

## **What makes the credibility of an election? Lessons from the Tunisian electoral experience since 2011**

The credibility of an election or a referendum is based on several essentially objective elements without denying some elements of subjectivity. The credibility of an election has as its primary objective the strengthening of the acceptability of the electoral operation, acceptability which must be as wide as possible, regardless of the question of the legitimacy of the election in the legal sense of the term. In this regard, Tunisia has experienced four major electoral events since 2011, which are rich in lessons, and is preparing to experience two other major events in 2022 on July 25 and December 17.

The main issue of these next meetings and more particularly the referendum of July 25 is first of all an issue of credibility in the context of a rather deleterious general political atmosphere and a questioning of the main institutions put in place by the Constitution of July 27, 2014. However, despite a revision of its legal framework (revisions which above all modified the terms of the composition of its members), the Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE) will be responsible for the smooth running of these next electoral appointments based on the same bureaucratic infrastructure and according to the same technical procedures of the "unfolding" of the previous elections.

As part of this lesson, we will try to determine the main points that make the credibility of an election based on the main lessons of the Tunisian electoral experiences since 2011. These experiences are characterized by a rather surprising paradox: At the time of the conduct of the election and when the results are announced, the credibility and acceptability of the operation are never substantially called into question. Once the electoral period has passed particularly during institutional blockages and/or political crises, it is often at these times that the question of the credibility of past elections and consequently their acceptability or even their legitimacy resurfaces.

In reality, it's all a matter of terminology and legal notion: A "flawed" election is not necessarily a "rigged" election. An electoral offense or crime does not necessarily call into question the free choice of a voter and therefore the credibility of a result. This lesson will try to clarify the true from the false in terms of the credibility of an election through its four cardinal points:

- 1- The legal framework of an election and particularly the electoral legal terminology,
- 2- Electoral administration or governance,
- 3- The electoral environment and particularly issues related to the financing of electoral campaigns,
- 4- The electoral technique and its transparency.

The author of this lesson will be based on his long academic experience but also on his electoral experience whether as a trainer in electoral technique or as a former member of the regional administration of the ISIE in Sousse during the general elections of 2014.