

Mediterranean Review



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This document provides an overview of developments in the Mediterranean Basin and other regions of interest from 19 February – 04 March 2013, with hyperlinks to source material highlighted and underlined in the text. For more information on the topics below or other issues pertaining to the region, please contact the members of the Med Basin Team, or visit our website at www.cimicweb.org.



In Focus: A United Opposition for the Djibouti Elections By Trista Guertin

The Republic of Djibouti, a small yet strategically important state in the Horn of Africa, held parliamentary elections on 22 February. In a country with a regime widely regarded as [repressive and controlling](#), this election has been viewed as [significant and historic](#), according to *World Politics Review*. The election effectively ended a ten-year boycott by the political opposition, who will be represented in parliament for the first time in 36 years. Furthermore, the widespread support for the political opposition, as measured through votes cast and participation at rallies, “demonstrates a society which is increasingly standing up for itself and challenging power”, according to James Schneider, editor-in-chief of *Think Africa Press*.

The country is plagued by poor economic performance and social indicators, including [widespread poverty](#), low levels of education and rampant child malnutrition, placing it below other countries in the region, according to the World Bank. Like most of its neighbours in the Horn of Africa (HOA), the country has a [large youth population](#), with a median age of 22.1 years. The country’s main assets are its strategic location on the HOA, its harbour and associated infrastructure, and its proximity to relatively rich fishing waters; Djibouti is located near the world’s busiest shipping lanes, controlling access to the Red Sea – the route into the Suez Canal. Already home to a French military base, Djibouti became an ally of the United States in the war on terror following 9/11, allowing the establishment of the US [Camp Lemonnier](#), the largest American military base on the continent and now home to its controversial [fleet of drones](#). The last time protests erupted in Djibouti was in February 2011 when anti-government protesters inspired by the [Arab Spring revolutions](#) throughout North Africa called for Guelleh to step down. The [authorities](#) squashed the opposition, persecuting peaceful protesters and making numerous arrests, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW).

Djibouti gained independence from the French in 1977, at which time Hassan Gouled Aptidon, the uncle of current President Ismael Omar Guelleh, took office. Guelleh succeeded his uncle in 1999,

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North Africa

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Algeria

Algeria carried out [DNA tests](#) to confirm the reported death of Abdelhamid Abu Zeid, a senior al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) official, during the fighting in north-eastern Mali, reports *Agence-France Presse (AFP)*. The test involves the comparison of body samples provided by the French forces and DNA samples taken from two close relatives of Abu Zeid. An independent Algerian television service, *Ennahar TV*, reported on 28 February that Abu Zeid was killed in Mali along with forty other Islamists; however, French government spokeswoman Najat Vallaud-Belkacem said the death of the AQIM chief still awaits official confirmation. In a related note, Moktar Belmoktar, who led an AQIM-associated terrorist group named Al-Mulathameen Brigade (The Brigade of the Masked Ones) and who orchestrated the attack on the In Amenas gas facility in Algeria, [was reportedly killed](#) in Mali by Chadian military forces, reports *CNN* (See [CFC Complex Coverage](#) review for more details).

An unnamed Algerian official said that [twelve extremist fighters](#) were killed in Boumerdes, near the capital Algiers, by an army patrol on 23 February, reports the *Associated Press (AP)*. The patrol also uncovered an arms cache in the area.

High level officials from Algeria and Morocco exchanged accusatory statements over the [issue of Western Sahara](#), reports *Al Monitor*. Moroccan Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane said: "If we had been able to find a solution with our Algerian brothers regarding the Sahara, we would have cooperated better and resolved the existing problems together," referring to the current crisis in Mali. In response, Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Amar Belani said "our Moroccan brothers know perfectly well that the Sahara issue has been on the UN's agenda for a long time. It was the subject of a follow-up by the UN Special Committee on Decolonization designated to grant independence to colonized people and countries," and added that Benkirane's comments regarding the Western Sahara "stem from a trivializing analysis as well as deceptive and artificial reasoning".

Following several recent [smuggling incidents](#), Algeria and Mauritania are increasing border security in efforts to prevent the infiltration of terrorists from Mali, who are crossing borders with the help of allied criminal groups, reports *Magharebia*. The vast desert along the border has provided a route for trafficking weapons, gasoline and cigarettes. Smugglers in the region are known to have alliances with AQIM.

Egypt

A [retrial](#) of former President Hosni Mubarak has been scheduled for 13 April, informs *Reuters*. Mubarak, along with his sons and senior aides, were sentenced to life in jail for the deaths of protesters during the 2011 revolution. They were granted retrial in January 2013. Mubarak's sons, Gamal and Alaa, will face a retrial concurrently on charges of corruption and wasteful spending of public funds. The trial of Mubarak will commence nine days before scheduled parliamentary elections on 22 April, raising concerns that the proceedings could further inflame tensions in Egypt which is already in the midst of substantial political and economic chaos. The elections will be conducted in four stages over two months.

In his first international visit as [US Secretary of State](#), John Kerry visited Cairo on 02 March, meeting with President Mohammed Morsi, members of the political opposition and Egyptian and US business executives, according to *Reuters*. Kerry voiced strong concerns that it is, "paramount, essential, urgent that the Egyptian economy get stronger, that it gets back on its feet", stating that a loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), has to be reached. Following his two hour meeting with Morsi, Kerry announced the US will provide USD 250 million in aid to the country. The Egyptian government stated that it would extend an invitation to the IMF delegation to resume talks in April regarding the USD 4.8 billion loan package that was postponed in late 2012.

Violent protests have continued in Port Said, resulting in the [deaths of five people](#) on 03 March, informs *Reuters*. An estimated 420 people have been injured during protests in the city since January, when an Egyptian court handed down death sentences to 21 defendants blamed for the deaths of 70 fans in the Port Said soccer riot in 2012. Following the death sentence decision in January, violent clashes erupted in Port Said, killing [at least forty people](#). The Interior Ministry has decided to move the remaining defendants in the case from the Port Said prison to avoid further unrest while they await their verdict, to be handed down 09 March.

On 26 February, a Cairo court ruled that the tunnels between the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip are illegal, pose a "[threat to national security](#)", and should be destroyed, according to *Egypt Independent*. Ahmed Mohamed Ali, spokesman for the Armed Forces, estimates that around 225 tunnels remain operational. The tunnels became a lucrative transport route to circumvent the Israeli-imposed blockade on Gaza after Hamas gained control. Egyptian security officials reported that on 27 February, [sixty anti-tank missiles](#) were seized after being smuggled across the Libyan border, according to an *AP* wire. The missiles, transported in two pick-up trucks, were purportedly destined for the Sinai Peninsula, where weapons are regularly smuggled to militant groups in the Gaza Strip vis-à-vis the elaborate system of underground tunnels.

On 26 February, nineteen tourists from China, France, Japan and the UK were killed when their [hot air balloon](#) caught fire and crashed near the town of Luxor, reports *The Guardian*. Only the balloon's pilot and one passenger survived the incident. Tourism, one of the country's main sources of revenue, has already declined by 22 per cent since 2010.

Libya

About thirty former [revolutionaries stormed](#) the prime minister's office on 25 February, claiming they have not been paid in over eighteen months, reports *Libya Herald*. Some of the protesters wore military uniforms and one said they were serving as border guards. Another protester carrying a Ministry of Defence ID card accused the government of ignoring the former revolutionaries. An official from the Ministry of Information said during the demonstration that the majority of the demonstrators were, in fact, no longer members of the security forces, adding that [the government] has offered them the opportunity to join to the army or the police, where they would be paid.

Reports that Al Baghdadi al-Mahmoudi, Gaddafi's Premier, was [tortured while in detention](#), were denied by the Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zeidan, reports *Reuters*. On 26 February, al-Mahmoudi's lawyer said his client was tortured in jail and in critical condition. UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), who had the opportunity to visit al-Mahmoudi, said in a statement that "Mahmoudi appeared in decent physical and psychological condition and his general demeanour was relaxed. He stated that he is being treated well, and although he suffers from various medical conditions, he has adequate access to medical care". This statement was in support of the Prime Minister Ali Zeidan, who earlier dismissed the allegations of Malmoudi's mistreatment.

A growing number of Libyans support [federalism](#), reports *Voice of America (VOA)*. These supporters say the central government should control defence, central banking and foreign policy, while the oil revenue from Libyan oil fields, which are mostly in the east of the county, should be shared. However, the leaders of the country and residents of western Libya are afraid that federalists will not be satisfied with semi-autonomy and will seek full independence. Federalists argue that the people of eastern Libya (Cyrenaica) were marginalised under the Gaddafi regime and continue to be so under the new regime. They welcome semi-autonomy for the two other Libyan provinces, Fezzan in the southwest and Tripolitania in the west. Tripoli strongly rejects such demands; even some politicians with federalist leanings argue that this is not the right time to discuss federalism in Libya. The federalist system was implemented in Libya for most of 1950s through the 1960s.

Morocco

In an effort to prevent terrorism and money laundering and align Moroccan legislation with international law, the Justice Committee within the Moroccan Chamber of Representatives adopted a new law on 26 February criminalising the [financing of terrorism](#), reports *Magharebia*. Under this law, it is illegal to "provide funds in the knowledge that they will be partly or wholly used to commit a terrorist act or will be used by a terrorist or a terrorist organisation", reports *Magharebia* and adds that "[the law] would also regard the financing of terrorism as a crime even where terrorist acts are perpetrated outside Morocco or do not take place at all". According to parliament member Mohamed Benabdessadek, the law aims to make Morocco safe for Moroccans as well as foreign investors, who seek stability before providing the country with the much-needed foreign funds.

Morocco and the European Union (EU) initiated talks for a [free trade agreement](#) on 01 March, reports *VOA*. The agreement is the first of several planned deals aimed at strengthening economic ties with North African nations. Trade between the EU and Morocco had risen to EUR 24 billion (USD 31.2 billion) in the goods sector in 2011 and the EU seeks to expand the trade into services sector as well. Morocco is the largest recipient of European neighbourhood aid, having received EUR 580.5 million euros (USD 760 million) for 2011-2013.

Tunisia

Rached Ghannouchi, the leader of Tunisia's ruling Islamist Ennahda party was [attacked by the residents](#) of a town he was visiting on 03 March, reports *AFP*. The crowd in the town of Thala threw rocks at his car and shouted "get out", a rallying cry of the 2011 revolution that ousted former leader Zine el Abidine Ben Ali.

Hundreds of Salafists held a [protest](#) on 01 March in the town of Sidi Bouzid, calling for the release of Khalifa Karaoui, an imam who was arrested for involvement in a gunfight between the police and the Salafists, reports *Naharnet*. The town of Sidi Bouzid, which was an important cradle of the 2011 revolution, has a high population of radical Islamists. The Salafists carried out several violent acts in the country since the revolution and authorities blamed them for the attack on the US Embassy last September, as well as the murder of leftist politician Chokri Belaid.

The Ennahda party [ceded four ministries](#) and allowed independents to take over the ministries of interior, foreign affairs, defence and justice as a concession to opposition in the next government, reports *Reuters*. President Moncef Marzouki tasked Minister of Interior Ali Larayedh to form a new government within the next fifteen days. Ghannouchi said that his party was ready to negotiate on all the "sovereign" ministries, three of which were controlled by Ennahda in the recently dissolved government.

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We look forward to hearing from you!



Northeast Africa

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Cross Border Issues between South Sudan and Sudan

A newly released Small Arms Survey report claims the prospects for peace in the disputed [Abyei](#) region are “bleak”, reports *Sudan Tribune*. Possession of the oil-rich region remains a point of contention between Sudan and South Sudan. The fate of the area was to be decided through a referendum, which to date has not been held due to disagreements over voter eligibility. The report explains that Sudan has rejected efforts by the African Union High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) to resolve the impasse. South Sudan apparently supports the AUHIP initiative, which proposed an October 2013 date for the referendum. Tension between the two countries continues to escalate, with South Sudan accusing Sudan of sending more troops to the border regions, including Abyei. A spokesman for the South Sudan army (SPLA) stated on 01 March that Sudan had mobilised its forces and allied militias in an effort to reoccupy Abyei and invade South Sudan.

Bloomberg reports that Sudan is also deploying additional troops to the border [state of Blue Nile](#). Three battalions of soldiers have been dispatched to “strengthen the security of the state”. More are expected to leave for Blue Nile later this week as the Sudanese government continues to battle the rebel group Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N). The clashes, which first broke out in 2011 in South Kordofan state and subsequently spread to neighbouring Blue Nile State, have served to undercut peace efforts by the African Union to establish a demilitarised zone between South Sudan and Sudan. Khartoum continues to accuse South Sudan of supporting the SPLM-N rebels, which Juba denies.

South Sudan

The World Bank announced its approval of South Sudan’s interim strategy to [develop public institutions](#) on 02 March, reports *Sudan Tribune*. The World Bank Board of Directors, in cooperation with the International Finance Cooperation (IFC), will invest USD 130 million in the South Sudan Development Plan (SSDP) over 2013/2014. Bella Bird, the World Bank country director for South Sudan, Sudan and Somalia stated: “South Sudan is a new republic that’s barely two years old, and emerging from decades of conflict. As development partners, we recognize that building the state will depend on development-oriented leaders having and implementing a long-term vision, while exercising patience and persistence”. South Sudan, which gained independence in 2011 and became a member of the World Bank last year, continues to face vast challenges including extremely poor or non-existent infrastructure, subsistence level agriculture, poor human development indicators and fragile government institutions.

South Sudan announced plans to [construct a road](#) to Ethiopia in order to transport the country’s crude oil to the international market via the port of Djibouti, informs *Africa Review*. Information and Broadcasting Minister Barnaba Marial Benjamin said the Cabinet resolved on 01 March to construct the road from the oil fields at Paloug in Upper Nile State to the Ethiopian border. In 2012, Juba halted the transport of oil into Sudan after the two countries failed to implement a negotiated peace agreement in September 2012, which would have facilitated the resumption of the flow of oil from South Sudan into Sudan. Oil exports account for almost 98 per cent of the South Sudanese budget. By exporting oil through Ethiopia, the country could receive much needed hard currency used to import basic goods and revive the country’s struggling economy.

The UN released a joint report by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) which warns that some [4.1 million people](#) will most probably face food insecurity during 2013, reports *Sudan Tribune*. The FAO-WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission to South Sudan (CFSAM) report, carried out between October and November 2012, is an important tool in assessing South Sudan’s agricultural production and food availability. Although food production has increased over the past two years, overall food security in the country remains uncertain for more than forty per cent of the population due to increasing food prices and a limited food supply in parts of the country. WFP further warns that 2.8 million people are in urgent need of food and nutritional assistance, particularly rural families, vulnerable children, internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and returnees.

UN humanitarian coordinator for South Sudan Toby Lanzer raised concerns on 28 February regarding continued fighting in the eastern state of Jonglei, the safety of [humanitarian aid workers](#) in the country, and the protection of humanitarian assets and supplies, reports *UN News Centre*. Lanzer further added that civilians requiring aid and protection must be granted freedom to move and that the delivery of “impartial, neutral and independent humanitarian action” should be adhered to by all armed parties. South Sudan continues to endure inter-communal violence not only in Jonglei state, but throughout the country, including a number of cattle raids in recent weeks in Unity, Lakes and Warrap states. Lanzer urged the South Sudanese government to strengthen on-going efforts to protect civilians and improve law and order.

Sudan

Army spokesperson Colonel al-Sawarmi Khalid Sa’ad confirmed on 04 March that Sudanese army troops had clashed this weekend with rebels from the [Sudanese Revolutionary Front \(SRF\)](#) in the state of North Kordofan, according to *Sudan Tribune*. Sa’ad stated that the army launched an attack on a group of SRF “outlaws” they had tracked across the South Sudanese border. He further claimed that the SRF had suffered heavy casualties and loss of equipment before the remaining rebels fled into North Darfur.

A UN Security Council independent panel of experts reports that Sudan is [violating UN sanctions](#) in carrying out continued airstrikes in the region of Darfur, reports *Reuters*. The panel said Sudan broke its vow, using aircraft from Belarus and Russia to carry out aerial bombardments throughout 2012. The sanctions, imposed in 2005, sought to curb Sudan’s use of aircraft and weapons to carry out military operations in the troubled region. Although the Sudanese government claimed the aircraft had limited use and had never been used to target civilians in Darfur, the UNSC panel claimed to possess credible information that Sudanese armed forces had conducted several offensive military flights and bombardments using Antonov aircraft, Mi-24 attack helicopters, MiG-29 aircraft and Su-25 aircraft.



Horn of Africa

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Djibouti

Union for the Presidential Majority (UMP), the party of autocratic President Ismail Omar Guelleh, [declared victory](#) in the 22 February parliamentary elections, taking 49 of 65 seats. Guelleh was not up for re-election. Daher Ahmed Farah, the leader of the opposition [Union for National Salvation \(USN\)](#) party, returned from exile in Belgium to participate. USN immediately dismissed the results, claiming the election was rigged. Farah and other opposition party leaders boycotted the 2008 and 2011 elections. Nevertheless, the proceedings have been described as the [most open elections](#) in the country's history, which has been ruled by Guelleh since he succeeded his uncle in 1999.

Eritrea

Eritrea filed a [formal complaint](#) against Egypt in the UN Security Council on 23 February, according to *Indepth Africa*. President Isaias Afewerki signed a letter, charging the Egyptian government with executing a [shoot-to-kill policy](#) with regard to Eritrean refugees attempting to cross into Israel. On 25 February, the representative for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) in Israel, William Tall, [accused](#) the Israeli government of forcing Eritreans to return to their home country, informs *Haaretz*. "The government needs to provide an Eritrean access to sanctuary. That's not happening", said Tall. Human Rights Watch considers the [Eritrean government](#) to be one of the most repressive and reclusive in the world. An attempted [coup](#) by junior military officers in late January 2013 hinted at a [power struggle](#) in the current regime, and signs of internal instability have continued to emerge, including the recent [defection](#) of the country's football team in Uganda.

Ethiopia

Abune Matias was [elected](#) leader of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church on 28 February, reports the *Associated Press (AP)*. The position lends considerable political power to Matias, in a country where forty million people are Orthodox Christians. Posted in Jerusalem prior to his election, the 71-year old leader is the sixth patriarch of the church. In celebration of the 38th anniversary of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), 965 prisoners were [released](#) in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region. The Tigray police commissioner described rehabilitation and training programmes that former prisoners had completed to qualify for a return to civilian life.

Kenya

On 04 March, Kenya's long-awaited election day, two hundred armed secessionists of the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) killed at least fifteen people in two [coordinated attacks](#), reports *The Guardian*. After setting traps in Mombasa and nearby Kilifi, MRC militia armed with machetes, guns and bows and arrows killed at least five police officers and one election official. The group, which initially boycotted the elections, had [called](#) for peace in recent weeks. Elsewhere in the country, lines for [polling stations](#) were long but residents [reported](#) little unrest. The electoral commission has seven days to announce the results. Groups called for [increased security](#) leading up to the elections, according to *Voice of America (VOA)*. The International Criminal Court (ICC) unexpectedly announced the [probable delay](#) of a trial for leading presidential and vice-presidential candidates, Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto, according to *The Standard*. The two men were scheduled to appear before the ICC in April.

Despite calls for calm and months of preparation, signs of unrest began to emerge in the last week of February. Chief Justice Willy Mutungu [received death threats](#) as he reviewed the case brought against Kenyatta and Ruto. On 27 February, a group of thirty civil society organisations released a joint statement that described [worrisome signs](#): increased sales of [machetes \(pangas\)](#), reported instances of voter intimidation and the distribution of leaflets that encouraged the eviction of target ethnic groups. Politicians were also accused of [buying votes](#) when illegal bribery was recorded in regional campaigns for gubernatorial candidates of [both major parties](#). Tourists were [warned](#) against visiting the country's coastal region, reports the *Telegraph*. *France 24* reported on fears circulating about a possible [Mungiki resurgence](#); the group [operates](#) as a secretive, quasi-religious sect of Kikuyus that has been outlawed in Kenya for some time. Businesses have also [shuttered](#) in Kisumu. Potential [flashpoints](#) in the coming days include Mombasa, portions of the Rift Valley (especially Nakuru), the Tana River Delta and informal settlements in Nairobi, according to *The Economist*. In 2007, violence first broke out in Kibera, a large slum in Nairobi. Mathare, a slum across town from Kibera, has been increasingly politicised in recent weeks. *Note: The CFC is hosting real-time live coverage and social media of the 2013 elections on our [Kenyan elections page](#).*

Somalia

Two suicide bombers killed three people and wounded several others during a [coordinated attack](#) on 01 March in the Somali capital. The perpetrators struck a popular restaurant in Mogadishu's upscale Lido beach, reports *Agence France Press (AFP)*. The attack follows an earlier suicide bombing at a Lido beach restaurant on 16 February that killed one civilian and wounded one other. The [string of attacks](#) demonstrates the capability of *al Shabaab* to carry out guerrilla strikes, despite being driven from Mogadishu in August 2011. The twin attacks also undermine security and development initiatives as the Somali government seeks to strengthen the credibility of recently elected President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's government and [normalise](#) ties with international partners like the United States, informs *Reuters*. In Puntland, a court sentenced [twelve people](#) to death for the murder of a prominent local sheikh, informs *Garowe Online*. *Al Shabaab* leader Ahmed Godane "Abu Zubeir" was among the twelve to receive death sentences. He and five others were sentenced [in absentia](#) because they have not yet been detained by officials.

The United Nations is considering a reconfiguration of the African Union Mission in Somalia ([AMISOM](#)), which comprises 17,600 peacekeeping troops. The Security Council is also considering Somalia's request to lift a 21-year [arms embargo](#), according to *Reuters*. A vote is expected before the current mandate expires on 07 March. Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) [cautioned](#) against integrating humanitarian assistance into a UN "stabilisation" mission, citing concerns that it could prevent the delivery of lifesaving medical care by compromising the independent credibility of NGOs and result in distrust amongst local communities in Somalia.

Continued from page 1

and is currently serving his third six-year term as president, after amending the constitution in 2011 to permit the president to run for a third consecutive term. Overall, the country has an abysmal record of free and fair elections and has operated effectively as a one-party state since the 1970s. In 2003, the opposition received 37.3 per cent of the official vote but failed to win a single seat in the [65-seat parliament](#). This popular vote/representation disparity was attributed to the organisation of the constituencies in favour of the ruling party, according to *Think Africa Press*. As a result of the contested 2003 elections, the opposition boycotted the 2008 elections, resulting in Guelleh's party, the Union for the Presidential Majority (UMP) winning all 65 seats again. In November 2012, the electoral system was reformed so that thirteen seats would be elected by proportional representation. The remaining 52 seats would continue to use the former multi-member per constituency "first-past-the-post system". This revision would almost guarantee that the opposition would acquire some seats. With the revised constituencies, it was widely anticipated that the results would install the first opposition parliament since independence.

The 2013 [electoral campaign](#) began on 08 February, and in the days before the election, the campaigning was described by observers as calm yet tense, according to the *Somaliland Sun*. The opposition coalition party, the [Union for National Salvation \(USN\)](#) ended a ten year boycott of the elections by opposition parties after Guelleh approved that one-fifth of parliamentary seats would be allotted by proportional representation. Opposition parties banded together to take on the UMP, developing a common platform of improving human rights, support for independent media and a fight against "tribalism, corruption and nepotism". Emerging from a nine-year exile, Daher Ahmed Farah, the leader of the one opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Renewal and Development, returned from Belgium to participate in the election. Farah was reportedly arrested upon his return to Djibouti, but released two days later. Despite some anomalies, the campaign included many of the hallmarks of a generally democratic process: sixty [international election observers](#) which included delegates from the African Union, the Arab League, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation, the International Organisation of the Francophonie, the United Nations and the European Union arrived in the country on 21 February, reports *Sabahi*. The USN was allowed to hold rallies, which were reportedly attended by [thousands of supporters](#). The candidates also participated in the country's [first televised political debates](#) which included leaders of various parties, according to *All Africa*.

[Election results](#) were released on the evening of Election Day, and into 23 February, giving the UMP a lead in all six districts, especially in Djibouti city, where most of the country's 800,000 residents live, reports *Middle East Online*. Gulleh and the UMP claimed victory, [winning 49 seats](#) in the National Assembly. The opposition rejected the results, calling the election flawed, according to *Reuters*. International observers reported no major violations of electoral procedures; however, protests against the ruling coalition's victory have continued since and security force attempts to diffuse the situation and remove the protesters have largely failed.

In the week following the elections, [unprecedented](#) civic action was observed in response to the widely [discredited vote](#) that was easily won by the incumbent UMP party. Thousands of [anti-government protesters](#) took to the streets in Djibouti City. Riot police were reportedly met with [Molotov cocktails](#), according to *Reuters*. *Middle East Online* reports that some [300 protesters](#) were arrested on 25 February, with police using tear gas and batons in an attempt to subdue the crowd. Farah claimed he was blocked from leaving his home to participate: "The opposition won the elections and the victory was denied...the numbers were manipulated." Citizens rallied in support of opposition leaders who were recently jailed, shouting "freedom" and "free our leaders" as police again targeted crowds with tear gas. Interior Minister, Hassan Darar Houffaneh, banned all protests and [called](#) for calm on 27 February by urging local authorities, and even parents, to discourage youth from inciting riots and unrest.

Clashes between security forces and [youth protesters](#) continued on 01 March in support of the Union of National Salvation (USN) and against the arrest of opposition leaders and the results of the election. The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) reported that security forces used excessive force against the youth following the Minister of Interior's decision to ban demonstrations and marches. The same day, President Guelleh called on protesters to cease using violence. He urged them to use the [justice system](#) for complaints against the elections, reports *Sabahi*. While Guelleh acknowledged the right of the opposition to protest, he claimed his actions were to avert activists' efforts to "create the conditions for civil war in our country".

Meanwhile, a Djiboutian court ordered Abdirahman Bashir, Abdirahman God and Guirreh Meidal, [religious scholars](#), to appear on 03 March on charges of encouraging the riots. The scholars were arrested on 25 February, as the opposition prepared to hold demonstrations in the capital to protest the election results. Following the arrest of the influential moderate imams, the mayor of Djibouti City, Abdourahman Mohamed Guelleh was also [arrested](#), according to the *Somaliland Sun*. Mayor Guelleh, a USN opposition member, is a popular political figure who won his office in 2012. Mr Guelleh has reportedly been critical of the government's policies since taking office. His arrest prompted members of Djibouti's diaspora to question the ability of President Guelleh to maintain control in the face of civic unrest and a resurgence of USN popularity.

While the unrest and arrests that ensued in the aftermath of the 22 February election may continue, the widespread discontent has given an [unprecedented voice](#) to a population that has been suppressed for decades, according to the *Somaliland Sun*. Abdourahman Boreh, a businessman and exiled member of the opposition said: "Freedom loving Djiboutian have demonstrated courage and a great willingness to observe peace and stability. For the first time we witness votes being counted till the early hours of the following day, which is great testament of the peoples' willingness for change." Through restructuring the electoral process to ensure opposition seats were held, President Guelleh has acknowledged, or been forced to acknowledge, opposition to his rule. However, Schneider warns that the presence of opposition members in parliament will not, on its own, make a [significant impact](#) and that any opening up of the country is being strictly managed by the president: "This appears to be his plan. He can make small changes and incorporate new figures into his patronage network, keep the outward signs of electoral legitimacy and keep almost total power." What remains to be seen is how the large youth population will participate in shaping the country's future. According to Schneider, "It is difficult to see how this population can continue to be controlled with such stark problems facing the country".

