



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات  
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

Situation Assessment | 17 June 2021

# Algeria's Legislative Elections: Reproducing Regime, or a Step towards a New Algeria?

Unit for Political Studies

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Series: [Situation Assessment](#)

17 June 2021

## Unit for Political Studies

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On 12 June, Algeria held early legislative elections, called by President Abdelmadjid Tebboune in February after the People's National Assembly (Parliament) was dissolved. These elections are the third electoral process to take place since the beginning of the Hirak pro-democracy movement in February 2019 that led to the resignation of former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. They were preceded by the presidential elections of December 2019, which President Tebboune won, and the 1 November 2020 referendum on amending the constitution.

## Election Law and Context

The elections were held under the new electoral law issued on 10 March 2021.<sup>(1)</sup> The law includes some promises that the authority has made, such as empowering youth and women to participate in politics, and fighting the “corruption money” that has long distorted the electoral process. Article 191 stipulates that lists running for elections must “observe the principle of parity between women and men, and allocate, at least, half of the nominations to candidates under the age of forty years, with at least one third of the list's candidates having a university education.” This law also defines the permissible sources of funding for the electoral campaign (Article 87), which is supervised by the Independent National Election Authority (Article 26) through a committee that monitors the financing of election campaign accounts. Article 88 also states that it is prohibited for any candidate to “receive, directly or indirectly, gifts in cash or in kind or any other contribution, whatever its form, from any foreign country or any person of a foreign nationality.”

In addition, Article 191 stipulates that the election shall take place “by proportional voting on the open list, and by preferential voting without mixing.” This means that the chances of the candidates are supposed to be equal,<sup>(2)</sup> because the open list system gives the voter the freedom to arrange the candidates of one list, unlike the closed list system, which imposes the order determined by the party in the list on the voter.

Many parties participated in the elections, including the national movements such as the National Liberation Front (FLN), the Democratic National Rally (RND), Islamist parties like The Movement for the Society of Peace (MSP), the Islamic Renaissance Movement (MRI), The Justice and Development Front (FJD) and the Movement for National Reform (MRN), new parties like Talaie El Houriyet and Jil Jadid. Other parties, affiliated with the democratic current, boycotted the elections on the grounds that the conditions for organizing free and transparent elections were not met, which was also the view of the Socialist Forces Front (FFS) and the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD), the most prominent traditional opposition forces in Algeria, in addition to the leftist Workers Party (PT).

1 "Organic Laws", Independent National Electoral Commission website, accessed on 17/6/2021, at: <https://bit.ly/2TvkBSr>

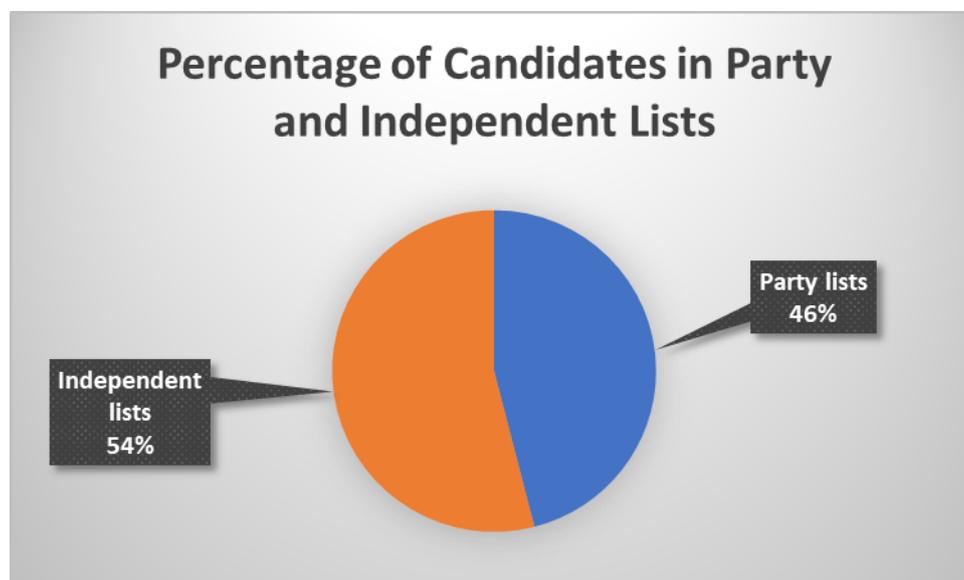
2 Testimonies given by some of those who were tried in corruption cases, after the 22 February movement, revealed that “the first ranks in the lists of large parties” were given in exchange for “bribes”, as this guarantees the candidate entering parliament. Hassan Jibril, “The Open List in Algeria: A Complex System May Delay the Results of Women Parliamentarians,” *Anadolu Agency*, 11/6/2021, accessed on 16/6/2021 at: <https://bit.ly/3q07e8S>



The popular Hirak movement, whose activity declined over 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, before resuming in February 2021, began to change its positions on government initiatives. Part of the movement believes that the regime is reproducing itself through electoral processes in which the conditions for integrity are not met, and that the army is still in control of the decision-making apparatus. Another part of the popular movement sees that participation in elections does not contradict popular rallies as a mechanism for protest and continued demands for change. The government in turn considers that the current protests have nothing to do with the “original movement” and do not express its demands, most of which have been responded to.<sup>3</sup>

A total of 1,483 lists (22,553 candidates) competed for parliamentary seats, including 646 party lists (10,466 candidates) and 837 independent lists (12,085 candidates). The following proportional constituencies show a set of data related to participation in running for elections. From these percentages, it is clear how the new election law has reflected on the percentages of participation in candidacy, whether it comes to adopting the open list system (Figure 1 and 2), or stipulating parity between men and women (Figure 3), or supporting youth participation in electoral lists (Figure 4), or even with the participation of university degree holders (Figure 5).

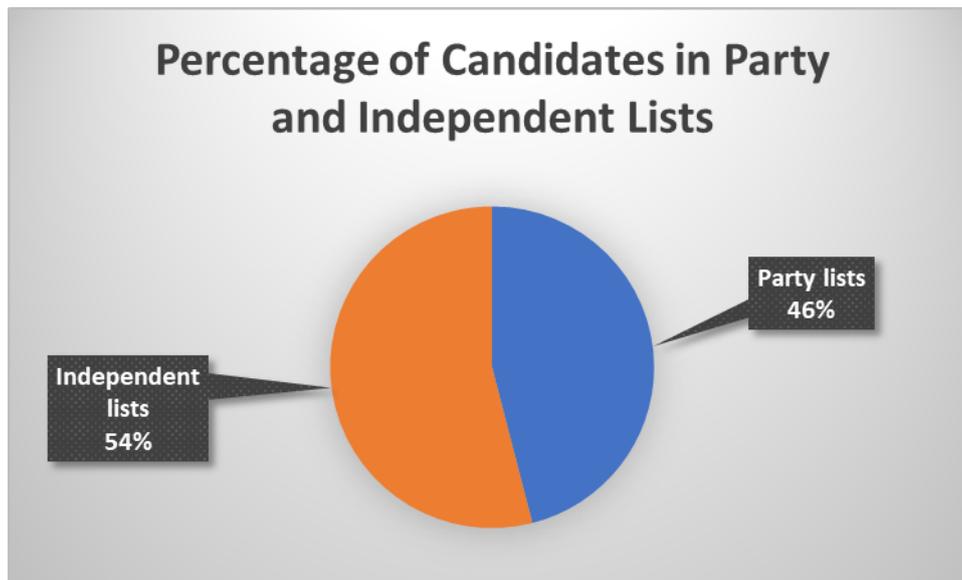
**Figure 1: The Ratio of Party lists and Independent Lists**



Source: Ibid

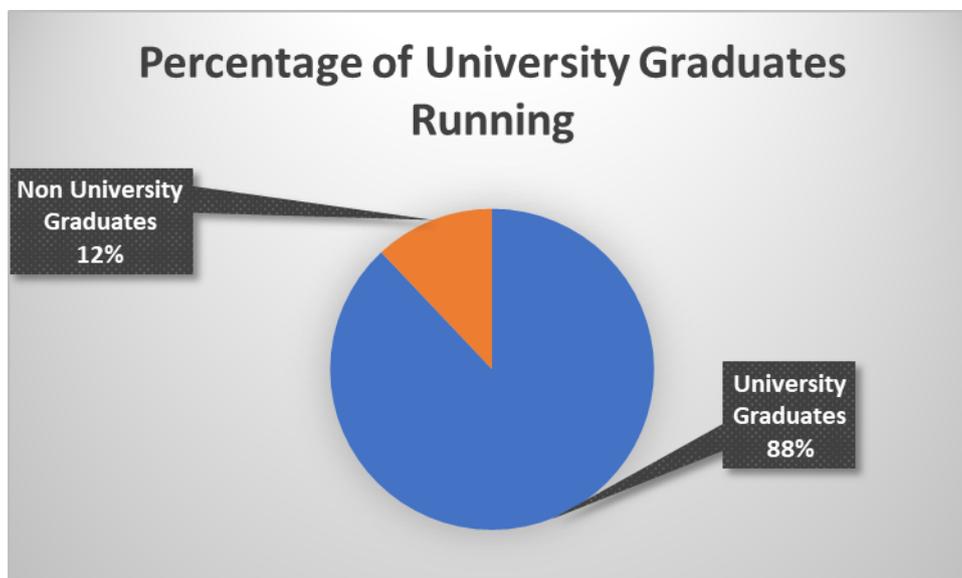
<sup>3</sup> "President Tebboune: The Blessed Original Movement Saved Algeria from Disaster", *Al Jazeera*, 8/6/2021 accessed on: 13/6/2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3ztFWMk>

**Figure 2: Percentage of Candidates in Party and Independent Lists**



Source: Ibid

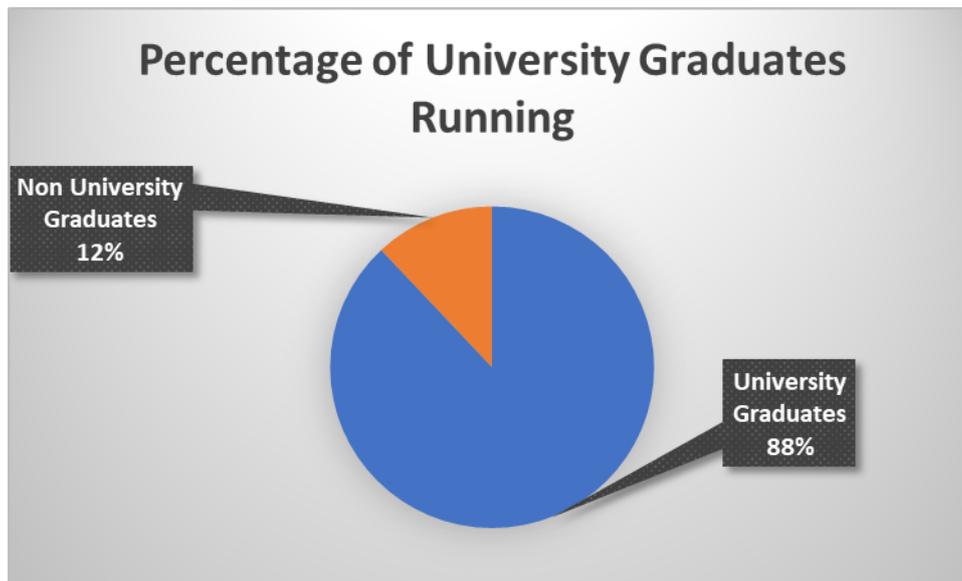
**Figure 3: Distribution of Candidates According to Gender<sup>(4)</sup>**



Source: Ibid

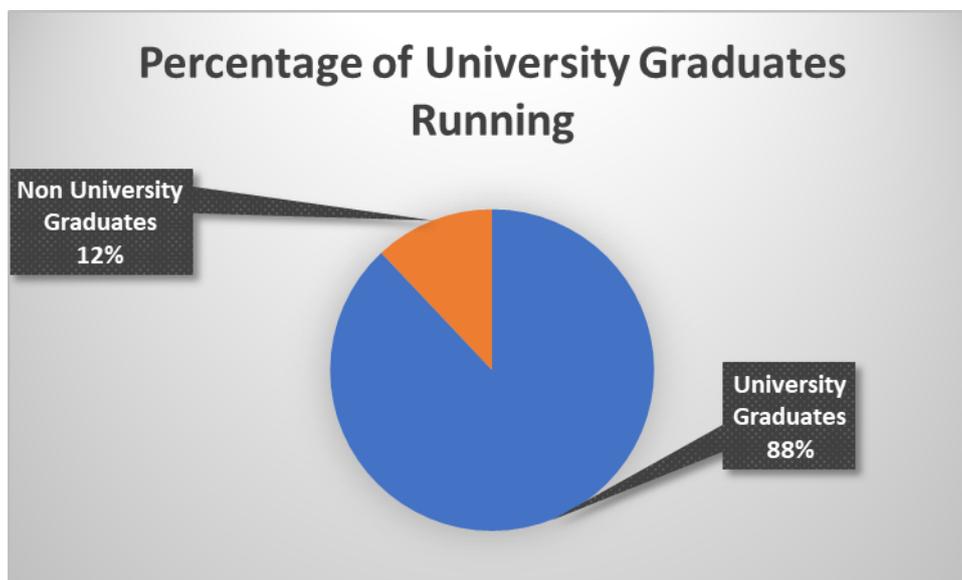
<sup>4</sup> Article 317 of the new election law states that lists that were unable to achieve the parity condition can request the independent authority to provide it with an authorization to do so. This is why the women candidates did not make up 50%.

**Figure 4: Distribution of Candidates According to Age**



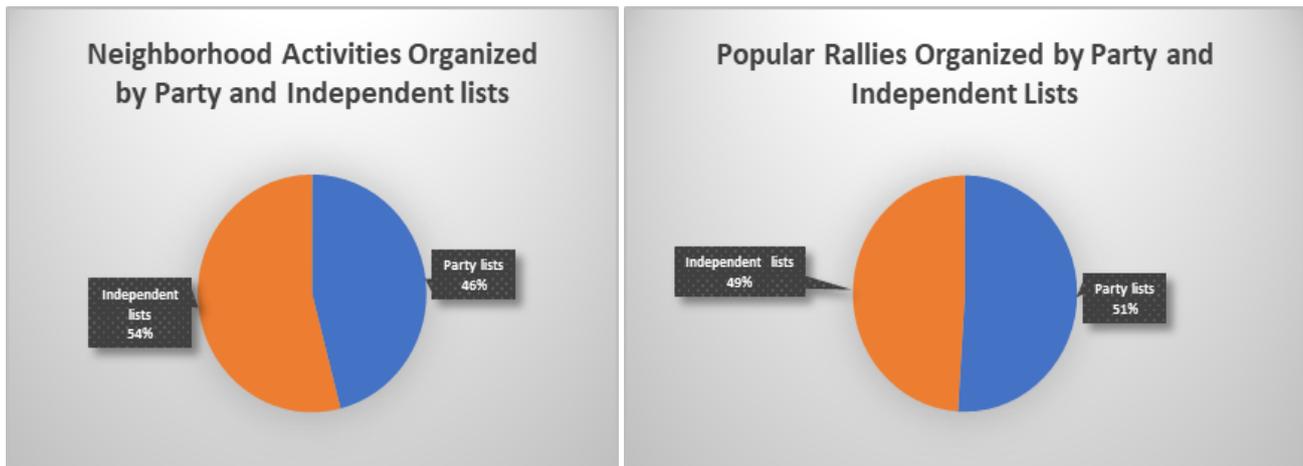
Source: Ibid

**Figure 5: Percentage of University Graduates Running**



Source: Ibid

On the other hand, statistics on election campaign activities show a discrepancy in the type of activities between party and independent lists. While it seems clear that the parties, which are characterized by the financial ability to organize and mobilize, relied more on popular rallies, the independent lists engaged in more field work and direct interaction with voters, especially in villages and small towns. The independent candidates relied on people meeting in public places face to face, rather than the traditional party rallies in closed halls (Figure 6)

**Figure 6: Campaign Activities According to Party and Independent Lists**

Source: Ibid

The general picture of the electoral campaigning has some important implications. For example, the candidates on party and independent lists alike focused on the tribal factor in small cities, rural areas and villages, especially since the focus in these areas was not on political programs but rather on persuading the electorate to vote. In the major cities (including Algiers), the electoral campaign activities were very limited, and scenes of almost empty halls flooded social media. This phenomenon was most acute in the cities of the Greater Kabylia region, which is traditionally known for electoral boycotts, and houses a significant portion of the electoral base of the opposition parties FFS and RCD, which declared their boycotting of these elections.

## Analysis of the Results

On 15 June, Algeria's Independent Electoral Commission announced the election results, with a voter turnout of just 23.03%, sinking from 35.7% in the 2017 and 42.9% in the 2012 legislative elections. The turnout was also low compared to the 2019 presidential elections (41%) and the constitutional amendment referendum in 2020 (23.7%). This low turnout puts the already tense relationship between Hirak and the new government back to square one, as Hirak activists will take it as evidence of the new parliament's lack of legitimacy. The new government will meanwhile insist on the legitimacy of the electoral process and move forward in building a "new Algeria." President Tebboune had anticipated announcing the results by saying that "the voter turnout does not matter much to him," and that "what matters to him is that those who are selected by the [ballot] box enjoy sufficient legitimacy to enable them to exercise legislative authority."<sup>5</sup>

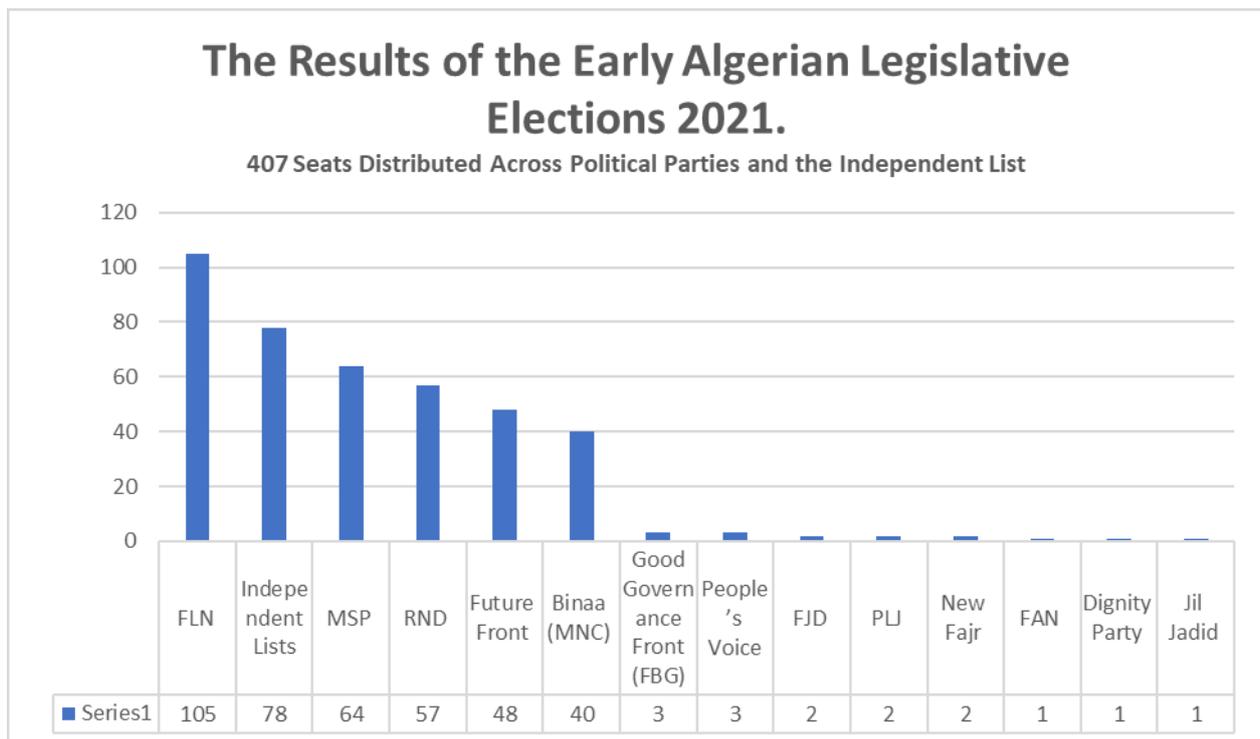
5 "President of the Republic: Those who chose the boycott are free in their opinion, provided that their decision is not imposed on others," *Établissement public de télévision*, 12/6/2021, accessed on 17/6/2021, at: <https://bit.ly/35ojeaP>



## 1. Weak Return of the Presidential Alliance

The elections for the 407 parliamentary seats, as shown in Figure (7), resulted in the FLN receiving a majority (105 seats), down from 164 seats in the 2017 elections, followed (excluding independent lists) by MSP (64 seats as opposed to 33 in the previous parliament), and RND (57 seats compared to 97 in the previous parliament).<sup>(6)</sup>

**Figure 7: The Results of the Early Algerian legislative Elections 2021**



Source: Ibid

It was these three parties that formed what is known as the presidential alliance on the eve of the re-election of President Bouteflika in 2004, from which Islamist MSP withdrew in 2012. With the exception of the latter, which almost doubled its number of seats, the FLN and the RND lost no less than a third of their seats in Parliament. This indicates a significant decline in the role and popularity of the two parties, which once formed the pillars of the alliance that ruled the country for twenty years under Bouteflika's rule. Future Front, which came in fifth and won 48 seats, was founded by Abdelaziz Belaïd in 2012, after his split from the National Liberation Front. He ran in the 2019 presidential elections, coming in last and the party is considered centrist. The National Construction Movement (MNC), which won 40 seats, it is a centrist Islamist party close to the government. Its leader, Abdelkader Bengrina, previously ran for the 2019 presidential elections and came in second place. One of his deputies, Slimane Chenine, was chosen as President of the Assembly to succeed Mouad Bouchareb, who resigned under pressure from Hirak. In addition, the fact that the MSP

<sup>6</sup> "In Numbers... the Results of the Algerian Elections", *Al Jazeera*, 5/5/2017, seen on 17/6/2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3gHCbdx>

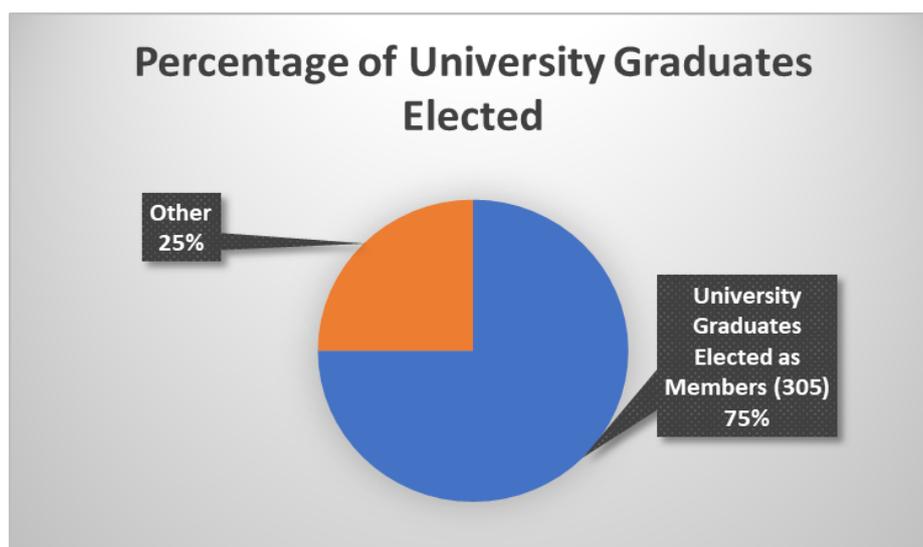
occupied the third place, after the independent lists, may not mean much to the opposition trends in the upcoming parliament, especially since this (moderate Islamist) party was among the early advocates of the army's intervention to ensure a "safe transition" of power before the end of President Bouteflika's fourth term. In addition, it was part of the presidential alliance throughout a significant period of Bouteflika's rule.<sup>(7)</sup> The remaining fifteen seats were divided into eight small parties across the political spectrum.

The alliance of the National Current parties (especially the FLN and the RND) remains the most established, while an attempt to maintain an alliance between Islamist forces fell flat in 2012 and 2017.<sup>(8)</sup> Hence, the chances of an Islamist alliance forming between MSP and MNC remain slim, especially since the latter was established, in 2012, as a splinter movement from the former. This is one of the many divisions seen by Islamist parties over the last three decades.

## 2. The Rise of Independent Lists, Young Candidates and the Decline of Women's Representation

The elections saw the independent lists collectively obtain 78 seats, or 19.1% of the parliament's seats. This is a significant improvement compared to just 6% in 2017, but it falls short of expectations given the huge proportion of candidates on independent lists (54%) and the decline in the popularity of the traditional parties rejected by Hirak, as symbols of Bouteflika's regime. In contrast, the new parliament will include a significant proportion of young people (34%), as well as a large proportion of university graduates (75%).

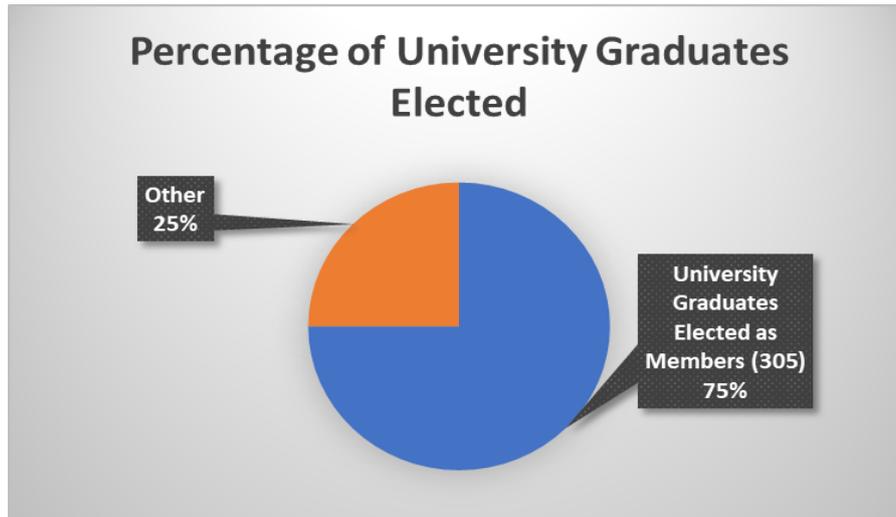
**Figure 8: Percentage of Elected Younger Candidates**



Source: Ibid

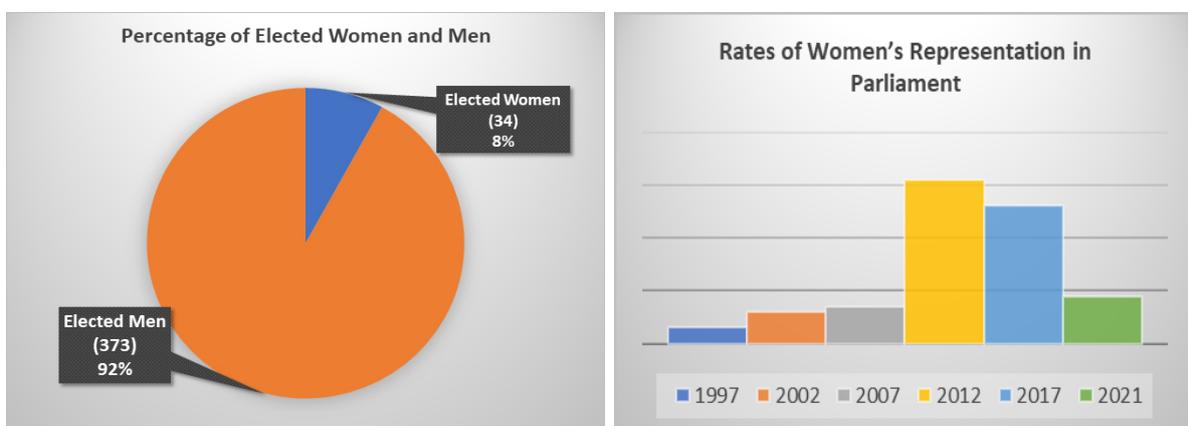
7 "Abdul Razzak Mukri: The fifth term is over and we call on the army to intervene," YouTube, 14/7/2018, accessed on 17/6/2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3wze5IP>

8 Othman Lahyani, "Algeria: An Islamist Party Presents the Idea of Establishing an Electoral Alliance," the New Arab, 13/3/2021, accessed on 17/6/2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3grlNz9>

**Figure 9: Percentage of University Graduates Elected**


Source: Ibid

Conversely, the women's representation witnessed a significant decline compared to the last two Parliaments. Only 8 % of the seats were held by women, compared to 31% in the 2012 elections and 26% in 2017 (Figure 10). This decline is attributable to many factors, most of which are social, but the most prominent of which was the abolition of the quota system in the electoral law, which President Bouteflika approved in 2012, stipulating the allocation of 30% of nominations on the lists to women.<sup>(9)</sup> The principle of parity between men and women in candidatures has been replaced but the transition from the closed to open list system meant that the low electoral success of women to parliament did not reflect the significant percentage of women running (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Percentage of Women Candidates**


Source: Ibid

<sup>9</sup> This principle allowed Algeria to rank first in the Arab world and twenty-sixth globally in terms of women's representation in parliament in 2017.



These percentages are a natural result of the “5% threshold” rule approved by the new election law in Article 194, which states that “When distributing seats, lists which did not obtain at least five percent of the votes cast are not taken into account.” The adoption of this rule increased the number of uncounted votes.

## Conclusion

The early legislative elections that took place in Algeria on 12 June 2021 were marked by low voter turnout, reflecting a lack of public interest. They also resulted in the continuation of the traditional parties at the forefront of the political scene, albeit with far less dominance than they enjoyed in the previous parliament. On the other hand, the elections saw a significant rise of independent representatives and a decline in the representation of women. While the presence of the FLN has decreased to just a quarter of parliament members, it may move towards a renewed alliance with the RND, but this possibility may be dismissed if it provokes the popular movement, which could interpret the move as a restoration of the political scene under Bouteflika. In this case, President Tebboune has several alternatives to form a presidential majority.<sup>(10)</sup> It may include, in addition to FLN and RND, MSF, especially given previous alliances. It could also include the Future Front, which belongs to the centrist movement and is not considered an opposition party, as well as MNC. These possibilities reinforce the fragmentation of Islamist parties which failed to gain enough seats to enable them to form a parliamentary majority (including with the lists of independents). The government thus enjoys so many alternatives that competition may flare between the parties over who joins the presidential majority that will rally around the president's program.

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<sup>10</sup> Chapter 2 of the constitution stipulates that the President shall appoint a new Prime Minister if the parliament does not approve the proposed action plan of the government. See footnote 2.