

Political Risk Update: November 4, 2020

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Algeria: Authorities ignore low turnout as referendum approves new constitution

Event: Election authorities said the referendum on the country's new constitution held on November 1 showed 66.8% in favour but turnout was only 23.7%.

Outlook: The revised constitution was supposed to answer demands from the Hirak protest movement which ousted longtime President Abdelaziz Bouteflika last year. But with turnout significantly lower than the 40% seen in the December 2019 presidential election, the new constitution will have little legitimacy. However, protests against its implementation will be limited and sporadic as most Algerians are fatigued from the long stretch of political instability and the economic impact of COVID-19. Authorities will press ahead with new legislative and local elections under the new constitution, probably by April 2021.

Analysis

In Kabylie region, riots and protests disrupted referendum voting. The pandemic likely also dissuaded some people from voting elsewhere in the country, though the chief reason for

low turnout is probably widespread criticism that the amendments are cosmetic. With President Abdelmajid Tebboune, 75, being flown to Germany at the end of October for checks after close aides tested positive for COVID-19, snap presidential elections may be required if he becomes incapacitated. Tebboune may face early elections even if he recovers quickly, depending on the outcome of the legislative and local polls.



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Moldova: President Dodon loses first round of elections but may well win runoff

Event: In the first round of presidential voting on November 1, opposition candidate Maia Sandu led incumbent Igor Dodon by 36.16% to 32.61%.

Outlook: The outcome of the second round runoff between Dodon and Sandu on November 15 is uncertain, with everything depending on how many additional votes each can secure from the six other candidates who stood in the first round. Dodon has the advantage of being more likely than Sandu to secure part of the 16.9% vote share of third-ranking Renato Usatii. Dire warnings from both sides about this being a fateful election that will define Moldova's future direction may be overstated: the country is just as likely to muddle along between pro-EU and pro-Russia trends as to take a dramatic turn in either direction.

Analysis

With 75% of first round votes counted, President Dodon, whose stance is pro-Moscow, appeared firmly ahead. The fact that Sandu, who was prime minister for several months last year and favours European integration, overtook him as more votes were counted is an encouraging sign for Moldova. In countries with strong rulers and weak electoral systems, it is incumbents rather than challengers who usually get the results 'adjusted' in their favour as the count progresses.

Ivory Coast: Tainted poll will undermine Ouattara's controversial third term

Event: With half the votes counted from the presidential election on October 31, official results show President Alassane Ouattara with 90% of votes cast.

Outlook: Ouattara will undoubtedly be re-elected. However, the fact that his two main challengers, former President Henri Konan Bedie of the Democratic Party of Ivory Coast and Pascal Affi N'Guessan of the Ivorian Popular Front, called on their supporters to boycott the elections in protest at Ouattara's bid for a third term after changing the constitution will reduce credibility of the result. The relatively low levels of violence mean his government will hope to muddle through and may try to overcome continued opposition with a heavy-handed response. Domestic and regional pressure is likely to grow on Ouattara to pursue dialogue with the opposition or map out a succession plan.

Analysis

Security was heavy ahead of the poll and an independent local observer group reportedly stated that some 20% of polling stations did not open, although this has been denied by the independent electoral commission. Speaking on behalf of the boycotting parties yesterday, N'Guessan said that they did not recognise the poll, that Ouattara's mandate has ended and that there should now be "the opening of a civil transition" towards a new

election. On November 2, the two opposition leaders said they have created a transitional council chaired by Bedie to prepare for a transfer of power.

Tanzania: Dubious election results confirm rising authoritarianism

Event: Official results from the October 28 general election show President John Magufuli winning a second five-year term with 84% of the vote to 13% for his closet challenger, Tindu Lissu.

Outlook: Magufuli and his ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) were widely expected to secure victory, but the large margins, especially in Zanzibar, will stretch the credibility of even cynical observers. The opposition has called for protests but it is unclear how long they can sustain any resistance in the face of CCM intransigence. The coming weeks will probably be turbulent but the greater risks are likely to unfold over the next few years as Tanzania's authoritarian drift looks set to become more pronounced.

Analysis

In addition to President Magufuli's success, Hussein Ali Mwinyi of the CCM won Zanzibar's presidential poll with 76% of the vote. CCM has reportedly secured 194 parliamentary seats to just two for the opposition, with results from some of the 264 single-member constituency seats still awaited. As most of the remaining seats in the 393-seat legislature are awarded through proportional representation, CCM looks assured to secure well over the two-thirds majority needed to pass constitutional amendments. The opposition has alleged fraud, and the US embassy has described claims of electoral fraud as 'credible'.

Zambia: Government's failure to pass Bill 10 may bring tougher clampdown

Event: The Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) Bill No. 10 of 2019 failed to pass its second reading in parliament on October 29 after the ruling Patriotic Front (PF) failed to muster the required two-thirds support; 105 MPs voted in favour but the government needed 111 votes.

Outlook: The failure to pass Bill 10 is an embarrassment for President Edgar Lungu's PF and a notable victory for the opposition United Party of National Development (UPND) and its leader Hakainde Hichilema, as well as for civil society more broadly. Nevertheless, PF efforts to stifle the opposition could increase yet further on the back of the recent controversial sentencing of opposition National Democratic Congress leader Chishimba Kambwili to one year in prison on fraud charges dating from 2013.

Analysis

Ahead of the vote, the PF claimed that it had the support of ten MPs from the UPND who ultimately boycotted the vote. 'Bill 10' is widely viewed as an attempt by President Lungu and the PF to counter their falling popularity by increasing their powers before next year's elections. As well as diluting measures to hold the president to account and reducing parliamentary oversight of areas such as debt accrual, Bill 10 would have allowed a presidential candidate who received less than 50%-plus of the vote to align with another candidate to win an election.

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