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International Foundation
for Electoral Systems

Election FAQs: Mauritania

Presidential Elections

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Middle East and Northern Africa

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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Election Snapshot

- Election Day: June 29 (first round); July 13 (in case of a second round).
- Presidential election with seven registered candidates; no women candidates.
- Registered voters: 1,939,341, including 1,027,906 women (53 percent) and 617,900 (32 percent) youth under 30 years old; 29,371 out-of-country.
- Polling stations: 4,510 in and out of the country.
- Mandate duration: Five years.

When is Election Day?

Presidential elections in Mauritania will take place on June 29, 2024. If needed, a second round will take place two weeks later, on July 13, 2024.

What is the legal framework for conducting the elections?

The legal framework for elections in Mauritania is divided among several legal texts. These include:

- The 1991 Constitution and its revisions of 2006, 2012, and 2017, which established fundamental rights and freedoms such as equal access to elections by women and men;
- Organic Law No. 2009-022 of April 2, 2009, and its subsequent amendments establishing special provisions for voting by Mauritians residing abroad;
- Organic Law No. 2012-027 of April 12, 2012, establishing the National Independent Electoral Commission and its functions, as amended by Organic Law No. 2018-005;
- Ordinance No. 91-027 of October 7, 1991, governing the election of the president of the republic;
- Ordinance No. 91-024 of July 25, 1991, and its subsequent amendments pertaining to political parties;
- Decree No. 20212-278 of December 17, 2012, setting up the modalities of the electoral campaign and of voting for the presidential election; and
- Decision No. 2024-056 of June 12, 2024, of the High Authority for Print and Audiovisual Media, setting out the procedures for media coverage of the presidential elections of June 29 and July 13, 2024.

What are the main powers of the President?

The Constitution establishes a semi-presidential political regime in which the president of the republic has preponderant powers. In addition to being the head of state and the guarantor of the independence of the nation and the integrity of the territory, the president is the head of the executive. In this capacity, the president presides over the Council of Ministers, appoints and dismisses the prime minister and other ministers, and sets the general policy of the state. The government is responsible to both the president and the National Assembly. The president has general regulatory power and signs decree-laws and ordinances adopted by the government. The president is also the supreme commander of the armed forces. In this capacity, the president determines and conducts the state's defense and security policy as well as its foreign policy. The president may resort to a referendum on any matter of national importance. He or she can also dissolve the National Assembly and call for early parliamentary elections. The president exercises the legislative initiative through the government and promulgates (and can

also veto) laws. The president is the guarantor of the independence of the judiciary and presides over the High Judicial Council.

What is the electoral system?

The president of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania is elected through a two-round majoritarian system. If no candidate obtains an absolute majority of votes during the first round on June 29, a second round will be held between the two candidates who received the largest number of votes. The second round will take place on July 13, two weeks after the first round. The presidential mandate is limited to two consecutive terms. Mauritanian voters residing abroad will be able to vote in eight countries.¹

Who is eligible to run as a candidate? What are the legal requirements?

To be eligible to run as a candidate in the presidential elections, a person must have been born a Mauritanian citizen and be a Muslim, between 40 and 75 years of age, who enjoys all of her or his civil and political rights.

Presidential candidates must collect the signatures of at least 100 municipal council members including at least five mayors, from at least eight *wilayas*² (regions), to support their nomination. An elected official can support only one presidential candidate, and that official's signature must be legalized. The names of those who sponsored a candidate are published.

Candidates for the presidency must make a financial deposit of 500,000 MRU (approximately \$12,500 USD). Deposits are reimbursed if a candidate obtains more than 2 percent of valid votes in the first round.

Who registers the presidential candidates? How many candidates are competing for this election?

The Constitutional Council reviews the candidates' applications, verifies their conformity with the legislation, and decides on the candidacies for the presidential election. The council is also responsible for adjudicating complaints about candidacies. Between April 26 and May 15, seven candidates submitted applications. On May 20, the Constitutional Council deliberated and approved the seven presidential candidates, all men, including the incumbent, President Mohamed Cheikh El Ghazouani.

The final list of candidates was published on May 29. The candidates are:

- Mohamed Cheikh El Ghazouani;
- Mohamed Lemine El Mourtaja El Wavi;
- Hamadi Sidi El Mokhtar Mohamed Abdi;
- Otouma Antoine Souleimane Soumaré;
- Mamadou Bocar Bâ;
- El-Id Mohameden M'bareck; and
- Biram Dah Abeid.

¹ Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, France and the United States.

² Mauritania comprises 15 *wilayas* (regions).

How is the electoral campaign conducted, and how is it financed?

The electoral campaign began 15 days before the first round (June 14, at midnight) and closes on the eve of Election Day (June 27, at midnight). Candidates must respect a silence period that starts the day before polling.

The National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI, in French) must approve each candidate's electoral platform. Candidates are entitled to hold public meetings to present their programs. However, they must announce each electoral meeting in advance to the competent local administration, which will inform the CENI. A board must be nominated by the candidate or the candidate's party to manage the campaign meeting and to guarantee security and compliance with the law. A representative of the competent local authority attends each meeting. Candidates can affix posters in dedicated locations.

The High Authority for Print and Audiovisual Media (HAPA, in French) has jurisdiction over all private and public print, electronic and digital media outlets. It supervises the campaign in the media and sets the ground rules for the production, scheduling, and broadcasting of election-related media programs.³ On June 12, 2024, the HAPA adopted a decision pertaining to media coverage of the presidential election.⁴ The decision stipulates that the public media must guarantee equal access and equal coverage to all candidates. Private media must ensure equitable access to candidates and balanced coverage of their campaigns. The decision also reminds print, foreign media, and social media content creators of the applicable regulations and their obligation to adhere to the principles of free, fair, and honest media coverage. Each candidate is entitled to free airtime on television and radio.⁵ Candidates' representatives are permitted to attend media-related programs on behalf of their candidates.

Members of the Mauritanian security forces and state and municipal public officials are prohibited from participating in the electoral campaign.

Mauritanian legislation establishes a ceiling on campaign expenditures that cannot exceed 1 million MRU per *moughataa*⁶ (approximately \$25,000). Funding can come from several authorized sources:

- Self-funding from candidates;⁷
- Individuals and private legal persons;
- The political party that supports the candidate; and
- The state.

³ Articles 3 and 4 of the Law No. 2008-26, amended by law No. 2022-22.

⁴ HAPA Decision No. 2024-056 of 12 June 2024 fixing procedures for media coverage of the presidential elections of June 29 and July 13, 2024.

⁵ According to Article 8 of Decree No. 2012-278, candidates are allowed up to 90 minutes on televised electoral programs and 150 minutes on radio. However, Articles 4 and 5 of the HAPA decision provide for different durations. According to Article 4, each candidate is entitled to eight minutes of free airtime per day on national television and 12 minutes on national radio for the duration of the campaign (that is, each candidate will have a total of 120 minutes of television and 180 minutes of radio coverage during the 15 days of campaigning). However, Article 5 provides for a total of 98 minutes of television and 184 minutes of radio coverage per candidate during the entire campaign. The same article provides for a total of 11 hours and 26 minutes of television and 21 hours and 28 minutes of radio for all candidates throughout the campaign. Therefore, there is a discrepancy between the decree and the HAPA decision and between Articles 4 and 5 of the HAPA decision.

⁶ *Moughataas* correspond to Mauritania's 63 sub-regional administrative units (departments).

⁷ Article 2 of Decree-Law/Ordinance No. 2006-35 dated 2 November 2006 pertaining to the funding of electoral campaigns.

The law foresees that the state will provide an exceptional, non-reimbursable subsidy to each candidate. However, no secondary legislation describes the amount, how it is calculated, or when and according to which procedures the funds are disbursed. Public funding is not confirmed for this election.

Donations are allowed but must be declared to the Ministry of the Interior, including the nature and amount of each donation and the identity of the donor. Private donations by each donor cannot exceed 10 percent of the set ceiling for campaign expenditures.

Foreign funding is prohibited. With the exception of public funding allotted to each candidate, donations are forbidden from public legal persons or from private legal entities in which public funds are invested.

What is the election management body? What are its powers?

The National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI, in French) is Mauritania's electoral management body. It was established in 2012 to organize all levels of elections and referenda in the country in lieu of the Ministry of Interior and Decentralization.

The CENI is a permanent institution with financial autonomy. It is led by an 11-member Board of Commissioners, the *Comité directeur*. The president of the republic appoints board members from a list of 22 candidates proposed by the parliamentary majority and opposition. By secret ballot, CENI members elect one of their number as a chairperson, who is the head of the electoral administration and the budget authorizing officer. The Board of Commissioners is supported by a central administration whose work is coordinated by a secretary general. In addition, a temporary, three-tiered local election commission structure operates at the regional, departmental, and municipal levels during electoral periods. Current CENI members took office in October 2022 for a five-year mandate.

The CENI has specific prerogatives, including conducting voter registration; managing the voter register; assigning voters to polling stations and creating voter lists; managing candidate nominations (except for presidential elections); producing, printing, and distributing ballot papers and voter cards; supervising electoral campaigns; conducting voter information campaigns; recruiting and training polling station staff; and tabulating and announcing election results, with the exception of the results for the presidential elections and referenda.

Who can vote in these elections? How many registered voters are there?

To vote, Mauritanian citizens must:

- Be at least 18 years old;
- Enjoy full civil and political rights; and
- Be registered on the voter lists.

Persons convicted of a felony, of a misdemeanor with more than three months' imprisonment without a suspended sentence, or to more than a six-month suspended sentence, who have not been rehabilitated, or who do not enjoy all their mental faculties, are not allowed to vote. The period during which a felon who has served a sentence but cannot yet exercise the right to vote varies from five to 20 years depending on the severity of the offense. Internal security forces and military are entitled to vote in presidential elections.

To cast ballots, voters must be registered before Election Day. To register, voters must possess valid biometric identity cards. In 2023, the validity of many biometric identity cards was extended until 2024 to facilitate registration for the 2023 general and 2024 presidential elections.

For the May 13, 2023, general elections, the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI, in French) compiled a new voter register to increase public confidence in its accuracy, comprehensiveness, and inclusiveness through a voter registration process – the *Recensement administratif à vocation électorale* (administrative census for electoral purposes, RAVEL). Based on the 2023 RAVEL, the CENI conducted a *Révision Exceptionnelle des listes électorales* (exceptional revision of electoral lists) to complement the voter lists ahead of the presidential election. The revision commenced on April 15 and closed on May 29.⁸ As of June 7, 2024, the number of voters had increased to 1,939,341, including 1,027,906 women (53 percent) and 621,900 (32 percent) youth under 30 years old.⁹ The number of Mauritians registered abroad stands at 29,371.

Where and when will voters cast their ballots?

On June 29, voters will cast their ballots between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. at their designated polling stations, based on where they indicated they would vote during the RAVEL process. All 4,510 polling stations are located in public buildings. While an ID card or a valid passport is mandatory for voting, voters are not required to present the voter card issued by the CENI. Other than poll workers and voters, only those who receive a CENI-issued accreditation can access polling stations. These include candidates' representatives, observers, and journalists.

Poll workers, local and regional representatives of the CENI present at polling stations, security officers responsible for the security of the polling stations, and candidates' representatives may vote in the polling stations where they are assigned to work, subject to their presentation of a voter's card and ID card. They are required to vote at the end of the day, after the last voter in line. Their names must be added to the voters' list at the polling station.

How is polling conducted?

Polling station staff comprise a president and two members who are responsible for the smooth conduct of the elections, including counting and tallying votes. Once a voter's identity is confirmed, a poll worker verifies the absence of electoral ink on the voter's finger. Then the voter collects the ballot paper and enters the privacy of the polling booth to mark her or his choice of candidate or the option called "neutral" if the voter does not wish to vote for a candidate. The marked ballot paper is dropped by the voter into a ballot box. A poll worker signs the voter list on behalf of the voter and stamps the voter card "voted." Voters who do not have voter cards can collect them at the polling station on Election Day. Polling station staff instruct each such voter to dip his or her left index finger into indelible ink. Then the voter retrieves the ID card or passport from the poll worker. Voters with disabilities are entitled to assistance by

⁸ The registration period for Mauritians living abroad was extended from April 25 to May 29.

⁹ In 2023, 1,785,035 voters were registered, including 22,288 Mauritians living abroad.

another voter or a person of their choice. The CENI will put three polling stations at the express disposal of voters with disabilities. They will be located in the three *wilayas* of Nouakchott.

Where are vote counting and tabulation held?

Poll workers are responsible for counting and tallying votes, starting immediately after the closing of polling stations. They must first check the number of ballot papers against the number of voters. Next, they determine the validity of each ballot paper and proceed with counting them.

The poll workers prepare five tally sheets that go to the CENI, the Constitutional Council, the Ministry of the Interior and Decentralization, the *moughataa*, and the *wilaya*. Copies of the tally sheet must be distributed to the representatives of candidates, and another copy must be immediately posted in front of the polling station.

The CENI then aggregates the results from each municipality and compiles them at the level of each *moughataa* in collaboration with the Constitutional Council. Candidate representatives can observe the tabulation of results at the *moughataas*. The tabulation process must be completed by midnight on the Monday following polling (for this election, July 1).

At the national level, the Constitutional Council tabulates the election results from all *moughataas*. The results of the first round must be announced no later than the Wednesday following Election Day (for this election, July 3).

Can CENI decisions and election results be contested?

Candidates and their representatives can challenge any CENI decision taken by one of its structures at the national or sub-national levels. So, for instance, a decision by the CENI at the departmental level can be challenged at the next CENI level (in this case, the regional election commission), and so on. The timeframe is the same for each level: Complaints must be filed within eight days of the publication or notification of the contested decision. The next level has eight days from the date of the referral to rule on the complaint. When a challenge concerns a decision taken by the central structures of the CENI, the complaint is filed with the Constitutional Council. The time limit for its decision is then set at 15 days from the date of the referral. The Council's decisions are final and cannot be appealed.

Any candidate can contest the results of the presidential elections within 48 hours of the end of polling via a written request to the president of the Constitutional Council. The council then has eight days from the date of the referral to decide on the challenges. Its decisions are final. If the Constitutional Council finds that there have been irregularities in the electoral process, depending on their nature and seriousness, it decides either to uphold the election or to annul it in whole or in part. In the event of an annulment of the election results, the government sets the date for a new election.

Resources

- [اللجنة الوطنية المستقلة للانتخابات \(ceni.mr\)](http://ceni.mr) Official website of the National Independent Electoral Commission
- Compendium of legislative and regulatory texts pertaining to elections in Mauritania, 2024 edition (available in hard copy only)
- [Mauritania official gazette](#)
- [Official website of the Constitutional Council](#)
- [Official website of the High Authority for Print and Audiovisual Media](#)
- [IFES Election Guide | Country Profile: Mauritania](#)

About IFES in Mauritania

From 2012 to 2013, IFES implemented the Supporting the Electoral Process program in Mauritania, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), to strengthen the capacity of Mauritania's National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) ahead of legislative and municipal elections in November and runoff elections in December 2013. IFES's support included targeted trainings on electoral operations and management, voter registration, and civic and voter education.

In February 2023, IFES returned to Mauritania under the USAID-funded *Kofo Sugande* (People's Choice) project, implemented by the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening, which includes IFES and the International Republican Institute. IFES has worked with the CENI to make the 2023 general elections and the 2024 presidential election more inclusive and accessible to voters across Mauritania. *Kofo Sugande* project activities also focus on longer-term strategic planning and capacity building to improve the country's overall electoral administration and enhance the political participation of all Mauritians.

Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the CENI and Mauritania's High Authority for Print and Audiovisual Media as of June 12, 2024, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

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