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International Foundation  
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**Election FAQs: Mauritania**  
*Legislative, Regional, and Local  
Elections*  
*May 13, 2023*

Middle East and Northern Africa

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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## Election Snapshot

- Election Day: May 13, 2023
- Three elections: parliamentary, regional, and municipal
- Six ballot papers to be placed in separate ballot boxes
- Registered voters: 1,785,035 (52 percent women), including 22,288 Mauritians living abroad
- Polling stations: 4,729 in and out of the country
- Seats:
  - 176 in the National Assembly
  - 285 in regional councils
  - 4,110 in municipal councils
- Candidate lists:
  - 25 national-level party lists, including women and youth, and 481 department-level party lists for the parliamentary elections
  - 144 party lists for regional elections
  - 1,368 party lists for the municipal elections
- Mandate duration: five years for the National Assembly and regional and municipal councils

## When is Election Day?

Simultaneous legislative, regional, and local government elections in Mauritania will occur on May 13, 2023. Second rounds will take place two weeks later, as needed, on May 27, but only for half of the deputies to the National Assembly, including those elected by Mauritians residing abroad.

## What changes are in place for these elections, compared to 2018?

Following an agreement reached between all main political parties in September 2022, several new features were introduced for the May 13 elections:

- The number of deputies in the National Assembly increased from 155 to 176. Of those, 88 will be elected in multi-member constituencies based on a proportional system, and the remaining 88 will be elected through a two-round majoritarian system. The country's largest city, Nouakchott, was divided into three constituencies, each with seven deputies.
- A national list reserved for youth and composed of 11 members was introduced to increase youth representation in Parliament.
- Each party is required to include two persons with disabilities in one of its national lists.
- The head of the candidate list that receives the most votes will be declared the mayor or president of the region. Due to the introduction of the proportional system, a council may not receive a stable majority. The Ministry of Interior will be responsible for finding a compromise in such cases.
- For the first time, Mauritians residing abroad will elect four representatives directly through a two-round majoritarian system. Previously, members of the National Assembly elected representatives on behalf of Mauritians living abroad.

## What is the legal framework for conducting the elections?

The legal framework for elections in Mauritania is divided among several legal texts. These include organic laws, ordinances, decrees, regulations, and decisions. The framework consists of the following:

- The 1991 Constitution and its revisions in 2006, 2012, and 2017, which established fundamental rights and freedoms such as equal access to elections by women and men;
- Ordinance No. 91-028 of October 7, 1991, and revised by several organic laws pertaining to the election of deputies to the National Assembly;
- 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. 2018-010 of February 10, 2018, and its subsequent amendments pertaining to the regions;
- Ordinance No. 87-289 of October 1987 and its subsequent amendments through organic laws pertaining to municipalities;
- Organic Law No. 2012-027, establishing the National Independent Electoral Commission and its functions, as amended by Organic Law No. 2018-005; and
- Ordinance No. 91-024 of July 25, 1991, and its subsequent amendments pertaining to political parties.

## Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

Holding three simultaneous elections makes the electoral process complex. Mauritanian voters will elect the 176 deputies of the National Assembly and members of 15 regional and 238 municipal councils. On Election Day, each voter will mark six ballot papers in secrecy and place them in corresponding color-coded ballot boxes. Four ballot papers are for the parliamentary elections, and two are for the regional and municipal elections. For each election, the voter will choose a political party.

For the parliamentary elections, three ballots will correspond to a national list of political parties, a national list of women, and a national list of youth. For these ballots, the electoral district is the entire country. In addition, voters will elect a deputy at the department (*Moughataas*) level or the regional (*Wilayas*) level for Nouakchott. The number of deputies elected in each department depends on the number of inhabitants, varying from one to seven deputies. In addition to voting for deputies of the National Assembly, registered voters will elect the councils of regions and municipalities.

## What is the electoral system?

Mauritania's electoral system uses both proportional representation and two-round majoritarian systems, adding to the complexity of these elections. Most representatives are elected through closed-party lists based on proportional representation in electoral districts of various sizes. For parliamentary elections, the entire country is a single electoral district; for regional elections, the regions constitute the electoral constituencies. The municipalities are the electoral districts in which municipal elections take place. Only 88 deputies to the National Assembly are elected

through the two-round majoritarian system; for these, the electoral constituency is either the department (*Moughataas*) or electoral districts created abroad.

Out-of-country voting will occur in eight countries represented by four electoral districts (Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas), each with one seat.

## **Who is eligible to run as a candidate?**

To be eligible to run as a candidate in legislative, regional, or municipal elections, a person must be a Mauritanian citizen and be at least 25.

A person is not qualified to be a candidate if they:

- Has forfeited their civil and political rights;
- Has been convicted of corruption or fraud;
- Is bankrupt or in judicial liquidation;
- Has been a naturalized citizen for less than 10 years (National Assembly candidates) or less than five years (regional-level or municipal-level candidates);
- Is a member of the armed forces or security services; or
- Is a civil servant working in any of the roles detailed in Organic Law No. 2018-030, Chapter 3, Article 5.

Other restrictions to candidacy apply based on having held previous offices, as detailed in the law, or, in the case of municipal elections, having previously been declared resigned due to failure to fulfill a mandated function.

Candidates for the National Assembly must make a financial deposit of 10,000 ouguiyas (approximately USD 290). The deposit is 5,000 ouguiyas (approximately USD 145) for regional and municipal elections. Deposits for all elections are reimbursed if a candidate list receives more than 3 percent of valid votes. Out-of-country candidates must present 50 signatures of Mauritanians who have lived abroad for at least one year.

## **What provisions are in place that support the equal rights of women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups? Are there reserved seats?**

Ordinance No. 2006-029 and Organic Law 2012-034, both recently modified by Organic Law 2018-008, guarantee equal suffrage and promote women's representation in elected positions. Specifically, the law puts in place the following:

- For municipal elections, there is a minimum quota of 20 percent of seats for women.
- For regional elections, women are guaranteed a minimum number of places on candidate lists relative to the total number of positions to be elected. Women receive preferred placement on the lists to ensure that they win some seats.
- For legislative elections, a national list is reserved for women, and political parties are obligated to alternate men and women on their nationwide lists of candidates.

Any list that does not abide by these requirements is rejected.

The revisions to be introduced in the May 13 elections include a national list reserved for youth. Composed of 11 members, this new list is intended to increase youth representation in Parliament. Candidates on the youth list must be between 25 and 35 years old. Parties are also required to include two persons with disabilities in one of their national lists (either nationwide party lists or lists reserved for women and/or youth) to increase the representation of persons with disabilities in the National Assembly.

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

The National Independent Electoral Commission (*Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante*, CENI) 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. The 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.

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

Voters must be registered before Election Day to cast their ballots. To register, voters must possess valid biometric identity cards. In the September 2022 political agreement framework, political parties and the government decided to compile an entirely new voter register to increase public confidence in its accuracy, comprehensiveness, and inclusiveness. Due to the imminent expiration of many biometric ID cards, they extended validity until 2024 to facilitate the registration process. Therefore, the voters' list used in 2019 for the presidential election was discarded. The register was built anew through a process known as *Recensement administratif à vocation électorale* (administrative census for electoral purposes, RAVEL). The RAVEL is the exclusive responsibility of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI). It commenced on January 27, 2023, and closed on March 13, 2023, after a 15-day extension. In 2019, 1.5 million voters were registered; the final figure for the most recent RAVEL was 1,785,035, including 22,288 Mauritians living abroad.

## **Where and when will voters cast their ballots?**

On May 13, registered voters will cast their ballots between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. in their designated polling station, based on where they indicated they would vote during the RAVEL process. All polling stations are located in public buildings. While an ID card or a valid passport is mandatory to vote, voters are not required to present the card issued by the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI). In addition to poll workers and voters, only those who receive a CENI-issued accreditation can access polling stations. These include party representatives, observers, and journalists.

## **How is polling conducted?**

Polling station staff consists of a president and two members who will be 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 six ballot papers for the three elections to mark in the privacy of the polling booth. The voter drops each marked ballot paper into a color-coded box corresponding to a given race. For instance, yellow ballot boxes are reserved for municipal elections, and grey boxes are for regional elections. Four ballot boxes are for parliamentary races: dark blue for the national party lists, pink for the national list reserved for women, white for the national list reserved for youth, and green for the departmental list. A poll worker signs the voter list on behalf of the voter and instructs the voter to dip their left index finger in indelible ink. Then the voter retrieves their ID card or passport from the poll worker. Voters with disabilities are entitled to assistance from another voter or a person of their choice.

## **Where are vote counting and tabulation held?**

Poll workers are responsible for counting and tallying votes for the six electoral races. They must count the contents of ballot boxes in a predefined order. Once they complete the tally sheet for the municipal elections, they move on to regional lists, followed in sequence by the departmental lists, national party lists, and women's national lists. They close the counting with the youth national lists. A copy of the tally sheet must be distributed to the representatives of candidate lists; another copy must be posted in front of the polling station.

## **Can the official results be contested?**

The National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) centralizes, compiles, and announces the official results of parliamentary, regional, and municipal elections. The parliamentary election results can be contested before the Constitutional Court within eight days after the announcement of the results. Any registered voter or candidate can contest the results. Legal representatives of each candidate list can contest the results of the regional and municipal elections before the Supreme Court. In all cases, the courts' decisions are final.

## Resources

- [اللجنة الوطنية المستقلة للانتخابات \(ceni.mr\)](http://ceni.mr) Official website of the CENI
- Collection of legislative and regulatory texts relating to elections in Mauritania, 2019 Edition, [Recueil-des-textes-2019.pdf \(dgct.mr\)](#)
- [IFES Election Guide | Country Profile: Mauritania](#)

## About IFES in Mauritania

From 2012 to 2013, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (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. 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 (CEPPS), which includes IFES and the International Republican Institute. IFES works with the CENI to make the 2023 general elections 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 National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) as of April 30, 2023, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any International Foundation for Electoral Systems policy or technical recommendations.

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