

Algerian President Drops Bid for Fifth Term, Suspends New Election

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*On February 16, Algerian **President Abdelaziz Bouteflika** since 1999 announced his candidacy for a fifth term – despite unable to perform the duties of his office since becoming ill in 2005, especially after a debilitating 2013 stroke.*

Large-scale daily protests followed his announcement. Others occurred last December against a fifth term in office.

Organized via social media in Algerian cities, protests rallied against him since mid-February. In the country's Algiers capital, they've been the largest in many years – in a nation where street protests are banned.

According to human rights activists, around 800,000 rallied against him on February 22. On February 24, he was hospitalized in Geneva, Switzerland.

March 3 was the deadline for presidential aspirants to formally announce their candidacy for the nation's highest office. On March 1, Dzair News television reported that around one million rallied in Algiers against Bouteflika's candidacy.

Yet on March 3, he announced he'd stand for a fifth term despite strong public opposition. Large-scale protests against him continued, including calls for other candidates to withdraw.

Until March, Algerian media largely ignored street protests. When state TV covered them, protesters were criticized. France's *Le Figero* called anti-Bouteflika demonstrations a humiliation for the president and his government.

On March 11 after returning from Geneva, he announced his withdrawal from the race, postponing the April 18 election indefinitely.

On the same day, the Algiers Herald reported the following, saying:

The nation's "dictatorial regime has opted for the postponement of the election without setting a timeline for the next election, which will likely result in Bouteflika remaining president until his death," adding:

Regime opponents consider his announcement "a constitutional coup." The Algerian Constitution only permits postponing an election in time of war, not applicable to things in the country now.

Bouteflika's announcement challenged popular sentiment, along with violating the country's

Constitution.

He nominated **Noureddine Bedoui** to serve as prime minister – perhaps his choice to succeed him as president when he formally steps down or dies in office.

On April 28, his legitimacy as president will end. Following Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LADDH)/National Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Unemployed (CNDDC) member Hadj Ghermoul's demand for "no...fifth term" for Bouteflika, he was arrested and sentenced to six months imprisonment – part of an attempt to quash protests against another term in office.

He aims to retain power directly or indirectly until passing – despite popular sentiment opposing his "mandate of shame."

Days before postponing the election indefinitely, a statement on his behalf said he "listened and heard the heartfelt cries of the demonstrators," yet remains a "candidate for the next presidential election."

Opposition elements mocked him, saying "(w)e have two plans: plan A, for Abdelaziz (his first name). And plan B, for Bouteflika!"

Plan C came on Monday, Bouteflika saying:

"There will be no fifth term. There was never any question of it for me. Given my state of health and age (82), my last duty towards the Algerian people was always contributing to the foundation of a new republic."

He hasn't made a public speech since 2013. Over 1,000 judges said they wouldn't oversee the presidential election with him as a candidate.

Known as "the pouvoir (the power)" since 1999, his formal days in office may be numbered – wanting immunity for crimes in office from whoever succeeds him while still alive.

He governs like Turkey's Erdogan and Egypt's el-Sisi, though frail and incapacitated without their vigor and public posture.

No matter. Underlings enforce his brutal rule though it's unclear who's really in charge given his precarious state. Algerians can be imprisoned for "offending the president, "insulting state officials," or "denigrating Islam."

Like the US, other Western nations and Israel, Algerian "democracy" is pure fantasy. Hardline regime rule runs the country under Bouteflika, whoever succeeds him in power, and the country's military.

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