

## **The Role of the Executive Authority in the Organization and Functioning of the Constitutional Court**

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**Soumission: 21/03/2026    Acceptation: 25/07/2026    Publication: 07/10/2026**

### **Abstract**

This study examines how the executive authority shapes the organization and functioning of Algeria's Constitutional Court in the aftermath of the 2020 constitutional amendment. While that reform underscored the Court's independence, its mandate to safeguard the supremacy of the Constitution, and its contribution to consolidating the rule of law, the executive branch remains structurally present in key aspects of the Court's institutional life. In particular, the analysis considers the influence of the President of the Republic and, depending on the institutional configuration, the Prime Minister or the Head of Government in the Court's composition, the appointment of its members, and the determination of the conditions governing their election.

The study also addresses the executive authority's role in triggering the Court's competences through mandatory and discretionary referral mechanisms, which open the path to constitutional review of laws and regulatory instruments. It argues that this configuration raises persistent questions about the effective independence of constitutional adjudication. On that basis, the study concludes that constitutional governance requires a carefully maintained balance: review must remain operational and effective, yet the Court's autonomy must be protected. Achieving this balance is essential for strengthening public confidence in the judiciary and for giving concrete expression to the principle of separation of powers.

**Keywords:** executive authority; Constitutional Court; constitutional review; referral; President of the Republic.

### **Introduction**

A Constitutional Court is a central feature of any constitutional system, not only because it protects the supremacy of the Constitution, but also because it supports the application of law and contributes to the protection of rights and freedoms. In Algeria, this institution gained renewed importance with the 2020 constitutional amendment, which clarified the Court's competences and powers and emphasized its place in reinforcing the rule of law and the separation of powers.

At the same time, constitutional design does not remove the executive from the Court's institutional environment. Despite the guarantees associated with judicial independence, the

executive authority, represented by the President of the Republic and the Head of Government, continues to play a consequential role in the Court's organization and day-to-day functioning. This role is visible in the processes through which the Court is composed and its members are appointed, in the rules governing the election of certain members, and in the executive's impact on organizational matters through implementing regulatory texts.

### **Research Significance**

The significance of this research stems from its focus on the relationship between the executive authority and constitutional adjudication, a relationship that directly affects both the effectiveness of constitutional review and the Court's independence. In some respects, executive involvement may also contribute to ensuring that constitutional decisions are taken with speed and practical effectiveness.

### **Research Objectives**

The paper seeks to assess the extent to which the executive authority intervenes in organizing and operating the Constitutional Court. It also maps the mechanisms through which the executive influences the activation of the Court's competences, notably referral procedures, whether mandatory or discretionary, which constitute the gateway to reviewing the constitutionality of laws and regulatory measures.

### **Research Question**

Against this background, the study poses the following central question: to what extent does the executive authority intervene in the organization and functioning of the Constitutional Court?

To address this question, the study is divided into two sections. The first examines the executive authority's participation in organizing the Constitutional Court. The second considers the executive authority's role in activating constitutional review.

### **Section One: Executive Involvement in the Organization of the Constitutional Court**

The Constitutional Court is presented as an independent body. Yet the 2020 constitutional revision assigns the executive authority a consequential role in how the Court is organized. Two points are central here. First, the President of the Republic is granted broad powers to appoint four members of the Court, including its President (Subsection One). Second, the President also determines the conditions governing the election of six further members drawn from constitutional law professors (Subsection Two).

### **Subsection One: Appointment of the Four Members within the Court's Composition**

A close reading of the 2020 constitutional amendment<sup>1</sup> indicates that the constitutional framers vested the President of the Republic with the authority to appoint the President of the Constitutional Court and to appoint certain other members, subject to the constitutional conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria (2020), issued on 15 Jumada al-Awwal 1442 AH (30 December 2020), *Official Gazette of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria*, No. 82.

### **Part One: Conditions for Appointing the President of the Constitutional Court**

Under Article 186, paragraph 1, of the 2020 amendment, the President of the Constitutional Court is appointed directly by the President of the Republic through a presidential decree. This mechanism places the executive at the center of the Court's institutional configuration<sup>2</sup>. In this context, the Constitution also draws a clear limit: the President of the Republic cannot delegate the power to appoint the heads of constitutional institutions. Article 93 provides that this competence belongs exclusively to the President and is not open to delegation<sup>3</sup>.

The constitutional framework sets out a series of requirements applicable to any member of the Constitutional Court, whether elected or appointed. These include the following<sup>4</sup>:

- The member must be at least fifty (50) years old in full on the day of election or vote. By contrast, under the former Constitutional Council, the threshold was forty (40) years in full on the day of appointment or election.
- The member must have legal experience of at least twenty (20) years. Under the Constitutional Council, the requirement was at least fifteen (15) years of professional experience, whether in higher education in legal sciences, in the judiciary, in legal practice as an advocate before the Supreme Court or the Council of State, or in a senior state position.
- The amendment introduced an additional requirement: training in constitutional law. This condition did not appear under the former Council and is intended to reinforce the specialized character of the Court.
- The member must enjoy civil and political rights and must not have been convicted and sentenced to a term of imprisonment.
- The amendment also requires non-affiliation with any political party, with the stated aim of entrenching neutrality and safeguarding the members' political independence.

Beyond these general requirements, Article 188 provides that the President of the Constitutional Court must meet the eligibility conditions set out in Article 87 of the Constitution, with one exception: the age requirement does not apply. These are the conditions required of a candidate for the Presidency of the Republic, namely<sup>5</sup>:

- holding Algerian nationality by origin only, with proof that both father and mother also hold Algerian nationality by origin;
- not having acquired a foreign nationality;
- professing Islam;
- proving that the spouse holds Algerian nationality by origin only;

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<sup>2</sup> Article 186(1) provides: "four (4) members appointed by the President of the Republic, including the President of the Court," 2020 constitutional amendment, *ibid*.

<sup>3</sup> Article 93(1) provides: "Under no circumstances may the President of the Republic delegate his power to appoint the Prime Minister or the Head of Government, the members of the Government, as well as the heads and members of constitutional institutions for which the Constitution has not provided another method of appointment." 2020 constitutional amendment, *opcit*.

<sup>4</sup> Article 187 of the 2020 constitutional amendment, *opcit*.

<sup>5</sup> Article 188(1), 2020 constitutional amendment, *ibid*.

- proving permanent residence in Algeria, and in Algeria alone, for at least ten (10) years;
- proving participation in the Revolution of 1 November 1954 if born before July 1942;
- proving that the parents were not involved in acts against the Revolution of 1 November 1954 if born after July 1942;
- proving completion of national service, or providing a legal justification for non-completion;
- submitting a public declaration of movable and immovable property, inside and outside Algeria.

The President of the Republic appoints the President of the Constitutional Court for a single term of six (6) years. Once appointed, the President of the Court must cease any other membership, office, assignment, mandate, mission, activity, or liberal profession<sup>6</sup>.

These rules make clear that the appointment of the Court's President remains an executive prerogative, exercised through a presidential decree. This configuration inevitably raises the question of how far institutional independence is insulated from the logic of appointment, especially given the President's procedural weight within the Court. Decisions are taken by a majority of the members present; where votes are equal, the President's vote is decisive. In practice, then, the method of appointment becomes relevant to how the Court embodies the separation of powers and to the extent to which constitutional adjudication is experienced as independent.

### **Branch Two: Appointment Requirements for Constitutional Court Members**

Article 186(1) of the 2020 constitutional amendment empowers the President of the Republic to appoint four (4) members of the Constitutional Court, including its President. These appointments are made by presidential decree, a choice that keeps the executive authority structurally involved in the formation of the Court<sup>7</sup>.

The same amendment draws a strict line on delegation. Under Article 93, the President cannot transfer the power to appoint members of constitutional institutions where the Constitution does not prescribe another method of appointment. The competence is framed as personal and exclusive. In practical terms, this mirrors the earlier framework of the Constitutional Council, where the President appointed four (4) members, including both the President and the Vice-President of that body.

For the members appointed by the President of the Republic, Algerian law sets a series of conditions<sup>8</sup>:

- The appointee must be fifty (50) years old in full on the day of election or vote. Under the former Constitutional Council, the threshold was forty (40) years in full on the day of appointment or election.

<sup>6</sup> Article 188(2), 2020 constitutional amendment, *ibid*.

<sup>7</sup> Article 186, 2020 constitutional amendment, *ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> Article 188, 2020 constitutional amendment, *ibid*.

- The appointee must have at least twenty (20) years of legal experience. Previously, the required professional experience was fifteen (15) years, whether in higher education in legal sciences, within the judiciary, in legal practice as an advocate before the Supreme Court or the Council of State, or in a senior state office.
- Training in constitutional law is now required. This was not among the former Council's membership conditions and is intended to strengthen the Court's specialized character.
- The member must enjoy civil and political rights and must not be subject to a custodial sentence.
- Political party affiliation is excluded, in line with the stated objective of neutrality and political independence.

The four members are appointed for a single six-year term, but the system is not designed for a complete turnover at once. A partial renewal mechanism is adopted, with half of the membership renewed every three years. The underlying rationale is continuity: the Court's work should not be interrupted by sudden comprehensive replacement. Once appointed, the member must also cease to hold any other membership, office, assignment, mandate, mission, activity, or liberal profession, a requirement that operates as a safeguard of full-time commitment and functional independence<sup>9</sup>.

#### **Subsection Two: Presidential Control over the Election of Six Members**

Under the 2020 constitutional amendment, the Constitutional Court is composed of twelve members. Six are elected by ballot from among professors of constitutional law, while the President of the Republic is tasked with setting the conditions and procedures governing that election.

#### **Branch One: Setting the Eligibility Conditions**

To implement Article 186 of the Constitution, Presidential Decree No. 21-304 of 4 August 2021 was issued. It specifies the conditions and modalities for electing constitutional law professors as members of the Constitutional Court<sup>10</sup>. Under this decree, candidates must satisfy a set of requirements<sup>11</sup>:

- They must be fifty (50) years old in full on the day of election.
- They must have held the rank of professor in constitutional law for at least five (5) years, supported by scholarly contributions in the field.
- They must be in active service at a higher education institution at the time of their candidacy.
- They must have at least twenty (20) years of legal experience within a higher education institution.
- They must enjoy civil and political rights.

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<sup>9</sup> Article 188, 2020 constitutional amendment, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Article 187 (final paragraph), 2020 constitutional amendment, ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Presidential Decree No. 21-304, dated 25 Dhu al-Hijjah 1442 AH (4 August 2021), setting the conditions and procedures for electing professors of constitutional law as members of the Constitutional Court, *Official Gazette of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria*, No. 60.

- They must not have been finally convicted of a custodial sentence for a felony or misdemeanor without rehabilitation, except for non-intentional misdemeanors.
- They must not have been affiliated with a political party for at least the three (3) years preceding the election.
- The application file, and the place where it must be lodged, are also specified.

#### **Branch Two: Electoral Procedures**

Presidential Decree No. 21-304 also organizes the electoral process itself. It does so by identifying the supervisory bodies and structuring voting and counting procedures in a detailed manner.

#### **Supervisory bodies<sup>12</sup>:**

- A national electoral committee within the National Conference of Universities, with its composition and competences defined.
- Electoral committees at the level of the regional conferences of universities, likewise defined in terms of composition.

#### **Organization of voting<sup>13</sup>:**

Elections take place within university institutions, and the decree regulates the practical sequence, including:

- rules governing the opening and closing of polling;
- the formation of polling stations;
- the conduct of voting.

#### **Counting and official announcement of results<sup>14</sup>:**

Votes are counted in accordance with the procedures established by law, after which the results are officially proclaimed.

Once the six elected professors become members of the Constitutional Court, they must cease any other membership, office, assignment, mandate, mission, activity, or liberal profession.

The goal is the same as with appointed members: full-time dedication and independence<sup>15</sup>.

Their term is set at six years, once only, and the same partial renewal mechanism applies, with half of the members renewed every three years<sup>16</sup>.

Finally, it is worth noting that the former Constitutional Council did not provide an equivalent mode of election, nor did it include a condition specifically tied to the election of constitutional law professors. The 2020 revision thus signals a shift toward reinforcing the Court's judicial and scholarly profile.

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<sup>12</sup> Article 9, Presidential Decree No. 21-304 on the conditions and procedures for electing professors of constitutional law as members of the Constitutional Court, *ibid*.

<sup>13</sup> Article 14 et seq., Presidential Decree No. 21-304 on the conditions and procedures for electing professors of constitutional law as members of the Constitutional Court, *op. cit*.

<sup>14</sup> Article 20 et seq., Presidential Decree No. 21-304 on the conditions and procedures for electing professors of constitutional law as members of the Constitutional Court, *ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> Article 187 (final paragraph), 2020 constitutional amendment, *op. cit*.

<sup>16</sup> Article 188(2), 2020 constitutional amendment, *ibid*.

**Section Two: Executive Activation of Constitutional Review**

The executive authority has a tangible role in activating constitutional review. This role appears most clearly through referral mechanisms that the constitutional framers expressly granted to the executive, since referral is the legal route through which the Constitutional Court is seized and begins its review. Referral may be exercised by the President of the Republic, and also by the Prime Minister or the Head of Government, depending on the institutional configuration, and always within the parameters set by the Constitution. On this basis, the present section examines, first, the types of referral (Subsection One) and, second, the executive bodies empowered to initiate referral (Subsection Two).

**Subsection One: Types of Referral to the Constitutional Court**

The 2020 constitutional amendment authorizes the executive authority to refer matters to the Constitutional Court so that it may review the constitutionality of laws, treaties, and regulatory instruments. The Constitution structures this competence in two forms: mandatory referral (Branch One) and discretionary referral (Branch Two).

**Branch One: Mandatory Referral**

In the field of conformity review, the President of the Republic is the only executive actor constitutionally empowered to exercise mandatory referral. This review is directed at organic laws and at the internal rules of procedure of the two chambers of Parliament. The 2020 constitutional amendment explicitly preserved this exclusive position<sup>17</sup>.

In practical terms, mandatory referral means that the President is required to submit these texts to the Constitutional Court before they enter into force, so that the Court can assess whether they conform to the Constitution. The review is therefore prior and compulsory. It is not conditioned on political choice or executive preference<sup>18</sup>.

The 2020 amendment also expanded the scope of mandatory referral by introducing an additional case related to presidential ordinances issued during parliamentary recess, or when the National People's Assembly is vacant. Article 142, paragraph 2, provides that, in such circumstances, the President of the Republic must refer these ordinances to the Constitutional Court so that their conformity with the Constitution<sup>19</sup> can be assessed.

This constitutional monopoly over mandatory referral reflects the President's status as a central constitutional institution, combining executive responsibility with a role framed as ensuring respect for the Constitution. Yet the same configuration opens a parallel question about institutional balance: when activation of this form of review is confined to one executive authority, and other branches cannot initiate it, how far does the mechanism support equilibrium between powers in practice?

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<sup>17</sup> Article 190(5)-(6), 2020 constitutional amendment, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> Hanaa Ararour, "The Role of the Algerian Executive Authority in Initiating Constitutional Review," *Studies and Research: The Arab Journal of Research and Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences* (Ziane Achour University, Djelfa), Vol. 11, No. 2, June 2019, p. 732; pp. 751–770.

<sup>19</sup> Article 142(2), 2020 constitutional amendment, op. cit.

**Branch Two: Discretionary Referral**

In addition to mandatory referral, the constitutional framers introduced a discretionary referral mechanism for the executive authority. The rationale aligns with the broader idea of constraining public power through institutional checks. The discretionary character is evident in the constitutional drafting, which uses the wording “the Constitutional Court may be referred,” language that signals permission rather than obligation and leaves the competent authority with a margin of judgment in deciding whether to initiate review<sup>20</sup>.

This discretion is not open-ended. The Constitution defines the areas in which discretionary referral may be used, and they include the following<sup>21</sup>:

- Article 190, paragraph 2, allows referral concerning the constitutionality of treaties. This choice indicates an insistence on the supremacy of the Constitution even when the State enters into international commitments. The importance of this control is not merely theoretical. Treaties can impose obligations that affect the domestic constitutional order or touch rights and fundamental freedoms.
- The same article authorizes referral regarding the constitutionality of ordinary legislation. Given the number of ordinary laws and the breadth of their subject matter, this is one of the widest areas of discretionary referral. It is also the area where the likelihood of constitutional tension is structurally higher.
- Article 190 also provides for referral concerning the constitutionality of “regulations,” without expressly distinguishing among categories. Interpreting this provision in light of related constitutional texts leads to a more precise conclusion: the “regulations” contemplated here are those issued by the President of the Republic in the exercise of autonomous regulatory authority, as recognized in Article 141, paragraph 1.

On this reading, the term “regulation” or “regulations” refers to presidential decrees adopted in domains not reserved by the Constitution for parliamentary legislation, that is, within the autonomous regulatory sphere distinct from statute. Article 141, paragraph 2, reinforces this distinction by assigning the implementation of laws to the regulatory domain exercised by the Prime Minister or the Head of Government, as applicable. The implication is that implementing decrees issued by those authorities are not included among the “regulations” that may be challenged through discretionary referral under Article 190<sup>22</sup>.

**Subsection Two: Executive Actors Empowered to Activate Constitutional Review**

The constitutional framers assigned the executive authority a decisive place in initiating constitutional review by granting certain executive bodies the power to refer matters to the Constitutional Court. This competence is not open to the executive as a whole in an undifferentiated way. The Constitution confines it to specific offices, headed by the President

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<sup>20</sup> Article 190(2), 2020 constitutional amendment, op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> Article 190, 2020 constitutional amendment, ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ahsan Gharbi, “The Referral Mechanism of the Constitutional Court in the Algerian Constitution,” *Mediterranean Notebooks* (Badji Mokhtar University, Annaba), Vol. 6, No. 1, 2021, p. 17; pp. 9–39.

of the Republic (Branch One), and complemented by the Prime Minister or the Head of Government, depending on the governing configuration (Branch Two).

### **Branch One: The President of the Republic**

The President of the Republic stands among the key constitutional actors capable of setting constitutional review in motion, a consequence of the presidency's central position within Algeria's constitutional architecture. The Constitution authorizes the President to seize the Constitutional Court in order to test the conformity of certain legal and regulatory instruments with constitutional standards. Through this channel, executive authority becomes directly present within the mechanics of constitutional review.

The 2020 amendment made this role more explicit than the 2016 Constitution and, at the same time, expanded the scope of referral. The expansion concerns both what may be referred and how referral operates, yet it does not dilute presidential primacy. In practice, referral, whether mandatory or discretionary, remains closely tied to presidential initiative, particularly given the constitutional description of the President as the protector of the Constitution and the guarantor of respect for it<sup>23</sup>.

In some areas, the constitutional design goes beyond primacy and moves into exclusivity. The President is the only authority empowered to trigger review in relation to organic laws and the internal rules of procedure of both chambers of Parliament, where referral is mandatory<sup>24</sup>.

Elsewhere, the President acts within a discretionary framework. Treaties, ordinary laws, and regulatory instruments fall into this category, and the Constitution leaves the President with room to decide whether to activate review. Taken together, these arrangements widen executive influence over when and how constitutional review is actually brought to life<sup>25</sup>.

This concentration is often justified by the President's constitutional functions as guardian of the Constitution and symbol of national unity. Still, it raises a structural question about balance: if the initiation of review is largely routed through the presidency, how effectively does the mechanism distribute power among branches? What can be said with confidence is that Algerian constitutional practice, under the 2016 Constitution and after the 2020 amendment, reflects a strong executive imprint in the sphere of constitutional review. That imprint became more pronounced with the establishment of the Constitutional Court, and it gives referral a mixed character, simultaneously legal in form and political in effect.

### **Branch Two: The Prime Minister or the Head of Government**

After the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, or the Head of Government, occupies the next position within the executive hierarchy. Yet the capacity to refer matters to the Constitutional Court remains narrower at this level. The Algerian Constitution, especially since the 2016 reform, nevertheless opted to include the Prime Minister or the Head of

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<sup>23</sup> Zahira Ben Taa Allah, "The Constitutional Court in the 2020 Algerian Constitutional Amendment: Imitation of Comparative Systems or a Genuine Shift Toward Constitutional Justice?" *Cognitive Issues Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4, December 2022, p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> Article 190(5), 2020 constitutional amendment, op. cit.

<sup>25</sup> Article 190(2), 2020 constitutional amendment, ibid.

Government among the bodies able to initiate referral, as part of an effort to broaden the circle of actors capable of activating constitutional review.

The 2016 Constitution marked a turning point by recognizing, for the first time, the Prime Minister's right to refer matters to the Constitutional Council. The 2020 amendment maintained the same direction while aligning it with the executive structure in place, hence the dual reference to the Prime Minister or the Head of Government, as the case may be. The enlargement, however, remains limited. The constitutional framers did not extend this competence across the full range of situations.

Most notably, the Prime Minister or the Head of Government cannot initiate review where referral is mandatory. Organic laws and the internal rules of procedure of Parliament remain reserved to the President of the Republic, and the underlying assumption is that mandatory referral constitutes an exceptional mechanism tied to preserving constitutional equilibrium between branches<sup>26</sup>. As a result, the Prime Minister's or Head of Government's role is confined to discretionary referral and only in the areas that the Constitution itself identifies. This differentiation signals a clear preference for maintaining presidential centrality even when the appearance of plural referral actors is introduced. The Prime Minister or the Head of Government, despite belonging to the executive, does not exercise an independent and comprehensive referral power. The role functions as an auxiliary competence framed by constitutional boundaries.

From this perspective, allowing referral by the Prime Minister or the Head of Government can be read as a gain in terms of diversification of initiating actors, yet it also confirms the continuing presidential character of Algeria's constitutional system. The most consequential levers remain in presidential hands, particularly where the constitutional stakes are highest. At the same time, involving the Prime Minister or the Head of Government carries practical significance. The office is deeply embedded in legislative production and discussion, and it enjoys a right of legislative initiative. Functionally, that proximity to drafting and implementation should enhance the effectiveness of constitutional review, since the government is the executive actor most closely connected to the life cycle of legislation, from formulation through application<sup>27</sup>.

### Conclusion

The preceding analysis shows that Algeria's constitutional framers assigned the executive authority a direct role in shaping the Constitutional Court. They also placed in the executive's hands a key lever for activating constitutional review of laws through the referral mechanism. Against this background, three findings emerge:

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<sup>26</sup> Hanaa Ararour; Kharif Abdelwahab, "The Role of the Executive Authority in Initiating Constitutional Review," *Studies and Research: The Arab Journal in Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 11, No. 2, June 2019, p. 735.

<sup>27</sup> Samira Atouta; Jamila Douar, "Recent Developments in the Mechanism for Initiating Review of the Constitutionality of Laws in Light of Algeria's 2020 Constitutional Reforms," *Journal of Law and Political Science* (Khenchela University), Vol. 8, No. 2, 2021, p. 441.

1. Executive involvement in composing the Constitutional Court, particularly through the President of the Republic's appointment powers, points to a constitutional choice aimed at ensuring institutional continuity and securing effective functioning.
2. Referral, whether mandatory or discretionary, positions the executive authority at the center of initiating constitutional review. In practice, this means that review is, to a significant extent, contingent on the willingness of those bodies that hold the power to refer.
3. When appointment authority is coupled with the right of referral, the executive's position within the constitutional oversight framework is reinforced, both institutionally and procedurally.

Building on these findings, the study formulates three recommendations:

1. Recalibrate the executive's role in constituting the Constitutional Court by narrowing the scope of direct appointments and by strengthening selection mechanisms grounded in competence, experience, and independence. The objective is to reduce political influence over the Court's composition without undermining institutional effectiveness.
2. Expand the circle of actors empowered to refer matters to the Constitutional Court. This may include enabling other constitutional actors, and allowing individuals, through the exception of unconstitutionality, to participate in triggering review, thereby limiting the executive's exclusive control over initiation.
3. Refine the legal framework governing the relationship between the executive authority and the Constitutional Court in a way that maintains constitutional effectiveness while more firmly securing the independence of constitutional adjudication.

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