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TEIM Election Watch Analysis

ELECTORAL REPORT:

MAURITANIA/Presidential elections
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Background of the elections:

The turning point that marked the political period prior to these presidential elections was the coup d'état on 6 August 2008 led by General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz. The sudden appearance of the military on the political scene meant the end of the weak transition that began in 2005 with another coup d'état. The removal from office of the president of the Republic, Ould Cheikh Abdallahi, one year after his election was a serious setback for the incipient democracy established in Mauritania.

After the meeting at the end of December 2008 of the States-General of Democracy (*États généraux de la Démocratie*), a conference organised by the military junta and the general behind the coup, an initial agreement was reached to hold presidential elections at the end of May. The date that was finally agreed upon was 6 June 2009, although this had to be postponed. Time was of the essence because the African Union's constitutional treaty gives any member state sanctioned for violating the rule of law and democratic institutions six months to return to institutional normality before it is expelled from the organisation permanently. International pressure and an election boycott organised by the National Front for the Defence of Democracy (FNDD) – which the opposition party, Ahmed Ould Daddah's Rally of Democratic Forces (RFD) joined after discovering that Abdel Aziz resigned from his post in the army to run as a candidate – managed to put the elections off to 18 July 2009. After an agreement signed in Dakar permitted this delay, the leaders of the parties opposing the coup d'état decided to run as candidates in the elections, despite having less time to campaign and less money. While only four candidates were in the running for the initial scheduled election, the number rose to nine for the first round held on 18 July 2009. The Dakar agreement signed on 2 June 2009 by the two 'warring camps' – those supporting Ould Abdel Aziz and his party, the Union for the Republic (UPR), and those rejecting the coup regrouped in the FNDD (the People's Progressive Alliance, Tawasul, the Union of Forces for Progress and some of the deputies of the National Pact for Democracy and Development) plus the Regrouping of Democratic Forces (RFD) – not only permitted the election delay, but also appointed a government of national union and restructured the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI).

Quantitative indices of democracy:

Mauritania was classified in the following democratic performance rankings just before these elections:

Measurement	Name and year of report or database	Institution	Index	Points, ranking and classification
Political rights and freedom	Freedom House Report 2008	Freedom House (FH)	PR: political rights CL: civil liberties	PR: 6, CL: 5 (Scale of 1, free to 7, not free) Classification: Not free
Degree of democracy in earlier elections	Polyarchy 2.0 2004 (referring to the 2002 elections)	Peace Research Institute of Oslo and Tatu Vanhanen	ID: Synthetic democracy index, Part: participation, Comp: competition	ID: 4.25, max. 49 Part: 28.25, max. 70 Comp: 15.05, max. 70 (Democracy minimum: ID: 5, Part: 10, Comp: 30) Classification: non-democratic
Consolidation of authoritarian and democratic institutions	Polity IV 2007 (referring to 1 November 2008)	Center for International Development and Conflict Management, Univ. of Maryland	Democracy: consolidation of democratic institutions Autocracy: authoritarian consolidation Polity: synthesis of both	Democracy: 4 Autocracy: 0 Polity: +4 (Scale of +10, very democratic to -10, very authoritarian) Classification: moderately democratic
Perception of corruption	Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2008	Transparency International (TI)	TICPI: corruption perceptions index	TCPI: 2.8 points out of 10 (Scale of 1, very corrupt to 10, not at all corrupt) Rank: 115 out of 180 countries
Management of political and economic change	Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) 2008	Bertelsmann Foundation	MI: Management Index, quality of transformation management	MI: 5.94 points out of 10 Rank: 33 out of 125 countries Classification: Successful management with weaknesses
Democracy, including press status and corruption	World Democracy Audit Oct. 2008	World Audit	World Democracy Rank: political freedom (FH) + press and corruption (TI)	World Democracy Ranking: 94 out of 150 countries, division 4 out of 4

Quantitative analysis of electoral democracy:

The elections analysed in this profile produced the following electoral democracy quantitative results:

Degree of democracy in these elections	Measurement of democracy in these elections according to the Polyarchy 2.0 2009 index, calculated by TEIM Election Watch	Part: 25.70 ¹ max. 70 Comp: 47.19 ² max. 70 ID: 12.12, max. 49 (Democracy minimum: Part: 10, Comp: 30, ID: 5)	Classification of the elections: democratic
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¹Participation calculated out of a participation of 812,360 voters and an estimated population of 3,160,000 inhabitants halfway through the 2007-2008 period by the United Nations Population Division, updated in September 2009 (Source: United Nations Statistics Division, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/>).

² Competition calculated by subtracting the percentage of votes obtained by the winning candidate and those who publically supported his candidacy before the election (despite not withdrawing from the race – the case with Ould M'Bareck) from 100.

Definition of the political system and parties:

Mauritania uses a two-round majority system for presidential elections to ensure an absolute majority. Parliamentary elections use a two-round majority system for two thirds of the lower chamber (64). The remaining third of the National Assembly (31 seats) has been elected by means of a proportional largest remainder method since 2006. Of these 31 seats, 17 are elected in regional constituencies and 14 in national constituencies. Independent candidates are allowed. Elections to the Senate are by indirect suffrage among municipal representatives. Municipal elections use a one-round proportional system.

The multiparty party system is fictitious, given the clear predominance of the Democratic and Social Republican Party (PRDS) in government until the coup d'état in 2005, which gave way to a more open and competitive system. In this setting, many new parties emerged alongside the traditional parties that opposed Ould Taya's regime, as well as others that came to form part of his government. The coup d'état on 6 August 2008 put an end to the incipient transition from a dominant authoritarian party system to a multi-party system, which debuted in the 2006 general and municipal elections. The effective number of parties (ENP), according to the formula proposed by Laakso and Taagepera³, is equal to one divided by the sum of all the parties' squared proportion of seats. In the 2006 parliamentary elections, the effective number of parties was 4.22. Since the military intervention on 6 August 2008, only one election has been held, the first round of the presidential election discussed in this report, in which the former general behind the coup, Ould Abdel Aziz, won a resounding victory. The opposition forces' earlier boycott of the June 6 election date and the weak results obtained by the opposition candidates indicated that there would be no consolidation of a multi-party system, which had already been depleted by the weakness of the party structures, due above all to the permanent phenomenon of political turncoating.

Impact of the electoral process and size of the constituency on the elections:

The 53 *moughataa* (the administrative division equivalent to a province in Spain) which make up the election constituencies, were divided into 2,451 electoral colleges. In addition, 63 electoral colleges were established in Mauritanian consulates and embassies in 19 countries. This is the first time that Mauritians living abroad were permitted to vote, wherever at least 1,000 citizens were registered with the embassy or consulate.

Although the vote count issued in the presidential elections is done by *moughataa*, there is really only one constituency, given that what counts is the total number of direct votes at national level obtained by the candidate and not the number of *moughataa* won. Hence, the impact of the size of the constituency disappears in the presidential elections. Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that the electoral formula is a two-round majority one. Only the two candidates with the highest number of votes make it to the second round. The fact that nine candidates ran, some of them with long, solid political careers, and the need to obtain an absolute majority in the first round to win, led to predictions that a second round would have to be held. However, the results announced on Sunday

³ ENP=1/Σ(n_i/N)². n_i= number of seats for each party; N= total number of seats

19 July shattered the predictions about the possibility that the vote would fragment given the high number of candidates and the potential competition.

Election results:

In the first round of the 18 July 2009 elections, the total number of voters was 817,260 out of 1,265,589 registered voters. The number of spoilt votes was 34,911, the blank votes 4,244 and the participation rate was 64.58%.

The total number of votes won and the percentages for each candidate appear in the following table:

CANDIDATE ⁴	PARTY	% VOTES	VOTES WON
Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz	UPR (Union for the Republic)	52.58%	409,100
Messaoud Ould Boulkheir	APP (People's Progressive Alliance)	16.29%	126,782
Ahmed Ould Daddah	RFD (Rally of Democratic Forces)	13.66%	106,263
Mohamed Jemil Ould Mansour	Tawasul (Moderate Islamic party)	4.76%	37,059
Ibrahima Moctar Sarr	AJD/MR (Alliance for Justice and Democracy/Movement for National Reconciliation)	4.59%	35,709
Ely Mohamed Vall	Independent	3.81%	29,681
Kane Hamidou Baba	RFD (Rally of Democratic Forces)	1.49%	11,568
Saleh Ould Henenna	HATEM (Mauritanian Party for Unity and Change)	1.31%	10,219
Hamadi Abdallah Meimou	Independent	1.28%	9,936
Sghair Ould M'Bareck	PRDR (Republican Party for Democracy and Renewal)	0.23%	1,788

TEIM compilation from Ministry of Interior and Decentralisation data. Mauritania.
<http://www.interieur.gov.mr/mi/index.aspx>

Sghair Ould M'Bareck of the PRDR (the former PRDS party that was dominant during the Ould Taya regime) withdrew from the race at the beginning of the campaign for the first round on 18 July and threw his support behind Abdel Aziz. Despite this, his name was not removed from the ballots.

Qualitative analysis of the elections:

Participation:

The participation rate was 64.58%. Compared to the rates for the 2007 elections – 70.7% in the first round and 67.48% for the second – it is clear that there was no significant decrease. However, the political contexts are very different. 2007 was characterised by a transition period that generated hopes for clean and transparent elections, while the 2009 context represented the uncertainty of a political system destabilised by coups d'état and the impotence

⁴ Opposition. From the government or favourable to Ould Aziz. With no clear or defined position. The 3 candidates in blue began in opposition to Aziz: Sarr, whose party fights slavery and racism towards blacks, being the classic opponent to Taya; Kane Hamidou Baba went against the RFD's party line when he ran as a candidate for the 6 June elections, which his party was boycotting, and again on the 18th, despite the fact that Ould Daddah, the party president and founder, was also running; the third candidate, Hamadi Abdallah Meimou, ran as an independent. It is difficult to know if they would have supported Ould Aziz in the second round, although it is very likely that one of the three would have done so if a second round had taken place.

of the main opposition parties. The reason for this figure of 64.58% is the excitement generated by moving the elections back from 6 June to 18 July. This delay meant the end of the opposition parties' boycott and the presentation of their candidacies. Most importantly, after the pressure from the opposition parties and their refusal to accept the 6 June election date, as well as international pressure, limits were set on the arbitrary power of the military, and in particular on the coup leader and candidate for the presidency, Abdel Aziz. On the whole, participation in the different constituencies was around 60%, with the lowest participation rates seen in the overseas electoral colleges, like the United States, Tunisia and Spain.

Competition:

Establishing the degree of competition is difficult, given that the candidates for the July 2009 presidential elections agreed to run even though they knew that one of the favourite candidates was the former general and coup leader, and that they were starting out with a disadvantage. Abdel Aziz had already begun his campaign for the first election date of 6 June, overshadowed by none of the other three candidates, Ibrahima Moctar Sarr for the AJD/MR, Kane Hamidou Baba, former vice president of the RFD, and the PRDR's Sghair Ould M'Bareck. Abdel Aziz controlled the state resources to run his campaign, and especially, he had the means to apply populist measures geared at the most underprivileged classes. Similarly, Abdel Aziz had the support of the country's major businessmen, a fact that could be seen in the campaign (advertisement posters in the big locally-owned hotels) and its financing.

For the candidacies to be approved by the Constitutional Council, a series of requirements was formulated in Organic Law No. 2009-021 of 2 April 2009 which modified and completed some regulations in Ordinance No. 91-027 of 7 October 1991 on the election of the president of the republic:

- To have the support of at least one hundred municipal councillors, of whom at least five must be mayors. These councillors must belong to a simple majority of the *wilayas*.
- Every candidate for the presidency of the republic must pay a deposit of five million ouguiyas to the public treasury. This deposit is repaid if the candidate obtains 2% of the votes cast in the first round.

These measures had the effect of reducing the number of candidates with respect to the 2007 elections, when 19 candidates ran under the much less restrictive requirements.

Transparency:

According to the Constitutional Council, the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), international observers and reports from countries like France, Spain, Senegal and Morocco, the elections were clean and transparent from a formal point of view. However, the candidates Boukheir (2nd), Daddah (3rd) and Vall (6th) did not accept the results and did not appear at the swearing-in ceremony for President Abdel Aziz. These candidates presented complaints to the CENI and the Constitutional Council (the only body with the authority to decide election complaints) and demanded that international groups investigate the fraudulent acts committed during the elections. The main accusations focused on the manipulation of the electoral rolls (80% of voters who registered after 6 June do not appear on the final rolls), the improper conduct of the presidents of the electoral colleges, the duplication and forgery of election cards and ballots, fraud in the electoral colleges abroad and the use of chemical

products on the ballots to transfer votes to Abdel Aziz. Although Sid'Ahmed Ould Dey, the CENI President appointed after the Dakar agreements, accepted the results issued by the Interior Ministry and reports by international observers, he resigned because of his doubts about the final results given by the CENI in the face of repeated complaints of corruption, vote-buying and fraud.

Party representation and debate during the election:

Both the electoral formula (two-round majority) and the political context and 'nomadism' between the parties diminish the weight of the parties in favour of the leadership and 'big man' politics.⁵ Despite this feature of the Mauritanian political system, in these elections, the number of independent candidates did decrease with respect to the 2007 presidential elections, in which independents made up 58% of the nineteen candidacies. In 2009, even the candidate Abdel Aziz created a party, the Union for the Republic, and with the exception of two candidates (fellow former coup leader and Abdel Aziz' cousin, Ould Mohamed Vall and a former ambassador, Hamadi Abdallah Meimou), all were backed by their parties. One more exception underscores the fragility of the parties – the presentation of the candidacy of the vice president of the Rally of Democratic Forces (RFD), Kane Hamidou Baba, in the first round on 6 June 2009, which went against the party line, since the RFD had decided to join the National Front for the Defence of Democracy and boycott the elections.

The debate during the campaign for the 18 July elections intensified when what began as reports of corruption and the misappropriation of funds turned into unfounded personal attacks. Abdel Aziz, the most active of all of the candidates in time and space (he covered all of the national territory, not only Nouakchott and the big cities), continually attacked the other candidates, especially Daddah and Boulkheir, directly. The main themes focussed on ending corruption and public waste, the embezzlement of public funds and personal enrichment at the cost of the state. Themes like the management of the masses of refugees returning to Mauritania after the 1989 conflict, the exploitation of natural resources and foreign relations, especially with Israel, received little attention in the campaign.

Openness:

The first round and the decisive victory of the former coup leading general, portends that the process of opening and democratic institutionalisation that began in 2006 was definitively broken following the 6 August 2008 coup d'état. The 18 July 2009 elections did nothing more than legitimise the coup, as the opposition parties complained. Despite the reports by international observers, the rejection of the complaints by the Constitutional Council and the acceptance of the openness and transparency of the process by the CENI and the rest of the candidates in the elections (except Daddah, Boulkheir and Vall), Abdel Aziz' victory with 52.58% of the votes in the first round cast many unresolved doubts on the results. The role of the opposition parties is now more difficult, if such a thing is possible. The question lies in deciding between accepting the results and rules of the game as established by Abdel Aziz, or remaining in the opposition and outside the institutional game, which could lead to an even greater loss of their power.

⁵ Especially in Africa, this refers to the personalisation of politics in a 'big man'. This meaning is broader and has more reach than that of notable. A politician who becomes a 'big man', the president of the state, may not be a notable.

Significance:

The return to institutional normality was the main objective of these elections. International pressure, directed mainly by the African Union (at France's insistence and overseen by Senegal), but also maintained by the European Union, the International Organisation of La Francophonie, the League of Arab States and other international groups, sought to stabilise the political system at all costs to prevent phenomena like terrorism, immigration and the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources. Therefore, it seems that the objective of these elections was met. Mauritania's relations with its neighbouring countries and with international groups returned to normality. Political stability thanks to the legitimisation of the coup leader in power seems guaranteed, at least in the short term.

Consequences and impact on the political system:

The main consequences of the results of these presidential elections are, firstly, the stabilisation of the political system thanks to the legitimisation of the coup leader in power and the normalisation of foreign relations (a key factor in a country that depends economically on foreign aid). Secondly, the possibilities for openness and the democratisation of the political regime have been put on the back burner as a consequence of Abdel Aziz' victory and the consolidation of his power. Finally, the opposition parties who maintained a determined stance against the coup d'état, particularly the parties that make up the FNDD, have been left with little room to manoeuvre as far as intervening in public policy. It remains to be seen what will take place over the next few months with the elected institutions. The coexistence of the president of the republic and a parliament elected in 2006, whose president was the most faithful opponent to the deposed president, Abdallahi, and to the institutionalisation generated by the transition process in 2006 and 2007, does not seem durable.

International political reaction:

The international groups that sent election observation missions (a total of 320 international observers), the African Union, the Arab League, the International Organisation of La Francophonie, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the Arab Maghreb Union and the Community of Sahel-Saharan States all endorsed these elections. The messages of congratulations to the new president, once the results were confirmed by the Constitutional Council, were not long in coming. The first country to send congratulations was Morocco, but France, Senegal, China, Russia, Spain and many other countries followed. The toughest appraisal was the United States (which stated its doubts about the legality and cleanness of the process), but in the end, that country also accepted the results of 18 July elections.

Implications for Spain:

Spain is one of the countries with a special interest in Mauritania's return to institutional normality and a stable political system. Therefore, it accepted the results of the elections along with the European Union and the rest of the international groups. Spain's position with respect to the coup was condemnation; however, the fact that the country did not apply this condemnation forcefully seems to indicate that Spain's preference was to

maintain fluid relations with the Mauritanian authorities more than to protect international legality.

Conclusions:

The presidential elections were postponed to a later date, straining the electoral process and machinery after the signing of the Dakar agreements between the parties opposing the 2008 coup d'état and the former general Abdel Aziz. The international pressure to reach this agreement bore fruit and, internally, also seemed to offer the opposition parties a way to fight democratically. However, Abdel Aziz' disconcerting and resounding victory in the first round showed both the international community and the Mauritians themselves that the military, supported by an oligarchic minority, holds the reins of both state and economic power, and that in these conditions, despite fighting in a contest that was accepted as clean and transparent, it is difficult to compete, let alone win. If the results of the elections – 52.58% votes won by Abdel Aziz and 64.58% participation – are accepted as valid, it must be asked what the citizenry expects both of the political leaders and the system in general. If the manipulation, fraud and corruption on election day were not serious or decisive enough to change the results, the people have chosen Abdel Aziz who, in his 10-month political campaign and with his populist politics during that period, managed to convince them that he was the only candidate who could pull them out of their misery and give them stability. These results reveal, therefore, the people's weariness with traditional political parties, but also with the atavistic forms of tribal bonds. In this case, it seems that other parameters of political mobilisation were at work. All in all, Abdel Aziz' victory in the first round broke with all the predictions and raises doubts about the legitimacy of these elections.

Reference to two other Internet analyses of this election:

Bulletins published by the National Democratic Institute. Available at:
<http://www.ndi.org/node/15619>

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<http://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/countries/m/mauritania/mauritania-presidential-election-2009.html>