

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

Monthly Briefing Algeria 2024

Algeria Summary 9 August 2024

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune (2019-present) on 11 July announces he will seek a second term as president in the 7 September elections which he is highly favoured to win. The French foreign ministry says on 30 July that President Emmanuel Macron (2017-present) has decided to recognise Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara, a historic shift that intensifies tensions with Algeria. State-owned oil and gas firm Sonatrach and electricity and gas distribution company Sonelgaz sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on 31 July with Italy's energy giant Eni to study the feasibility of an electricity interconnection project between Algeria and Italy.

Tebboune confirms he will be running for a second term in office...

President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** (2019-present) announced on 11 July that he seek a second term in the upcoming 7 September elections, which he is highly favoured to win.¹ While speaking on national television, Tebboune said that Algerians will have the “*final say in this matter*” but justified his decision to run by highlighting his achievements:

*“The state’s revenues have strengthened, the bleeding of the public treasury has ended and Algeria has recovered what could have been recovered from looted funds estimated at billions of dollars”.*²

Per the constitution, Tebboune is eligible to run for a second and final term. Last year, parliamentary members urged Tebboune, who turns 79 in November, to run for re-election, and on 14 June, the ruling **Front de Libération Nationale (FLN)** announced that it would support Tebboune should he seek a second term, citing “*positive outcomes*” in his first term.³ Addressing the FLN central committee, secretary general **Abdel Karim Ben Mubarak** called Tebboune the most suitable candidate for the next presidential term and emphasised that he has successfully stabilised the pillars of the state and its institutions in a short time rather than wasting time settling scores.

Tebboune’s long-anticipated announcement marks a new phase in preparations for the September polls that were originally scheduled for December. State-owned media outlet **Algeria Press Service (APS)** announced on 21 March that Algeria would hold elections on 7 September, three months ahead of schedule, per Tebboune’s instruction.⁴ APS did not provide further details on the surprising announcement which came shortly after Tebboune chaired a meeting that was attended by lawmakers, constitutional court officials and the army’s chief of staff, **Saïd Chanegriha**.⁵

However, Tebboune said in his 11 July announcement that the decision to hold an early election was purely for technical reasons despite many arguing that it makes it harder for challengers to organise, dampening voter participation in the country.⁶ **Riccardo Fabiani**, the **North Africa** project director at the global no-profit, **International Crisis Group (ICG)**, echoed this sentiment on 11 July, stating that the election date change was most likely a strategy by Tebboune:

¹ Africa News, 11 Jul 2024; Bloomberg, 11 Jul 2024

² Bloomberg, 11 Jul 2024

³ Middle East Monitor, 14 Jun 2024

⁴ Algeria Press Service, 21 Mar 2024; France24, 21 Mar 2024

⁵ France24, 21 Mar 2024

⁶ Bloomberg, 11 Jul 2024

*“Fore stall any possible attempts by opposition candidates to mount a serious challenge to Tebboune and also to block any possible manoeuvre by army factions”.*⁷

Several organisations, including **United States**-based **Human Rights Watch (HRW)**, have also called on Algeria’s military regime to stop intimidating and targeting political opponents, denouncing restrictions on their freedom of movement, and the excessive use of the terrorism law to launch cases against critics.⁸ They argue that the harassment of political opponents is evident in the fact that Tebboune will only face two opposition candidates in next month’s poll - **Abdelali Hassani Cherif** of the **Islamist Movement of Society for Peace (MSP)** and **Youcef Aouchiche** of the **Front des Forces Socialistes (FFS)**.⁹

Constitutional court head **Omar Belhadj** said on 31 July that 13 other challengers were rejected after failing to produce the required signatures.¹⁰ Opposition **Parti des Travailleurs (PT)** candidate **Louisa Hanoune** quit the presidential race on 14 July citing unfair conditions facing the opposition.¹¹ Opposition **Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie (RCD)** also announced on 8 July that it will boycott the upcoming 7 September elections due to the lack of free and fair competition and the growing crackdown on political journalists (*See ARC Briefing Algeria Jul 2024*).¹² In the statement published on the local newspaper **Asharq Al-Awsat**, RCD party leader, **Othman Mazouz**, criticised restrictions imposed by government authorities on freedom of expression and assembly, noting that as a result, his party has decided not to participate in the polls.¹³

Eleven prominent Algerian opposition figures, including well-known politicians, lawyers and academics published an open letter on 21 July denouncing *“the authoritarian climate”* surrounding the upcoming presidential election, calling for a broad democratic transition.¹⁴ The opposition figures called the election a rubber stamp exercise in futility and said the lack of civil liberties makes holding legitimate polls impossible.¹⁵

All these issues raised by opposition figures and stakeholders cast doubts over the legitimacy of polls, as was the case in the 2019 elections. Tebboune won by 58% in the election which was marred by mass boycotts, record-low turnout of less than 40% and violent clashes between police and pro-democracy protestors. The election came after pro-democracy protests, known as the **Hirak Movement**, broke out in February 2019 and forced long-term president **Abdelaziz Bouteflika** (1999-2019) to step down.¹⁶ The movement ended in early 2020 due to the **Covid-19** pandemic and a government ban on protests. A local source told **Africa Risk and Consulting and Briefing (ARC Briefing)** that this election is a *“coronation”* and that *“nothing that has happened has been a surprise”*.¹⁷

Algeria recalls its ambassador after France backs Morocco’s Western Sahara plan...

The French foreign ministry said on 30 July that President **Emmanuel Macron** (2017-present) had decided to recognise **Morocco’s** sovereignty over the **Western Sahara**, a historic shift that intensifies tensions with Algeria.¹⁸ Morocco considers the Western Sahara its own territory, which the independence-seeking and Algeria-backed **Polisario Front** disputes.

In his letter to Morocco’s King **Mohammed VI** (1999-present) on 30 July, Macron emphasised that the autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty is *“the only basis for reaching an agreement”* to resolve the

⁷ Bloomberg, 11 Jul 2024

⁸ Middle East Monitor, 8 Jul 2024

⁹ Bloomberg, 31 Jul 2024

¹⁰ Bloomberg, 31 Jul 2024

¹¹ Africa News, 14 Jul 2024

¹² Middle East Monitor, 8 Jul 2024

¹³ Middle East Monitor, 8 Jul 2024

¹⁴ Arab News, 23 Jul 2024

¹⁵ Arab News, 23 Jul 2024

¹⁶ France24, 21 Mar 2024

¹⁷ ARC Source, Local Resident

¹⁸ MAP News, 30 Jul 2024; Middle East Monitor, 30 Jul 2024

long-running over the disputed territory.¹⁹ The move by France ends its longstanding policy of neutrality towards the formerly **Spanish**-ruled territory, which stretches along a swathe of **Atlantic** coastline and is larger than the **United Kingdom (UK)**.²⁰ As the former colonial power in North Africa, France had historically walked a diplomatic tightrope between Morocco and Algeria on the Western Sahara issue, despite most of its **Western** allies already backing Morocco's autonomy plan.²¹ The Moroccan royal palace welcomed the announcement as a "*significant development*" and King Mohammed invited Macron for an official visit in future.²²

The Algerian government said on 25 July that it noted "*with great regret and strong denunciation*" France's "*counterproductive decision*" to provide support to Morocco's autonomy plan.²³ Algerian foreign minister, **Ahmed Attaf**, also told reporters on 30 July that Macron had informed Tebboune that the decision was coming when they met on the sidelines of June's **G7** meeting in **Italy**.²⁴

Nonetheless, the decision irked Algeria which announced on 30 July that it was withdrawing its ambassador to France and downgrading its diplomatic representation to the level of chargé d'affaires in protest.²⁵ The Algerian foreign ministry also accused the French government of "*denying the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination*".²⁶ Without elaborating, the foreign ministry also revealed that Algeria will take steps to reject the decision, which it said is "*dangerous for the region*".²⁷

Judging by historical precedent, Algeria may subject France to the same treatment it directed to Spain after it backed Morocco's autonomy plan in 2022.²⁸ Algeria withdrew its ambassador to Spain in May 2022 and reduced economic engagement before eventually resuming diplomatic relations in November 2023. Algeria reinstated its ambassador to Madrid, **Abdelfettah Daghmoum**, on 8 April following an almost two-year-long diplomatic hiatus (*see ARC Briefing Algeria May 2024*). France, on its part, maintains that it is determined to deepen its bilateral ties with Algeria, but relations are expected to remain very tense in the short to medium term.²⁹

Morocco considers the Western Saharan territory, which borders Morocco, Algeria and **Mauritania**, as its own; however, the Algeria-backed **Polisario Front** movement has continuously demanded a sovereign state.³⁰ The **United Nations (UN)** considers Western Sahara a 'non-self-governing territory' but Morocco actually controls 80% of it.³¹ After Spain ended its colonial rule over Western Sahara in 1976, Morocco and Mauritania partitioned the territory between themselves. In August 1979, under pressure from the Polisario Front guerrillas, Mauritania withdrew all claims of its portion of the Western Sahara. Morocco then moved to occupy the territory and has since asserted administrative control over the whole Western Sahara.³² This resulted in the outbreak of war between Morocco and the Polisario Front. Sporadic clashes claimed approximately 9,000 lives over 16 years. The UN brokered a ceasefire in 1991 but a planned referendum on independence was never held and the final status of the territory remained unresolved.³³

A three-decade cease-fire collapsed in late 2020 and shortly afterwards, the **United States (US)** under then-president **Donald Trump** (2017-2021) became the first country to back Morocco's claim in a deal that also saw Morocco agree to normalise relations with **Israel**. Relations between Algeria and Morocco intensified after the decision by the US.

¹⁹ MAP News, 30 Jul 2024; Middle East Monitor, 30 Jul 2024

²⁰ Bloomberg, 30 Jul 2024

²¹ Reuters, 30 Jul 2024; Middle East Monitor, 30 Jul 2024

²² Morocco World News, 30 Jul 2024; Middle East Monitor, 30 Jul 2024

²³ Alarabiya News, 26 Jul 2024

²⁴ Bloomberg, 31 Jul 2024

²⁵ Algeria Press Service, 30 Jul 2024; Anadolu Agency, 30 Jul 2024

²⁶ Middle East Monitor, 30 Jul 2024; Anadolu Agency, 30 Jul 2024

²⁷ Bloomberg, 31 Jul 2024

²⁸ Reuters, 30 Jul 2024

²⁹ Reuters, 30 Jul 2024

³⁰ Reuters, 18 Mar 2022

³¹ Africa News, 27 Sep 2023

³² Xinhua, 30 Oct 2023

³³ Al Jazeera, 11 Dec 2020

Algeria's oil and gas firms sign MoU with Eni for electricity supply...

State-owned oil and gas firm **Sonatrach** and electricity and gas distribution company **Sonelgaz** signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on 31 July with **Italy's** energy giant **Eni** to study the feasibility of an electricity interconnection project between Algeria and Italy.³⁴ The project involves building a submarine cable to exchange or supply electricity to Italy and other **European** markets.³⁵

The studies will assess technical, legal, environmental, economic, financial and market aspects to determine the viability of producing, transporting and commercialising renewable energy.³⁶ The MoU strengthens the existing energy cooperation between Sonatrach and ENI, as it outlines future joint projects related to energy supply, energy transition, and decarbonisation.³⁷ ENI has been operating in Algeria for more than three decades and Algeria is one of Italy's most important partners. The MoU also boosts Algeria's objective to maintain its status as the largest supplier of energy in the **Mediterranean** basin and Africa and a key supplier to Europe as it weans itself off **Russian** energy supplies. Algeria has benefited substantially from rising oil and gas prices following Russia's 2022 invasion of **Ukraine**, enabling the government to offer wage and pension raises and cash handouts for the unemployed. This latest collaboration with Eni should boost Algeria's ability to both earn foreign exchange and meet its objective to boost exchange supply for domestic and international usage.

Planner

2024 (**France**) President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** to visit France;
 Sep 2024 (**Algeria**) Presidential elections;
 Dec 2024 **Vienna (Austria) Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries+ (OPEC+)** meeting;

Chronology

7 Aug 2024 **Algiers (Algeria) Africa News**. A court places three rejected presidential candidates are placed under "judicial supervision", while another 68 people, including elected officials, are temporarily detained as part of an investigation into electoral fraud;

6 Aug 2024 **Algiers (Algeria) Middle East Monitor**. **Spain** dismantles a network which was smuggling immigrants, including citizens from Algeria and **Syria**, to **European Union (EU)** countries;

3 Aug 2024 **Algiers (Algeria) Anadolu Agency**. A 4.3 magnitude earthquake strikes the **Medea** region south of Algiers, but with no apparent casualties;

3 Aug 2024 **Algiers (Algeria) Asharq Al Awsat**. Foreign affairs minister **Ahmed Attaf** says Algeria will take additional measures against **France**, in response to its support of **Morocco's** autonomy plan for **Western Sahara**;

2 Aug 2024 **Algiers (Algeria) Anadolu Agency**. **Air Algeria** suspends flights to **Lebanon** amid increasing regional tensions;

1 Aug 2024 **El Alamein (Egypt) Asharq Al-Awsat**. Investment minister **Hassan El-Khatib** meets with his **Saudi Arabian** counterpart, **Khalid bin Abdulaziz Al-Falih**, to discuss investment opportunities in Egypt;

³⁴ Reuters, 31 Jul 2024; Energy Capital Market, 2 Aug 2024

³⁵ Reuters, 31 Jul 2024; Energy Capital Market, 2 Aug 2024

³⁶ Reuters, 31 Jul 2024; Energy Capital Market, 2 Aug 2024

³⁷ Energy Capital Market, 2 Aug 2024

30 Jul 2024 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Arab News*. **Saudi Arabia's** foreign affairs deputy minister **Saud Al-Sati** receives Algerian ambassador **Sharif Walid** to discuss bilateral relations and topics of common interest;

27 Jul 2024 **Paris (France)** *Middle East Monitor*. During the **Olympic** opening ceremony in **Paris (France)**, the Algerian team throws roses in the **Seine** river in memory of the over 120 Algerians killed and 12,000 arrested on 17 October 1961 during protests calling for independence from French colonial rule;

28 Jul 2024 **Algiers (Algeria)** *AFP*. Defence ministry says it killed three terrorists during a raid in **Ain Defla** province;

26 Jul 2024 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Alarabiya News*. Algeria expresses “*great regret and strong denunciation*” over **France's** decision to recognise **Morocco's** autonomy plan for **Western Sahara**;

23 Jul 2024 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Arab News*. Eleven prominent Algerian opposition figures write an open letter denouncing “*the authoritarian climate*” surrounding the country's upcoming presidential election and calling for a broad democratic transition;

20 Jul 2024 **Algiers (Algeria)** *North Africa Post*. **United States (US)** ambassador to Algeria **Elizabeth Moore Aubin** affirms US recognition of **Morocco's** full sovereignty over its entire **Saharan** territory as irreversible and a “*historical fact*”;

18 Jul 2024 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Arab News*. **Abdelaali Hassani**, head of the **Movement of Society for Peace (MSP)** party, submits his candidacy for the presidency;

About Africa Risk Consulting:

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