

# [***Algerians question president for calling an early election without announcing his own campaign***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BPX-59T1-DYMD-613D-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

ALGIERS, Algeria — Like many of the [*elections in more than 50 countries voting*](https://apnews.com/25-elections-in-2024-that-could-change-the-world) this year, the upcoming presidential race in [*Algeria*](https://apnews.com/hub/algeria) was supposed to be a sleepy affair.

With [*few viable opposition candidates*](https://apnews.com/article/algeria-tebboune-election-85f399bd6fa7abc4911a176a99d47b99) capable of mounting a serious challenge, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune looked poised to sail to perfunctory victory and a second term.

But [*his March 21 decision*](https://apnews.com/article/algeria-president-election-tebboune-date-3baab2363140380e309570c61a3887ae) to announce elections three months ahead of schedule surprised voters and reawakened the oil-rich North African country's political parties from a deep lethargy.

“Ma fhemna walou” — North African Arabic for “We didn’t understand anything” — has since trended on platforms like YouTube and Tiktok. Scrambling opposition parties have promised to put forward challenger candidates for the poll on Sept. 7. And all the while, Tebboune himself has not formally announced plans to seek a second term.

“It’s not the appropriate moment to answer that question,” he said in a televised interview this week. “There’s still a program that I’m in the middle of implementing.”

His demurrals coupled with the new election date have injected a sense of bewilderment into business-as-usual ***politics***, raising questions about what lies ahead for the 78-year-old leader and the military apparatus that backs him.

Explanations offered haven't quelled them.

The day after Tebboune’s announcement, the state news agency APS described his decision as a “return to normality.” Tebboune himself later explained the reasoning behind the snap election as a “purely technical” matter of scheduling.

September, he said on Sunday, is “the opportune time for holding this election because it coincides with the end of the summer vacations and the start of the new school year for many Algerians inside and outside the country, who will be able to express their views.”

Others disagree. Scheduling an election in early fall means the height of campaign season takes place in August, when many leave home and vacation or seek respite from the heat.

“Can you imagine Algerians in the middle of an August vacation on the beach or in the mountains, going to venues to attend candidates’ meetings? It’s just surreal!” newspaper columnist Hakim Merabet told The Associated Press, noting the scorching heat that sweeps much of the country and often lasts through October.

Even in cooler months, Algeria has struggled to get voters disillusioned with ***politics*** [*to participate,*](https://apnews.com/article/government-and-politics-africa-algeria-boycotts-health-09c0a6054d2bfab42790310b121c3a28) including in the 2019 presidential election where turnout was below 40%.

Whether they turn out or stay home, the election will mark the next chapter for Algeria, five years after a nationwide peaceful protest movement forced octogenarian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to resign. For weeks, demonstrators took to the streets demanding an overhaul of the country's corruption-ridden ***politics***, in which the military has long played an outsize role.

After earlier announcing plans to seek a fifth term in office, Bouteflika stepped down under pressure from the public and the military. Tebboune rose to power later that year in an election boycotted by protesters who feared holding the vote too soon could thwart the opportunity offered by Bouteflika's ouster.

Tebboune promised to honor the calls made by the protests, but outlawed demonstrations when the COVID-19 pandemic started. Throughout his tenure, journalists have [*continued to face prosecution*](https://apnews.com/international-news-general-news-3a8e338789bd4ee60793aafdc7fa1da6) and the economic challenges facing many of the country’s 45 million people have persisted. The government has juggled competing priorities, trying to [*combat inflation*](https://apnews.com/article/algeria-currency-inflation-black-market-dd8c1fde348ee14182520dc9cb29a37f) while maintaining state spending, subsidies and price controls that keep people afloat.

The country is Africa's largest by area and a key security partner for Western nations. An OPEC member, it has long funded a large chunk of its government operations and social services with oil and gas revenues.

Though he has not officially announced his candidacy, Tebboune has been campaigning informally for months.

The National Liberation Front, with which Tebboune was long affiliated, endorsed the early election date and said in a statement this week that it would soon decide whether to back the president or field its own candidate.

Few challengers have come forth to challenge him, but political parties — both Islamist and secular — were animated in response to the September date.

The Socialist Forces Front, Algeria’s largest opposition party, has said they will soon decide how to respond to Tebboune’s announcement, promising to make the election “an occasion for a great debate.” The Rally for Culture and Democracy, another opposition party, issued a statement on Facebook calling the election a “constitutional coup de force” that would force a timeline causing “the de facto exclusion of society as a whole."

Islamist parties mostly took a softer approach, expressing support for the Sept. 7 date. Four days after Tebboune's announcement, Abderrazak Makri of the Movement for Society and Peace, a high-profile opposition figure, said at a news conference that he was interested in running depending on his party's decision at a scheduled June summit.

The only challenger to announce their candidacy is Zoubida Assoul, an attorney who has defended political prisoners, aligned herself with the 2019 protest movement and leads the Union for Change and Progress party. Though many from the movement are skeptical about the possibility of real democratic debate during the election campaign, Assoul has cautioned against missing a potential opportunity

“Obstacles must not deter us or serve as a pretext for inaction,” she said at a press conference last month before the September date was announced.

**Load-Date:** April 4, 2024

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