

Opposition wins Mauritanian elections

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Nouakchott - The second round of parliamentary elections in the west African desert state of Mauritania has confirmed the victory of the opposition to ousted president Maaouya Ould Taya, Interior Minister Mohammed Ahmed Ould Lemine announced Monday.

The second round was held Sunday in constituencies where no candidate had won an absolute majority in the first round held two weeks ago.

Parties opposing Ould Taya's policies took a total of 41 seats in the 95-strong parliament.

The most important of them are the Rally of Democratic Forces (RFD) of veteran politician Ahmed Ould Daddah and the Popular Alliance for Progress (APP) headed by Messaoud Ould Boulkheir, a champion of the rights of former slaves and their descendants.

Independent candidates including moderate Islamists came second, with 39 seats.

They were followed by Ould Taya's former party, the Republican Party for Democracy and Renewal (PRDR), which took 7 seats. The remaining 8 seats went to small formations.

Voter turnout was nearly 70 per cent.

The Islamic republic of 3 million has been governed by a military junta led by Colonel Ely Ould Mohammed Vall and by a transitional government since Ould Taya was overthrown in a bloodless coup in August 2005 after 21 years of authoritarian rule.

The parliamentary elections were an important step in a string of polls aiming at restoring democracy next year. Members of the junta were not allowed contest the elections.

Mauritania's history is riddled with coups. There has never been a democratic handover of power since the impoverished country, which is becoming one of Africa's new oil producers, achieved independence from France in 1960.