



Electoral Behavior and Political Participation in Algeria

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Abstract:

Discussing electoral behavior, especially within the Algerian context, compels us to examine a system that varies significantly across different nations. At its core, elections are inherently a facet of democratic practice. As commonly understood, elections encapsulate a broad and complex process, encompassing the elections themselves, legal frameworks, and a modern political culture. Collectively, these elements constitute an integral system; if any component falters, the entire democratic framework may be jeopardized.

The evolution of democracy in any system, irrespective of ideological alignment, necessitates mechanisms that integrate diverse political forces. These mechanisms are crucial, often exerting a significant influence on the political process. They help regulate and institutionalize democratic norms within electoral practices for both individuals and political parties, facilitating peaceful transitions of power and enabling varied political entities to engage in the political arena. This raises a pertinent question: What is the reality of electoral behavior in Algeria?

Keywords: Electoral Behavior; Electoral System; Political Participation; Elections.

1. The Relationship Between the Electoral System and the Political System in Algeria

Undoubtedly, the electoral system is a pivotal element of the political framework, exerting a profound and mutual influence. The extent of this influence varies with the nature and stability of the political system. In Arab regimes, the application of electoral systems has varied, designed primarily to confer legitimacy to a facade of democracy that predominantly benefits a specific faction, elite, or class.

The electoral system is shaped by the party systems, reflecting the dynamics of the political environment; the interaction between electoral and party systems is intricate, closely linked, and reciprocal. Maurice Duverger outlined three potential relationships between any electoral or party system:

- _ A system may maintain a specific party system structure (Abdul Rahman, 2006).
- _ An electoral system might reproduce a certain party system if its distinctive elements are well-defined.
- _ It could establish a particular party system in a nation previously devoid of such a framework (Abdul Rahman, 2006).

2. Elections Under a One-Party System

Analyzing a multifaceted phenomenon like elections within Algerian society is challenging, given the country's relatively brief historical engagement with electoral processes compared to Western nations with longstanding electoral traditions. In the early 1830s, Algeria endured severe colonial aggression, which devastated its landmarks and institutions, reducing its populace to dire poverty.

France's attempt to assimilate the Algerian people involved extending French legal systems to Algerian territories, exemplified by the Royal Decree of April 15, 1845, which established civil governance in regions with significant European populations. This decree led to the formation of three provinces: Algiers, Oran, and Constantine.

This provincial system was eventually abolished and replaced with a campaign system managed by the Ministry of Partisanship. An elected body, the General Council, functioned as a modest governance model for settlers, initially consisting of 15 members. By 1858 in the prefecture of Algiers, this number had increased to 18, reaching 25 by 1860, including two Muslims and one Jew appointed by the emperor from among the local notables for a three-year term.

Among other legislative measures, the Native Code of 1881 was enacted to govern the representation of Algerian natives in municipal settings, leading to the classification of municipalities into three types:

- _ Municipalities with full powers, predominantly European, where Europeans constituted 75% and Algerians only 25%.
- _ Mixed municipalities, featuring dual governance but predominantly led by Europeans.
- _ The so-called "Bureau Arab" municipalities in desert areas, administered by the French military.

The nationalist movement in Algeria marked a significant transition in the political landscape, evolving from grassroots political activism to armed resistance. This shift was spearheaded by a burgeoning network of associations, unions, and parties, notably the Algerian People's Party, which fervently advocated for independence.

This period catalyzed the formation of a distinct Algerian identity, anchored in the principles established on November 1st, which are heralded as the foundation of the current political system that derives its legitimacy from the revolution (Information Network, 2018).

Post-independence, Algeria initially adopted a one-party system, where the political bureau of the National Liberation Front (FLN), not originally conceived as a political party, wielded overwhelming control over both state and governance. The FLN was subsequently restructured into a socialist-oriented party, consolidating substantial powers under the presidency, who also served as the General Secretary of the party. This concentration of power facilitated extensive executive authority, emblematic of centralized governance.

The presidency of Ahmed Ben Bella (1962–1965) was marked by significant political purges aimed at eliminating rivals. Merely three days post-implementation, Ben Bella suspended the constitution, citing internal instability and external threats as justification for assuming absolute powers (Boudhan, 2008, p 21).

This era was characterized by the monopolization and personalization of power, setting the stage for a contentious relationship between the president and military leadership, culminating in Ben Bella's deposition via a military coup (Qira, 2002, p 103).

Houari Boumediene succeeded in establishing the Revolutionary Council and exerting control over the FLN, steering the political system towards a model that emphasized mobilization over genuine political participation. Under this regime, the party's operational mechanisms stifled diversity of opinion and inhibited the rotation of leadership responsibilities (Kira, 2002, p 108).

It was not until 1980 that Algeria introduced comprehensive legal reforms concerning the electoral system and its processes (Kira, 2002, p 96). Following Houari Boumediene's death, the military intervened to manage the succession, elevating Colonel Chadli Bendjedid.

The electoral system during Bendjedid's tenure, particularly noted for its simplicity, starkly contrasted with the complexities of pluralistic electoral systems and varied voting patterns. Bendjedid's presidency, spanning from 1979 to 1992, is often divided into two phases.

The constitutional reform of 1989, which was ratified by 72% of the electorate, marked a significant shift by ending the FLN's monopoly and facilitating the establishment of multiple political parties (Obeid, 2004, p 139). This period heralded an era of political pluralism in Algeria, setting the stage for the diverse political dynamics that would follow.

3. Elections Under Party Pluralism:

Within the context of Algerian political evolution, some politicians and jurists herald President Chadli Bendjedid as the "Father of Democracy" in Algeria. The ratification of the constitution on February 23, 1989, Algeria's third, marked a departure in both form and substance from its predecessors. This constitution was founded on legal principles rather than being merely programmatic, establishing foundational pillars such as democracy, freedom of expression, and party pluralism.

This era saw the emergence of several political parties, each espousing diverse ideologies, including the Islamic Salvation Front "FIS". The advent of this pluralistic landscape facilitated the first pluralistic elections, which were municipal elections held in June 1990. FIS emerged victorious, securing 54.25% of the vote, significantly ahead of the FLN, which garnered 28.13%, following the enactment of the first pluralistic election law on August 7, 1989.

Subsequent amendments led to dramatic political shifts, culminating on January 4, 1992, with President Chadli Bendjedid dissolving the National People's Assembly. A week later, on January 11, 1992, he was removed from office, and the High State Council was established under the leadership of Mohamed Boudiaf, who was tragically assassinated within the year. His successor, Ali Kafi, then assumed leadership of the High State Council.

This tumultuous period, often referred to as the "Black Decade," was characterized by severe political strife, with FIS taking up arms against the Algerian regime. The constitution was suspended, and appointments were made to municipal and provincial councils in lieu of elections, reflecting the unstable security conditions of the time.

Assuming power in a period of profound political turmoil, Liamine Zeroual implemented a dual strategy centered on dialogue with all political forces. On November 16, 1995, Algeria conducted its first pluralistic presidential elections under this new framework, which Zeroual won with 61% of the votes. This victory facilitated several significant legal and constitutional changes, ushering in a new era of openness. This period of reform was highlighted by the 1996 constitutional amendment, which addressed imbalances present in the 1989 constitution.

This new legal framework introduced several organic laws, including the organic law concerning the electoral system -Order No. 97/06 dated March 6, 1997- and the organic law specifying the division of electoral districts, Order No. 97/08 dated March 6, 1997. Another critical piece of legislation, the organic law related to political parties—Order No. 97/09 dated March 6, 1997, was also enacted.

The electoral system for parliamentary elections adopted proportional representation by list, a mechanism designed to facilitate minority participation and provide greater opportunities for opposition and smaller parties to be represented (Koujil and Habba, 2008).

Further legislation, such as Election Law 97/07 dated July 2, 1997, supplemented the foundational 1989 Election Law. This framework distributes electoral positions among various candidate lists based on the votes each list receives, as opposed to the majority election system, which permits the list obtaining a majority of votes to win all contested seats, thus promoting minority participation in political life (Labadi, 2006).

4. Under the New Election Law: Legislative Elections of June 5, 1997

The legislative elections on June 5, 1997, marked a pivotal moment under the new election law following the establishment of the National Democratic Rally (RND), a party that emerged from the Algerian political milieu, representing the new face of the FLN. These elections signaled the official start of the transitional phase, initiated in January 1994, and were seen by the regime as a step toward resolving ongoing crises of legitimacy and institutional integrity.

The RND's victory in these elections was significant, and despite the challenging security and political conditions in Algeria at the time, President Zeroual managed to achieve a degree of political stability and renew the legitimacy of both the regime and the state.

This was accomplished through measures that limited and marginalized the opposition, especially targeting the remnants of the FIS, which was dissolved by a government decision in March 1992. Both the Hamas and Renaissance movements, adapting to the political climate, agreed to remove Islamic references from their programs, rebranding themselves as conservative movements.

Non-Islamic ideological opposition parties participated in the elections as well, driven by fears of being marginalized and excluded from the political landscape. Despite these reforms, President Zeroual announced his resignation in 1998, accelerating the process for early presidential elections scheduled for 1999 (Mahaba, 1997, p 181).

Following Zeroual's resignation, the presidential race was opened to several Algerian political figures. More than 28 candidates submitted their applications, but only seven were accepted:

Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Ahmed Taleb Ibrahim, Mouloud Hamrouche, Abdallah Djaballah, Hocine Ait Ahmed, Mokdad Sifi, and Youcef Khatib were the candidates. The election results were as follows: Bouteflika received 73.39%, Ibrahim garnered 12.53%, Djaballah got 3.95%, Ait Ahmed 3.17%, Hamrouche 3.09%, Sifi 2.24%, and Khatib 1.22%.

The six candidates accused the government of fraud prior to the elections and announced their withdrawal on election day, effectively transforming the multiparty presidential election into a referendum on Bouteflika. The participation rate was 60.25%, a figure that was deemed sufficient to legitimize the newly elected president on April 15, 1999.

5. Political Achievements During President Bouteflika's Tenure:

Upon his electoral victory, President Bouteflika emphasized two key aspects in his governance approach: enhancing security and stability, and revitalizing the national economy. After taking office, one of his significant initiatives was proposing the Civil Harmony Law in July 1999, which was subsequently put to a public vote in September 1999.

Analysts suggest that Bouteflika's decision to present this law to the public, following its parliamentary approval, was a strategic move to secure popular legitimacy and enable him to bypass competing political institutions (Obeid, 2004, p 145).

The law, approved by 98% of the voters, remained effective until January 13, 2000. It offered a comprehensive amnesty to members of armed groups, excluding only the Armed Islamic Group and the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat. Key provisions of the Civil Harmony Law included:

- _ Adherence to the constitution and ensuring the execution of laws.
- _ Recognition and care for the victims of violence.
- _ Acknowledgment of the institutions and all citizens who contributed to saving Algeria.
- _ Providing an opportunity for reconciliation and return for those who had deviated from the law for various reasons.

This legislation was an attempt to pull Algeria out of the cycle of violence that had plagued it since the disruption of the electoral process, despite earlier efforts to restore security and stability.

Legislative elections were held on May 30, 2002, under unstable conditions, representing the third experiment since the onset of multiparty politics under the 1989 Constitution. Over 20 parties, in addition to independent candidates, competed, marked by a low participation rate of 46.09%.

There was nearly complete boycott in two provinces, with representatives from the tribal areas in the Kabylie region calling for election boycotts; participation did not exceed 1.5% in Tizi Ouzou and 2.5% in Béjaïa. The election process in these provinces was accompanied by some acts of violence and disturbances.

The results yielded a majority for the National Liberation Front (FLN) with 199 seats out of a total of 398 seats in the National People's Assembly. Overall, the elections in Algeria from the start of the multiparty experiment have yielded mixed results in terms of democratic development. Generally, the elections have continued to suffer from low political participation and have been challenged multiple times for being rigged in favor of the ruling parties.

On April 8, 2004, presidential elections were characterized by numerous candidacy applications, but the Constitutional Council, responsible for verifying that candidates met the basic conditions set by the election law (Decree, 2004), found that only 6 out of 9 candidates met these requirements: Abdelaziz Bouteflika (the incumbent president from 1999-2004), Ali Benflis, Abdallah Djaballah, Said Sadi, Ali Fawzi, and notably, Louisa Hanoune was the first woman to run for presidency in Algerian history. The elections attracted significant regional and international attention, with 13 international observers monitoring the voting process.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe reported no evidence of fraud during the elections, and the election marked a declaration by Chief of Staff General Mohamed Lamari that the military would remain neutral towards the candidates, possibly heralding its transformation into a professional institution (Belaur, 2011, p 171).

The results led to Bouteflika winning a second term, allowing him to initiate several significant projects, most notably the Peace and National Reconciliation project, implemented shortly after his re-election (Belaur, 2011, p 172).

Algeria held its fourth multiparty presidential elections on April 9, 2009, after a constitutional amendment in 1996 changed Article 74 to define the presidential term as five years, renewable once. The amendment was overwhelmingly supported as part of the constitutional reform project conditions for electoral candidacy (Bakra, 2004, p 59).

Bouteflika's third-term candidacy was distinguished by his landslide victory with 90.24%, and finally, Mohamed Said received 0.92% of the vote. Thus, Bouteflika's re-election by such a margin resembled a popular referendum, which saw him credited with relatively restoring stability to Algeria and significantly increasing Algeria's foreign currency reserves from four billion to thirty billion, according to data from the Arab Strategic Report (Arab Strategic Report, 2004, p 214).

6. Political Achievements During President Bouteflika's Reign:

During his tenure, President Bouteflika focused primarily on two critical issues in his victory speech: security and stability, and revitalizing the national economy. After taking office, Bouteflika introduced the Civil Concord Law in July 1999, which he presented to the public in September 1999 after it was approved by Parliament. Analysts suggest that Bouteflika's decision

to seek public approval was a strategic move to secure popular legitimacy that would enable him to overshadow competing institutions (Obeid, 2004, p. 145).

The law was overwhelmingly approved by 98% of the population and remained in effect until January 13, 2000. It included a comprehensive amnesty for armed groups, excluding only two groups: the Armed Islamic Group and the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat. The law's key provisions included adherence to the constitution, ensuring the enforcement of laws, recognizing and caring for victims of violence, expressing gratitude towards institutions and citizens who played roles in saving Algeria, and offering a chance for reconciliation to those who had strayed for various reasons.

This initiative was an attempt to pull the country out of the cycle of violence that had plagued it since the electoral process was halted, despite previous attempts to stabilize security and governance.

In May 2002, Algeria conducted legislative elections amidst unstable conditions, marking the third experiment with multiparty politics since the 1989 Constitution. The elections, contested by over 20 parties and independent candidates, were characterized by a low voter turnout of 46.09%.

There was almost a complete boycott in two provinces, where tribal leaders in the Kabylie region called for an election boycott—participation rates in Tizi Ouzou and Béjaïa were only 1.5% and 2.5%, respectively. The elections were accompanied by violence and unrest in these provinces and resulted in the National Liberation Front securing a majority of the seats in the National People's Assembly, winning 199 of the 398 seats available.

Overall, from the beginning of its multiparty experiment, Algeria's elections have produced mixed results concerning democratic development. Generally, the elections have been marked by persistently low political participation and allegations of rigging in favor of the ruling parties. On April 8, 2004, presidential elections were held, notable for a high number of candidacy applications.

However, the Constitutional Council, responsible for verifying candidates' compliance with the electoral law's fundamental requirements (Decree, 2004), found that only six out of nine candidates met these conditions. Candidates included incumbent President Abdelaziz Bouteflika (1999–2004), Ali Benflis, Abdallah Djaballah, Said Sadi, Ali Fawzi, and notably, Louisa Hanoune, the first woman to run for president in Algeria.

The elections garnered significant regional and international attention, with 13 international observers monitoring the process. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe reported no evidence of electoral fraud, and the military declared its neutrality towards the candidates, possibly signaling its transition to a professional institution (Belaur, 2011, p. 171).

Bouteflika won a second term, enabling him to launch several significant projects, notably the Peace and National Reconciliation project implemented shortly after his re-election (Belaur, 2011, p. 172). Algeria held its fourth multiparty presidential elections on April 9, 2009, following a constitutional amendment in 1996 that revised Article 74 to set the presidential term at five years, renewable once. The amendment was nearly unanimously supported and set the conditions for candidacy (Bakra, 2004, p. 59).

Bouteflika's third-term candidacy led to his re-election with 90.24% of the vote, with Mohamed Said receiving 0.92%. Thus, Bouteflika's re-election by such a margin resembled a popular

referendum, credited with relatively restoring stability to Algeria and significantly increasing its foreign currency reserves from four billion to thirty billion, according to the Arab Strategic Report (Arab Strategic Report, 2004, p. 214).

7. Determinants of Electoral Behavior in Algeria:

Elections form the foundation of democracy, enabling political authority to gain legitimacy through the populace. Voting is a crucial ritual in political life, solidifying the political community and embodying the principle of governance based on the rule of law and respect for others' opinions. It's important to note that electoral processes in democratic societies are influenced by a system of social, economic, political, and ideological factors that shape the electoral behavior of citizens in these societies.

Electoral behavior varies across societies and diversifies with the existing social structures, often clashing with an unfavorable social, economic, and cultural context. The effectiveness of any electoral system is contingent upon a set of socio-political, economic, and cultural determinants that can either advance or regress the democratic process into a state of sterility and stagnation (Suweim, 1987, p 182).

Key determinants of behavior include:

8. Political Factors:

These are among the most crucial determinants of political behavior both nationally and internationally, primarily due to the political socialization individuals undergo from an early age. This ongoing process involves the inculcation of political values and the acquisition of a personal identity, enabling individuals to express themselves and address their demands according to what they deem correct.

Essentially, political socialization defines an individual's political behavior, whether it involves acceptance or rejection of the political system, society as a whole, or any of its institutions (Aliwa, 2002, p 106).

The importance of political socialization can be understood through three dimensions:

- The cognitive dimension focuses on transmitting political information that shapes political awareness.
- The affective dimension deals with values, embedding and developing them socially and politically among citizens.
- The skills dimension concerns political participation, viewed as a citizen's right (Ismail, 1997, p 26).

Political socialization occurs through various channels that help implant, solidify, and develop political concepts, ideas, and practices among individuals and groups. The family, being the first institution in this process, significantly influences an individual's ideas, attitudes, behaviors, and ethics. It plays a crucial role in the moral, social, and national upbringing of a child, and the political stances of parents can affect their children's allegiance or disloyalty to society and the political system.

Cultural and educational institutions such as schools, institutes, and universities also play a significant and influential role in spreading national and humanitarian ideas and values among

individuals, encouraging them to adhere to and act according to these values. Religion also impacts political socialization.

The relationship between politics and religion can be described as a partnership, influencing the formation of political parties and their stance on opposition. Political parties with a religious character have emerged in both developed and developing countries, but their impact in Arab states remains significant.

The deeper the involvement of religion in politics, the greater its influence on the political socialization of its followers, as well as on the degree of an individual's faith, which directly affects the impact. Media and communication also play a substantial role, transmitting social, economic, scientific, cultural, and political ideas, opinions, and information to a large audience.

The importance of civil society institutions in influencing contemporary political life cannot be understated, and these institutions and channels extend beyond those mentioned to other elements that can intervene in consolidating, transferring, or altering the values, beliefs, and convictions of citizens (Ismail, 1997, p 56).

Contemporary Algerian individuals are complex entities where local loyalties intersect with national loyalties, and geographical boundaries do not coincide with emotional or political boundaries. This plurality of oppression and contradictions leads to a state of division, simultaneously torn by conflicting social affiliations at various levels and directions (Achour, 2021, p 20).

The absence of the concept of citizenship as a value and practice distinguishing the political culture is notable, especially since the Algerian individual is not yet freed from the web of traditional, outdated relations, being part of a tribe or clan, deriving value from the group. Tribal belonging, expressed through the concept of 'Arush' in Algerian society, has become a primary determinant of individual behaviors.

Researcher Abdel Nasser Gabi notes that the negative aspects of 'Arushiyah' become more pronounced and powerful during the retreat of the national project and its institutions. When the political elite's horizon narrows and they lack a long-term political project, they resort to immediate management with local and fragile power balances dominated by tribal affiliations (Gabi, 2007, p 9).

Thus, citizenship remains an elusive trait as tribal loyalties dominate, especially in the plateau and southern regions of Algeria. This domination puts the political system in a legitimacy crisis that widens with the system's failure to produce effective outcomes, posing a problem of political participation in the Algerian system characterized by formality, seasonality, and ineffectiveness in practices.

9. Socioeconomic Factors:

Since independence, Algerian society has undergone immature transformations that lacked political awareness. The Algerian people have suffered from a policy of deprivation implemented by the colonizer, who seized agricultural lands. This led to rural migration towards cities in search of better social and economic conditions.

The intensity of this phenomenon increased after independence, especially with the development plans from 1969 to 1977, which resulted in hundreds of thousands of people

moving to major cities in search of employment and improved living conditions (El-Ayachi, 1977, p. 5).

During the early 1980s, Algeria's socioeconomic conditions notably deteriorated. This decline was exacerbated by the emergence of informal tin settlements lacking basic urban living conditions, leading to a surge in social phenomena. The dark decade Algeria experienced was a principal factor in weakening the economic base.

The real crisis Algeria faced was the transitional phase from a socialist to a democratic system. However, this remained a perpetual transition, defined by the enduring presence of a ruling elite that produced political, social, and economic effluents that directly influenced individual behavior in Algeria.

This resulted in a lack of trust and widespread boycotts that increasingly troubled the political system and formed the core of individual behaviors, which viewed boycott as the sole method to punish the political authority.

10. Legal Factors:

Legal factors are crucial components adopted by the political system to ensure the successful implementation of the electoral process. These factors include a comprehensive set of laws that dictate the timing of elections, eligibility criteria for voters, and the methods by which electoral districts are delineated.

Furthermore, these legal frameworks encompass the entire electoral process, starting from initial voter registration, progressing through the electoral campaign, and concluding with the final vote counting (Shatnawi, 1980).

The electoral process is structured around two primary aspects: procedures and the general context. The procedural aspect is governed by all laws and regulations that direct the conduct of the electoral process. This includes the management of candidacy and voting procedures, as well as the oversight mechanisms in place from the preparation of electoral rolls through to the completion of vote counting.

The general context encapsulates the characteristics, traits, and practices that influence the electoral process. This includes the political climate in which the elections are conducted, the prevailing cultural dynamics, and the overarching nature of the political system. These elements are encapsulated within the electoral system, which plays a pivotal role in shaping the nature of the electoral process (Meftah, 2008, p. 168).

Political participation has evolved beyond just presidential elections, influenced by the widespread adoption of democratic ideals. It now includes the election of legislative authorities, oversight of the executive branch, and the selection of local councils responsible for managing local affairs.

Consequently, elections impact various spheres, endowing the electoral system with substantial political significance. Social, cultural, and economic factors significantly influence the type of electoral system adopted by a country, defining its foundational principles and operational guidelines.

The impact of these factors can vary not only from one country to another but also within the same country from one electoral stage to another, based on the specific characteristics and requirements of each stage. For instance, in countries with high illiteracy rates, the electoral

system must be adapted to address this challenge, a concern that is generally absent in more developed countries.

Moreover, the electoral system is shaped by social, religious, and ethnic factors, as well as cultural dimensions that significantly affect its functioning. A democratic electoral process cannot afford to ignore any population group with distinct cultural traits, as doing so would compromise the principle of genuine representation (Saad, Moqalled, & Ismail, 2005, p. 97).

Electoral behavior, therefore, encompasses all forms of conduct, actions, or reactions exhibited by citizens on an election date, whether influenced by or independent of a variety of social, political, civilizational, and economic factors. The study of electoral behavior is described as a comprehensive process that spans from its inception to the actual voting day.

The influence of the electoral system extends beyond mere seat distribution; it also impacts electoral behavior, as evidenced in the distribution of votes. Notably, voter support varies across different electoral systems, such as majority systems and proportional representation systems, whether they involve single or dual-round voting systems.

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