreign chancelleries, because international attention was focused on the US presidential elections (November 3rd). However, that has demonstrated that the path of cosmetic change from above is leading to failure before a citizenry that, still subjected to confinement, feels outraged and continues to be coordinated by other no less effective means.