

Bouteflika wins fourth term as Algerian president

Stéphane Hugues
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Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of the National Liberation Front (FLN) declared victory in presidential elections held Thursday, April 17, winning an unprecedented fourth term.

According to official results, the gravely ill 77-year-old Bouteflika won 81.53 percent of the vote, with his team announcing his victory even before the official results were in. The runner-up with 12.18 percent was the 70-year-old long-time FLN leader and former prime minister under Bouteflika, Ali Benflis, who now styles himself an independent. The other candidates shared the remaining 6.29 percent of the vote.

The election, in which Bouteflika faced off against a series of opposition candidates closely linked to different factions of the Algerian regime, testified to the sclerotic character of Algeria's political system. Voter participation was 51.70 percent, down sharply from 74.11 percent in the previous presidential elections.

From the predictable results to the predictably toothless charges of fraud from "opposition" candidates, the election functioned like clockwork, completely impervious to deepening class tensions in the country and the escalating imperialist wars on its borders.

Writing from France, the former colonial power in Algeria, the daily *Le Monde* centered its charges of vote fraud on allegations that voter participation figures in Algeria's restive south, ranging from 82 percent in Relizane to 55 percent in Ghardaïa, were vastly inflated. The fact that Bouteflika handily won these districts, when his representatives were heckled in campaign meetings in the region, also raised suspicion.

Ali Benflis, widely seen as the candidate supported by the army's Department of Intelligence and Security (DRS) intelligence agency, called the elections "an administrative dividing-up of the votes between the

candidates." He added, "My failure was prepared, planned, and organized by a coalition of three forces: fraud, dubious money, and certain media mechanisms subservient to the powers that hold this dubious money."

As for Bouteflika, he did not even participate in his own re-election campaign. Only three months ago, he was hospitalized once again in France, having already spent 80 days in French hospitals last year after a major stroke left him bed-ridden. Since then, he has appeared only once in public to submit his candidacy, appearing in a wheelchair and speaking only in a whisper. He delivered his last public speech in May 2012.

The fact that the different factions in the Algerian regime could only agree on returning such a figure as president testifies to the profound crisis facing the ruling elite.

Three of the remaining four candidates—Belaïd Abdelaziz, Moussa Touati, and Ali Fawzi Rebaïne—ran for satellite bourgeois nationalist parties around the FLN. The fourth was Louisa Hanoune of the Workers Party (PT), an organization linked to France's Lambertist Independent Workers Party (POI). Hanoune, a fixture of official Algerian politics, serves as a key prop and defender of the Bouteflika regime.

In the Kabylie region, where the Berber ethnic minority is concentrated, the Front of Socialist Forces (FFS) and Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) boycotted the elections, fearing that otherwise they would be completely discredited in the population. They issued a statement declaring that, in their estimation, voter participation in the election only reached 20 percent.

When PT members campaigned and distributed Arabic leaflets near Tizi Ouzou, one of Kabylie's main cities, Algeria's Francophone newspaper *El Watan*

recorded the responses: “Oh it’s for Louisa, but I can’t read Arabic,” “You’re giving credibility to these elections by participating in them,” and finally, “Since 1962 there’s always been fraud. We don’t vote. It’s just a charade that’s repeated every time.”

These remarks give an idea of the discrediting of the FLN regime, not only in the Kabyle region but throughout Algeria. Over a half century since independence, Algeria’s bourgeois regime has proven incapable of building a democratic regime, resolving the ethnic tensions inside the country, bringing prosperity to the population, or of defeating the escalating intervention of imperialism. These tasks fall to the working class in struggle for socialism against imperialism and the bankrupt Algerian regime.

The regime and its imperialist allies are closely monitoring discontent in the Algerian working class. With 70 percent of Algeria’s population under 30 years old, these forces are particularly concerned with the implications of youth unemployment.

IHS, a geo-political risk consultancy company, pointed to fears of protests by unemployed youth and workers of the Sonatrach national oil and gas firm, as well as calls for constitutional reform from within the ruling elite. It wrote: “The fact that such issues are once again being discussed openly after a hiatus since 2011, and that a number of well-respected figures are publicly questioning Bouteflika’s capacity to rule, indicates that high protest and instability risks will persist even if Bouteflika is successfully re-elected.”

The “hiatus” in public discussion of political issues since 2011 reflects the terror that seized Algeria’s entire ruling elite, amid the working class uprisings that year in Tunisia and Egypt. While initial protests broke out in Tunisia after the death of Mohamed Bouazizi, mass protests shook Algeria over government plans to slash subsidies for staple foods and energy, which would have sent prices soaring overnight by as much as 30 percent.

The FLN regime, now in power for 52 years since Algeria’s victory over French imperialism in the war for independence, only survived at the time by cancelling the subsidy cuts and formally lifting the State of Emergency that had been in place for 19 years. Since then, however, DRS and riot police forces have worked intensively to monitor and break up any developing protests.

The Algerian regime has also integrated itself ever more deeply into the reactionary wars waged by French and US imperialism and their NATO allies in the region. Its UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, who also served as UN envoy to Iraq after the US invasion in 2003, now is a special envoy to Syria, giving a thin diplomatic veneer to the imperialist proxy war waged against that country.

The Algerian regime is also complicit in Paris’s war in Mali, Algeria’s neighbor to the south, having thrown open its air space to warplanes flying from France to bomb targets in Mali.

Algiers’ complicity in Western imperialism’s offensive to re-colonize Africa and the Middle East underscores the criminal role of the regime and the class gulf separating it from the proletariat.

The remedies being proposed by dissident factions of the regime are bankrupt palliatives, distinguished above all by their desire to leave undisturbed the collaboration between the army and the FLN, who have together instigated countless acts of repression against the workers.

Thus Mouloud Hamrouche, the former FLN prime minister in 1989-1991, appealed for a boycott of the elections. “The crisis goes beyond this election ... which serves no purpose,” he said. “My feeling is that this regime is not good for Algeria.”

Hamrouche’s appeals were based, however, on explicit appeals to the army for support. “This regime has been crumbling and will fall ... I want to make it fall peacefully and without violence,” he added, stressing that “there is no chance of establishing a democracy without the army.”

Denying the obvious, he added: “I am not calling for a coup d’état. I’m not calling on the army to stop the candidacy of Bouteflika. I’m calling on it to save Algeria from this impasse.”



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