



# IPSS

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# ALGERIA CONFLICT INSIGHT

### ABOUT THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide analysis and policy implications to assist the African Union (AU), Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Member States and Development Partners in decision-making and in the implementation of peace and security related instruments. The opinions expressed in this report are the contributors' own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute for Peace and Security Studies.



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# SITUATION ANALYSIS

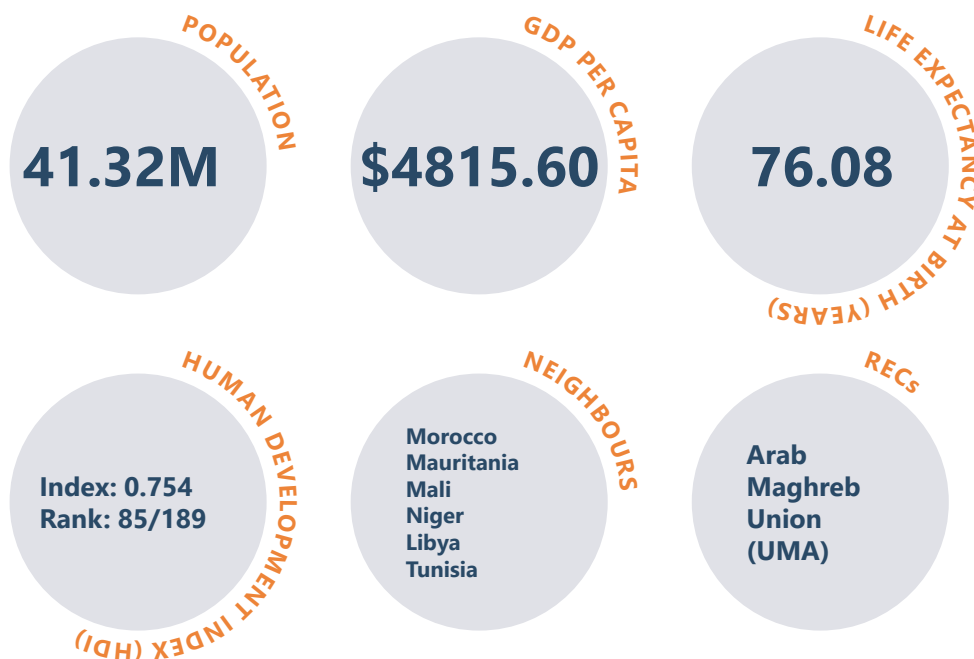


Figure 1: Country profile and demographics

Algeria is the largest African and Arab country and an important regional power in the MENA, with one of the biggest and best equipped armed forces in the sub-region.<sup>1</sup> The Algerian economy is based on a rentier state system that heavily relies on its hydrocarbons sector. Islam is the state religion and more than 99% of the population is Sunni Muslim. The official languages of Algeria are Arabic and Tamazight, which is spoken by the Amazigh (also called the Berber), an indigenous ethnic group composed of various tribes spanning across North Africa. The largest Amazigh population in Algeria is the Kabyle community, which is mostly located in the Kabylia region. Because of the 132 years of colonization, French is also widely spoken in the country.

Algeria gained its independence from France in 1962 after an 8-year-war that killed between 400,000 people (according to French historians) and more than one million people (according to the Algerian government).<sup>2</sup> After leading the independence struggle, the National Liberation Front (FLN) became the only legal political party, serving as an alibi for the military, the real power behind the one-party system. In 1965, after a coup against President Ahmed Ben Bella, Houari Boumediène started an era of socialist state-led economic development through rapid industrialization, collectivization of agriculture, and nationalization of hydrocarbons (1971). In 1988, massive riots under President Chadli Benjedid pushed the government to establish multi-party rule and liberalize the media. In the run-up to the country's first democratic parliamentary elections in 1991, a victory of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was imminent, but the High Security Council cancelled the elections, banned the FIS and imprisoned its main leaders, sparking a decade of violent civil conflict and terror attacks now referred to as the 'Black Decade', which led to the death of at least 150,000 people.<sup>3</sup> Elected in 1999 with the support of the military, Abdelaziz Bouteflika promised to re-establish peace, security and development.

<sup>1</sup> Dudley, D. (2018, February 26). Ten Strongest Military Forces in the Middle East. *Forbes*. Retrieved from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dominicdudley/2018/02/26/ten-strongest-military-forces-middle-east/#895966b16a24>

<sup>2</sup> BBC. *Algeria Country Profile*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14118852>

<sup>3</sup> Hagelstein, Roman (2007). "Where and When does Violence Pay Off? The Algerian Civil War" (PDF). *HICN. Households in Conflict Network: 24*. Retrieved 11 April 2012.

Socio-economic and cultural protests regularly took place under Bouteflika, but the population refrained from rising against the government to demand political change, which is generally attributed to the population's fear to revert to violence, in addition to the state's extensive distribution of oil rents to curb dissent.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, in 2011, Algeria did not experience the same mobilization as other Arab countries during the Arab Spring,<sup>5</sup> which led to the resignation of long-standing autocrats across the MENA. However, in April 2019, following Bouteflika's decision to run for a 5th presidential term, hundreds of thousands Algerians staged country-wide peaceful protests that led to Bouteflika's resignation. This event opened an era of uncertain transition marked by the military's attempt to maintain its domination of politics.

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<sup>4</sup> McAllister, E. (2013). *Immunity to the Arab Spring? Fear, Fatigue and Fragmentation in Algeria*, *New Middle Eastern Studies* 3.

<sup>5</sup> Yahia H. Zoubir (2011). "Algeria and the Arab Spring," *EuroMeSCo-IEMed Policy Brief*, No. 17, October 20, 2011, <https://www.euromesco.net/publication/the-arab-spring-is-algeria-the-exception/>

# CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT

## Authoritarian rule

Algeria is a constitutional presidential system based on a bicameral legislation. Political power is dominated by the army and intelligence services, and centralized in the hands of opaque circles of unelected rulers commonly referred to as "Le Pouvoir".<sup>6</sup> Multi-party rule is officially in place since 1989, but in fact, Algeria remains an example of 'liberalized autocracy', a system combining authoritarian structures with democratic features that allow for its survival.<sup>7</sup> Elections are characterized by irregularities and fraud, and electoral processes are not transparent,<sup>8</sup> and the administration and judiciary are not fully independent, which prevents these institutions from serving a check and balance function.<sup>9</sup>

As most newspapers depend on state agencies for printing and advertising, self-censorship is frequent, and legal mechanisms are often used to prevent reporting on controversial issues, making press freedom only partial.<sup>10</sup> Opposition groups operate in a fragmented political sphere: to maintain its rule, the regime resorts to co-optation, repression and divide-and-rule strategies that prevent new personalities and opposition groups from emerging.<sup>11</sup> According to the 1989 Constitution, ethnic-based parties and parties based on religion are forbidden (although the regime authorized the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in 1989). After the Black Decade, the regime only allowed a few more parties, including moderate Islamists. The objective was to divide further the opposition.<sup>12</sup>

This fragmented system has led most Algerians to distrust formal institutions, which translates into low voter turnout (in 2017, only 12% of the electorate voted for the legislative elections).<sup>13</sup> Considering political parties as unrepresentative, Algerians have expressed their demands through protests and sometimes through violent riots. From the end of the civil conflict until 2019, Algerian protests were mainly local and tied to specific socio-economic issues, such as housing or

power supply, instead of nation-wide political protests.<sup>14</sup> Throughout Bouteflika's rule, the state has responded to such protests either through rent distribution or police repression. Although the state of emergency in place since 1992 was lifted in 2011, the authorities have banned protests in Algiers after Kabyle protesters took the streets of the capital to demand cultural rights in June 2001.

## Economic Mismanagement

The Algerian economy is a rentier system based on hydrocarbons exploitation, mainly operated by the state-owned company Sonatrach. In 2014, oil and gas represented 30% of the gross domestic product (GDP), 60% of budget revenues, and 97% of total exports, making economic growth highly dependent on international oil prices.<sup>15</sup> In the past 20 years, the government has spent large amounts of oil revenue to finance subsidies, modernize infrastructure and fund social projects to prevent unrest. However, these measures have not benefited the population's purchasing power or provided sustainable employment for the youth.<sup>16</sup> Instead, Algeria is experiencing economic stagnation, a largely informal service sector, low productivity and unemployment (30% of the Algerian youth were unemployed in 2018).<sup>17</sup>

Corruption and patronage are pervasive. Partial economic liberalization in the 1990s under an International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment plan, and large infrastructure projects in the mid-2000s, have opened opportunities for rent-seeking, and the state granted contracts, loans and privileges to entrepreneurs based on political loyalty rather than efficiency. Vested interests between business elites and the state create a mutual willingness to protect the status quo.<sup>18</sup>

Economic mismanagement, corruption and cronyism generated discontent among Algerians who have been left out of the state's clientelistic networks, but since 1999 the government had managed to mitigate popular anger through oil rent distribution. However, the 2014 drop in international oil prices partially deprived

6 . McAllister, *op.cit.*

7 Martínez, L. and Rasmus Alenius Boserup. (2016). *Algeria Modern: From Opacity to Complexity*. 2016. Print. CERI Ser. in Comparative Politics and International Studies (London, England).

8 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/algeria>

9 Lahouari Addi, « Système politique et paix civile en Algérie », *Confluences Méditerranée* 2017/1 (N° 100), p. 27-39. DOI 10.3917/come.100.0027

10 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/algeria>

11 Oumansour, B. (2019, February 27). *Algeria: What's fuelling the country's mass protest movement?* IRIS France. <https://www.iris-france.org/131442-algeria-whats-fuelling-the-countrys-mass-protest-movement/>

12 Ahmed Aghrou and Yabia H. Zoubir (2016). "Algeria: Reforms without change?" in *North African Politics: Change and Continuity*, edited by Yabia H. Zoubir and Gregory White. London & New York: Routledge, pp. 145-155.

13 Lahouari, A. (2017). *Système politique et paix civile en Algérie*. *Confluences Méditerranée* 2017/1 (N° 100), pp. 27-39. DOI 10.3917/come.100.0027

14 McAllister, Edward, *Immunity to the Arab Spring? Fear, Fatigue and Fragmentation in Algeria*, *New Middle Eastern Studies*, 3 (2013), <<http://www.brisnes.ac.uk/nmes/archives/1048>>.

15 International Crisis Group. (2018, November 19). *Breaking Algeria's Economic Paralysis*. ICG Report 192. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/algeria/192-breaking-algerias-economic-paralysis>

16 IRIS, *Algeria: What's fuelling the country's mass protest movement?* Presse27 février 2019 <https://www.iris-france.org/131442-algeria-whats-fuelling-the-countrys-mass-protest-movement/>

17 World Bank Data. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.UEM.1524.ZS>

18 Werenfels, *Who is in Charge?*

the state of its main tool to buy social peace. As the government resorted to its foreign exchange reserves, cut state spending, and adopted an expansionary monetary policy to fund its budget, the resulting inflation hit poorer households and paved the way for anti-government mobilization.<sup>19</sup>

### Islamist Extremism

Islamist movements in Algeria can be traced back to the colonial period, and violent Islamist ideologies appeared in Algeria in the 1960s with Jihadist discourses that portrayed Islamist fighting as a continuity of the independence struggle.<sup>20</sup> In the 1980s, Islamism became a way to express the growing social discontent against the state in the midst of a harsh economic recession.<sup>21</sup> The state's Arabization policy also arguably contributed to the spread of these ideologies and furthered Islamists' growing popularity in universities and mosques.<sup>22</sup> In this context, the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS), a party dedicated to the establishment of Sharia law, quickly gained support, leading to its success in the 1990 local elections. As a FIS victory became imminent for the 1992 parliamentary elections, the military cancelled the vote, took over the government, banned the FIS, and cracked down on its members.<sup>23</sup> A civil war ensued between the state and various Islamist guerrillas (the most important one being the Armed Islamic Group, or GIA), that perpetrated massacres against civilians.<sup>24</sup>

Following his election in 1999, Bouteflika, supported by a national referendum, granted amnesty to many insurgents, and Islamist violence reduced. Some FIS and GIA members were allowed to repent, while Islamist groups that could be co-opted remained tolerated in politics. Other Islamist fighters were tracked down over the following years, while some fled to the desert in Northern Mali, leading to the emergence of new groups that merged Jihadi agendas with the grievances of Tuareg minorities in the Sahel.<sup>25</sup> After a decline in Jihadi violence, new attacks in 2007 showed that the Islamist

threat still existed in Algeria, as the creation of AQIM in 2006 out of a coalition of North African groups affiliated to Al-Qaeda marked the rise of a new set of trans-regional and transnational Jihadi networks in the area.<sup>26,27</sup>

While Islamist extremism remains a threat today, most Algerians do not support it (for instance, a 2015 poll revealed that 69% of Algerians are firmly opposed to ISIS).<sup>28</sup> Owing to this rejection of Jihadism among most Algerians, as well as to efficient counter-terrorism measures, the Jihadi terror threat seems to have subsided in Algeria in recent years, despite AQIM's calls for continued Jihadi action in the country.<sup>29</sup>

### Cultural and Regional Inequalities

Cultural, linguistic and regional divisions in Algeria date back to the pre-colonial era, but were exacerbated under the 132 years of French rule which established a clear distinction between Arabic-speaking people and francophone Amazigh elites.<sup>30</sup> After independence, the Algerian state based nation-building around a homogeneous Arab-Islamic national identity, at the expense of other identities that made up Algeria's cultural fabric.<sup>31</sup> For instance, Jewish Algerians, who were more than 150,000 people upon independence, left the country in large numbers after a Nationality Law in 1963 denied citizenship to non-Muslims, and most of the remaining ones left during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The remaining few left during the 1990s civil conflict after being targeted by Islamist guerrillas.<sup>32</sup>

Cultural inequalities resulting from Arabization have created a feeling of marginalization among the Amazigh community. In the mountainous region of Kabylia, which is home to Algeria's largest Amazigh population, people have been contesting Arabization since independence in the form of Berberism, a cultural and political movement that challenges the national narrative by promoting

19 Labouari, *Système politique et paix civile en Algérie*

20 Semmouk, A. (2012). *Schism and plurality in Algerian society: The struggle of identity in the sociology of 'the other'*, *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 5:1, 68-85, DOI: 10.1080/17550912.2011.621382

21 McAllister, *Immunity to the Arab Spring?*

22 Ghanem-Yazbeck, D. (2019, May 3). *Shifting Foundations of Political Islam in Algeria*. Carnegie Middle East Center. Retrieved from: <https://carnegie-mec.org/2019/05/03/shifting-foundations-of-political-islam-in-algeria-pub-79047>

23 McAllister, Edward, *Immunity to the Arab Spring? Fear, Fatigue and Fragmentation in Algeria*, *New Middle Eastern Studies*, 3 (2013)

24 Hafez, M. (2000). *Armed Islamist Movements and Political Violence in Algeria*. *Middle East Journal* 54, 4.

25 B. *Algeria's Long and Complex Battle against the Islamists, and its Relationship with Mali*. (2013, January 18). <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/news/latest/2013/01/18-Jan-Algerias-long-and-complex-battle-against-the-Islamists,-and-its-relationship-with-Mali,-by-Dr-Berry-S%20C3%A8be.aspx>

26 Zeraoui, Z. (2012) *Algeria: revolution, army and political power*, *Language and Intercultural Communication* 12:2, 133-145, DOI: 10.1080/14708477.2012.671608

27 Counter Extremism Project. (2018). *Algeria: Extremism & Counter-Extremism*. Retrieved from: <https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/algeria>

28 Doha Institute (2016). *Arab Opinion Index 2015*. Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. Retrieved from: [https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/lists/ACRPS-PDFDocumentLibrary/Arab\\_Opinion\\_Index\\_2015\\_Results\\_in\\_Brief\\_REVISED\\_JUNE\\_2016.pdf](https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/lists/ACRPS-PDFDocumentLibrary/Arab_Opinion_Index_2015_Results_in_Brief_REVISED_JUNE_2016.pdf)

29 Porter, Geoff D. (10 March 2019). *AQIM Pleads for Relevance in Algeria*, *CTC Sentinel* Volume 12, Issue 3. Retrieved from: <https://ctc.usma.edu/aqim-pleads-relevance-algeria/>

30 Werenfels, *Who is in Charge?*

31 Roberts, H. (2001). *Co-opting Identity: the Manipulation of Berberism, the Frustration of Democratisation and the Generation of Violence in Algeria*. LSE Development Research Centre Working Paper

32 Perrin, D. (2014). *Struggles of Citizenship in the Maghreb*. Routledge. *The Routledge Handbook of Global Citizenship Studies*, pp.230-239 [ff10.4324/9780203102015.ch19ff\\_ffhal-01395220f](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203102015.ch19ff_ffhal-01395220f)

Amazigh and other non-Arab identities and languages.<sup>33</sup> Kabylia has been the hotbed of multiple waves of large-scale protests, the main ones being the Berber Spring in the 1980s and the 2001 “Black Spring”, during which state repression cost the lives of more than 120 protestors.<sup>34</sup> As the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) flared up and Amazigh tribes called for election boycotts in 2002 and 2004 with particular success in Kabylia, the government started negotiating with the community.<sup>35</sup> The Amazigh struggle has led to some victories, culminating in the recognition of Tamazight as one of Algeria’s official languages in 2016.<sup>36</sup> However, the Amazigh movement has been largely co-opted by the regime, inequalities remained, and critics have pointed to Arabic having maintained its higher status as the sole “state language”.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to cultural disparities, Algeria also experiences regional inequalities. Historically, Algeria’s presidents have granted substantial privileges to their regions of origin. While the East was the region that benefited the most from the Boumédiène era, Bouteflika shifted his focus to the West of the country, especially to Tlemcen. The city has received substantial investment since Bouteflika’s coming to power, and many political, security and media figures from Tlemcen rose to prominence under his rule.<sup>38</sup> By contrast, the resource-rich Southern region is politically marginalised and has experienced increasing protests since formation of the the Mouvement des Enfants du Sud pour la Justice (MSJ) in the 2000s, which protested against regional exclusion and the population’s lack of benefit from hydrocarbons exploitation. The South has also experienced a series of inter-communal clashes in 2013 between Amazigh Mouzabites who follow the Ibadi school of Islam and Arabs who follow the Maliki school of Islam.<sup>39</sup>

## Trans-boundary and Geopolitical Tensions

While Algeria largely avoided domestic unrest during the 2011 Arab spring, internal strife in neighbouring countries and the rise of terrorism following the 2011 uprisings have directly exposed the country to trans-boundary threats. The Libyan crisis in particular has led to the spread of weapons and fighters across the region’s porous border. Benefiting from this situation, AQIM launched a series of terror attacks in Algeria from Libya and Mali. However, while Algeria used to be AQIM’s main target in the mid-2000s, the terror group seems to increasingly see Algeria only as a gateway to other Sahelian countries.<sup>40</sup> After a period of isolation during the 1990s civil war and in the face of rising cross-border threats, Algeria has been more proactive in the Maghreb by encouraging political dialogue in the Tunisian transition and helping negotiations among Libyan warring factions, as well as in the Sahel, by mediating in the Malian crisis.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, Algeria has been experiencing tensions with Morocco for the past four decades since the two countries fought a war over disputed borders (the “Sand War”) in 1963. The rivalry continued after Algeria declared its support to the Polisario Front for the independence of Western Sahara. This dispute has led the two countries to close their border in 1976 (and then in 1998, after it re-opened in 1994).<sup>42</sup> Despite the tensions, Algeria and Morocco did not break off again their diplomatic relations and have expressed their readiness to open a dialogue to end the current stalemate and re-open the border. Morocco’s joining of the African Union in 2017 and common issues such as the fight against terrorism have provided the two rival states with increased partnership opportunities.<sup>43</sup> However, so far, the protracted dispute with Morocco has prevented cooperation in the Maghreb and hindered the development of the Arab Maghreb Union. This lack of regional integration, in turn, has constrained the Maghreb’s economic development (trade among Maghreb countries contributes less than 3% to the region’s total GDP), and diplomatic empowerment.<sup>44</sup>

33 Roberts, *Co-opting Identity*

34 Allouche, Y. (2017, April 20). *Algeria’s Repression of the Berber Uprising*. *Middle East Monitor*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170420-algerias-repression-of-the-berber-uprising/>

35 Zeraoui, *Algeria: Revolution, Army and Political Power*

36 Allouche, Y. (2017, April 20). *Algeria’s Repression of the Berber Uprising*

37 *L’Humanité*. (2016, January 7). *Algérie: Le Berbère devient Langue Officielle*.

Retrieved from: <https://www.humanite.fr/algérie-le-berbere-devient-langue-officielle-594788>

38 Alilat, F. (2015, July 17). *Algérie: Tlemcen Power, une ville au cœur du pouvoir*.

*Jeune Afrique*. Retrieved from: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/245622/politique/algérie-tlemcen-pouvoir-une-ville-au-coeur-du-pouvoir/>

39 International Crisis Group. (2016, November 21). *Algeria’s South: Trouble’s Bellwether*. ICG Report 171. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/algeria/algeria-s-south-trouble-s-bellwether>

40 Harchaoui, J. (2018 July). *Too Close for Comfort: How Algeria Faces the Libyan Conflict*. *Small Arms Survey Briefing Paper*. Retrieved from: <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-SANA-BP-Algeria-Libya.pdf>

41 International Crisis Group. (2015, October 13). *Algeria and Its Neighbours*. ICG Report 164. Retrieved from: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/algeria/algeria-and-its-neighbours>

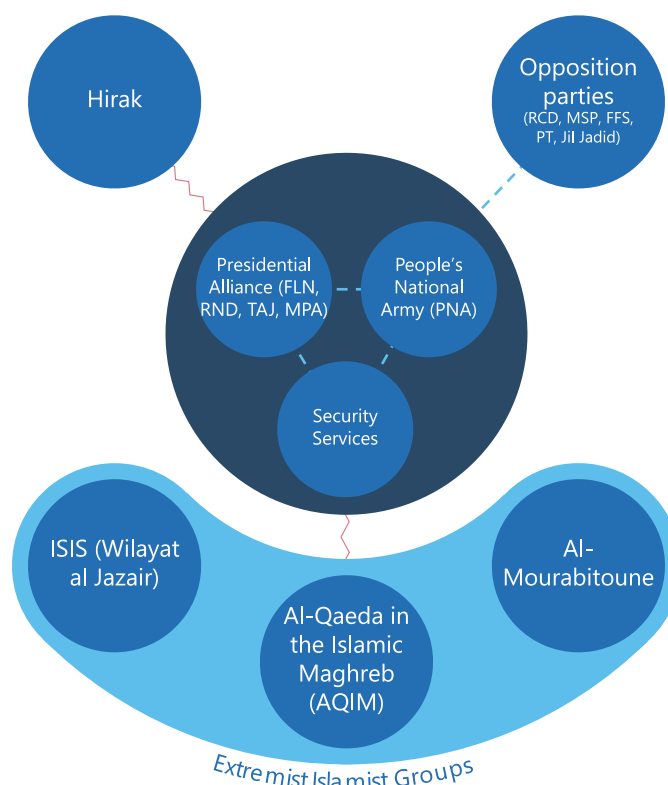
42 Lounnas, Djallil, and Nizar Messari. (October 2018). *Algeria-Morocco Relations and their Impact on the Maghrebi Regional System*. *Menara Working Papers* 20. [http://www.menaraproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/menara\\_wp\\_20.pdf](http://www.menaraproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/menara_wp_20.pdf)

43 *Ibid.*

44 Ghanmi, L. (2019, February 24). *IMF Urges Maghreb’s Economic Integration*. *The Arab Weekly*. Retrieved from: <https://theArabweekly.com/imf-urges-maghrebs-economic-integration>



# ACTORS



## KEY

~~~~~ Discord/ Conflict

----- Informal/ Intermittent

### The People's National Army (PNA)

The People's National Army is composed of Land, Navy and Air Command and the Territorial Air Defense Force commanded by the Head of State who is also the Minister of Defense. Among the largest in the MENA and Africa, the armed forces are composed of 280,000 military active personnel and 150,000 reservists, including 220,000 gendarmes.<sup>45</sup> The military purchases weapons mainly from Russia, the US, China and South Africa.

The most influential force in Algerian politics, the military, has intervened in political developments at various levels since independence, benefiting from its popular image as a safeguard of the independence struggle and the limited definition of its role in the constitution.<sup>46</sup> After fighting against the French towards Algeria's independence in the 1950s, contributing to socio-economic development in the 1970s, and responding to riots in the 1980s, the military took on its most interventionist role in 1988 and the ensuing decade by canceling elections and fighting Islamist armed groups during the civil war.<sup>47</sup> In the early 2000s, Bouteflika tried to consolidate civilian rule over military power by professionalizing the army, but since the rise

of regional instability and terrorism after the 2011 Arab Spring, the army regained its central role in politics.<sup>48</sup>

In particular, the military intelligence service has had a central role in all of the country's political developments since its creation during the national liberation war, by acting as central actor for repression and hidden government policy. Since the 1965 coup, the "Military Security" (MS) has been used to secure the power of the ruling party and eliminate political opponents, becoming the most feared institution in Algeria. In 1990, the MS became the Department of Intelligence and Security (DRS), led for the next 25 years by Mohammed "Toufik" Médienne, who was believed to have unmatched political power behind the scenes. In the 2010s, amidst growing competition between the presidency and intelligence services, Bouteflika sought to regain power from the DRS by restructuring it. In 2015 he dismissed Médienne and appointed a new head from among his allies, and a year later, he dissolved DRS to replace it with the Department of Surveillance and Security (DSS), which became directly linked to the presidency.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> International Institute for Security Studies (IISS). (2019). *Military Balance Plus*.

<sup>46</sup> Zeraoui, Algeria: *Revolution, Army and Political Power*

<sup>47</sup> Ghanem-Lazbeck, D. (2019, August 8). *How Algeria's military rules the country*. Washington Post. Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/08/08/how-algerias-military-rules-country/>

<sup>48</sup> Zeraoui, Algeria: *Revolution, Army and Political Power*

<sup>49</sup> Tlemçani, R. (5 February 2016). *Bouteflika dissolves Algeria's security service*. The Arab Weekly. Retrieved from: <https://the arabweekly.com/bouteflika-dissolves-algerias-security-service> See also: Jouve, A. (2019, July 27). *Algérie: l'histoire des services de l'ombre*. Radio France Internationale. Retrieved from: <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20190727-algerie-services-renseignement-armee-histoire>

## Algerian government

The Algerian government has been historically dominated by the National Liberation Front (FLN), created in 1954 during the war of independence. The FLN's ideology is based on Arab nationalism, socialism, anti-colonial discourses, socialism and Islam, and most of its leaders have been military officials. Enjoying historical legitimacy due to its role in the independence struggle, the FLN ruled the country as a single party until the establishment of a multi-party system in 1989. After a time of direct military rule under a state of emergency following the 1992 coup, a new political party close to the military, the Democratic National Rally (RND), won the legislative elections in 1997. The FLN and RND then continuously secured legislative majorities through a coalition called the Presidential Alliance. The coalition is supported by business elites who built their wealth during Bouteflika's time in office.<sup>50</sup>

## Opposition parties

The opposition in Algeria is highly fragmented due to the nature of the political system that allows the ruling elite to use divide-and-rule and co-optation strategies to remain in power.<sup>51</sup>

The oldest opposition party is the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD), which was created in 1989. Taking its main constituency from the Kabylia region, the RCD was born out of the struggle for the recognition of the Amazigh community's cultural rights. Beyond its focus on the language issue, the RCD has expanded to represent part of Algeria's non-Arab groups (the Shawiya, the Tuareg in the Sahara and the Mouzabites in Ghardaia), and sought to become a secular alternative in Algerian politics. Gaining prominence over time, in 2001 the RCD called for a boycott of elections which was applied by 95% of the Kabyle population. However, the RCD's focus on cultural rights prevented it from gaining broader support. In particular, the government under Bouteflika has contributed to portray the RCD as an exclusively Amazigh party, by framing Algeria's cultural issue as a set of isolated local problems rather than a wider quest for inclusive national identity.<sup>52</sup> Other opposition parties have been criticized for their lack of democratic commitment in their internal structures, which limits their ability to gain popular trust and support.<sup>53</sup> A 2017 poll indicated that political parties are the least trusted

institution in Algeria, with only 14% of the people declaring to have trust in parties.<sup>54</sup>

## Civil Society and the Hirak

Given the weakness of opposition parties in parliament, Algerians have privileged political expression in the form of spontaneous popular mobilisation, sometimes spearheaded by civil society. While capable of mobilizing large number of people, civil society organizations, in the form of trade unions, Human Rights associations, and youth groups, have limited organizational capabilities and leadership, in addition to regularly facing legal harassment and restrictions, which prevented CSOs from establishing viable alternatives to the ruling elite.<sup>55</sup> In 2014, the Barakat movement was formed to contest the re-election of Bouteflika but was dissolved immediately after the election.<sup>56</sup> In June 2018, a similar movement called Mouwatana, composed of intellectuals, opposition parties, activists, journalists and lawyers emerged to oppose a 5th Bouteflika mandate. However, the movement failed to act as a legitimate representative of civil society in politics as its members were considered elitist by many.<sup>57</sup>

Later, on 22 February 2019, a new movement appeared out of the mobilisation against Bouteflika's decision to run for a 5th term. Re-grouping millions of Algerians without distinction of age, social class, ethnicity and ideology, the "Hirak" (i.e. "Movement" in Arabic) has challenged the government in an unprecedented way with its size, determination and longevity. Students were an important catalyser of the movement, which was also joined by labour unions, lawyers, judges, teachers, journalists and professors.<sup>58</sup> One of the characteristics of the Hirak is its leaderlessness and unstructured character, which paid in favour of the movement by shielding it from co-optation and repression by the regime.<sup>59</sup> Initially

54 Arab Barometer. (2017, April 15). *Algeria: Five Years After the Arab Uprisings*. Arab Barometer. Retrieved from: <http://bit.ly/2mABVBb>.

55 International Crisis Group. (2019, April 26). *Post-Bouteflika Algeria: Growing Protests, Signs of Repression*. ICG Briefing 68. Retrieved from: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/algeria/b068-post-bouteflika-algeria-growing-protests-signs-repression>

56 Council on Foreign Relations. (2019, March 7). *Political Instability in Algeria*. Contingency Planning Memorandum No. 35 Retrieved from: <https://www.cfr.org/report/political-instability-algeria>

57 Algérie: Nouveaux rassemblements prévus contre un 5<sup>e</sup> mandat du Président Bouteflika. *Jeune Afrique*. Retrieved from: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/740637/politique/algerie-nouveaux-rassemblements-prevus-contre-un-5e-mandat-du-president-bouteflika/>. See also: Council on Foreign Relations, *Political Instability in Algeria*

58 El Kadi, T. (2019, March 21). *Algeria's Uprising: the Beginning of the End of Le Pouvoir ? The Review of African Political Economy*. Retrieved from: [http://roape.net/2019/03/21/algerias-uprising-the-beginning-of-the-end-of-le-pouvoir/?fbclid=IwAR0BafURSkV0VwFQt3B\\_-N-uY8tHkGqiln-L4C28KUk8UitX7W8ms5Gp0c](http://roape.net/2019/03/21/algerias-uprising-the-beginning-of-the-end-of-le-pouvoir/?fbclid=IwAR0BafURSkV0VwFQt3B_-N-uY8tHkGqiln-L4C28KUk8UitX7W8ms5Gp0c)

59 Volpi, F. (2019). *Le mouvement protestataire algérien de 2019 à la lumière de la théorie des mouvements sociaux et des printemps arabes. L'année du Maghreb*, 21. 27-36. Retrieved from: <https://journals.openedition.org/anneemaghreb/5039>

50 Oumansour, Algeria: *What's fuelling the country's mass protest movement?*

51 Ibid.

52 Zeraoui, Algeria: *Revolution, Army and Political Power*

53 Ghanem-Yazbeck, *Limiting Change through Change*

contesting Bouteflika's presidency, the Hirak's slogans quickly started to condemn the political system as a whole.<sup>60</sup> After a year of sustained protest, the Hirak's determination and commitment to peaceful methods gave credibility to the movement and provided citizens with an unprecedented opportunity to durably influence Algerian politics.<sup>61</sup>

## Islamist groups

Proponents of political Islam in Algeria range from peaceful movements to radical terrorists. Islamist movements have existed in Algeria since the country's independence in 1962, when an association called el Qiyam el Islamiyah (Islamic Values) was created by nationalist reformists close to Salafism and called for an Islamization of Algerian society.<sup>62</sup> The group was banned in 1966 but laid the foundations for the emergence of new groups in the ensuing decades.

### 1. Islamist parties

While Islamist groups were popular in the wake of the political opening of the late 1980s, the civil war led the state to exert a tight control over the participation of Islamist parties in politics. After the civil war, the FIS was banned; members of the GIA were tracked down; but Islamist parties considered 'moderate' by the government were allowed to participate in politics. However, these parties have had a limited capacity to influence politics, in part due to strategies by the state to contain them.<sup>63</sup> For instance, Islamist parties won only 48 out of 462 seats in the 2017 parliamentary elections.<sup>64</sup>

### 2. "Quietist" Salafists

Whereas Islamist parties now have a limited capacity to mobilize popular support, other Islamist movements have gained ground since the end of the civil war. The Saudi-inspired grassroots movement Dawa Salafiya, which aims to contribute to the Islamization of society, has a growing influence in mosques and universities, despite not being involved in formal politics. Many of the Dawa's followers are ex-Jihadis who received financial aid as part of the state's post-civil war

amnesty.<sup>65</sup> The state allows this group to expand, notably because it contributes to the weakening of other forms of Islamist opposition (both mainstream and radical). In turn, Dawa leaders, who claim to be apolitical, indirectly influence politics by repeatedly calling on their followers to refrain from joining anti-government protests.<sup>66</sup>

### 3. Jihadist groups

In addition, Jihadist groups are still present in Algeria and have been compounded by the rise of regional and transnational networks since the mid-2000s. While constituting a security threat, these groups' radical ideology is rejected by most Algerians considerably limiting extremist groups' ability to influence politics. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) aims to overthrow the governments that are considered 'unfaithful' or collaborating with the west to establish an Islamic state. AQIM originates in the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), a guerrilla that opposed the state during the 1990s civil war. In 2006, a GIA offshoot coalition called the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) allied with Al-Qaeda. The group renamed itself as AQIM in 2007, and since then, it has launched more than 600 attacks in Algeria, including bombings, ambushes against civilians and security personnel, as well as attacks on gas facilities. These operations are funded by trans-border human and drug trafficking. While AQIM was initially composed of Algerians in the main, the group has evolved to include nationals of the Sahel, especially Malians. In Algeria, AQIM seemed to attract radicalised youth from the marginalised South. One of AQIM's allies is Al-Mourabitoun. Its leader, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who is originally Algerian, formed the group in 2013 out of the fusion of two AQIM splinters, before resuming its alliance with AQIM in December 2015. The group has members from Mauritania, Mali, and Niger. Before the creation of Al Mourabitoun, Belmokhtar led an attack in January 2013 on gas facilities in Southeastern Algeria; the security forces intervention resulted in the killing of 36 terrorists, who slaughtered 38 civilians, mostly foreign workers.<sup>67</sup>

60 Belahkdar, N. (2019). *L'Indépendance, c'est maintenant!* - Réflexion sur le soulèvement populaire en Algérie. *L'Année du Maghreb*, 21, 105-116. Retrieved from: <https://journals.openedition.org/anneemaghreb/5280>

61 Boubekeur, A. (2019, November 1). *Listen to the Street: the New Algerian Transition*. European Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved from: [https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_listen\\_to\\_the\\_street\\_the\\_new\\_algerian\\_transition](https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_listen_to_the_street_the_new_algerian_transition)

62 Ghanem-Lazbeck, *Shifting Foundations of Political Islam in Algeria*

63 *Civil Strife, Politics, and Religion in Algeria*.

64 Samet, D. (2018, August 22). *Algeria: Islamist Threat Still Looms Over Domestic Politics*. Freedom House. Retrieved from: <https://freedomhouse.org/blog/algeria-islamist-threat-still-looms-over-domestic-politics>

65 Chikhi, L. (2019, June 17). *In Algeria, conservatives weigh in against pressure for Western-style democracy*. Reuters. Retrieved from: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-algeria-protests-insight/in-algeria-conservatives-weigh-in-against-pressure-for-western-style-democracy-idUSKCN1T10DR>

66 Ghanem-Lazbeck, *Shifting Foundations of Political Islam in Algeria*

67 Counter Extremism Project, *Algeria: Extremism & Counter-Extremism*

Finally, the Islamic State (ISIS) has a limited presence in Algeria. Wilayat al-Jazair (formerly Jund al Khilafah), a former AQIM brigade that swore allegiance to ISIS in 2014, was responsible for the kidnapping and beheading of a French national in November 2014. After the military killed the group's leader in a counter-terror operation in the East of Algiers, ISIS affirmed that it was still present in Algeria.<sup>68</sup> However, Wilayat al-Jazair seems to have been eliminated and other ISIS cells are significantly limited by the state's counter-terror capacities.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> International Crisis group. (2017, July 14). 'How the Islamic State Rose, Fell and Could Rise Again in the Maghreb.' Retrieved from: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/178-how-islamic-state-rose-fell-and-could-rise-again-maghreb> + Zoubir civil strife

# DYNAMICS OF THE CONFLICT

After his 1999 election and following a deadly decade, Bouteflika vowed to bring peace and development. Then after a referendum was held in the country, he granted amnesty to the Jihadists who repented, and the peace process culminated in the 2005 Charter on Peace and National Reconciliation. However, many criticized the move as preventing genuine collective healing by imposing a culture of silence over wartime atrocities and failing to hold the perpetrators accountable.<sup>70</sup> Although the country returned to peace, Islamist threat did not disappear from Algeria. In 2007, AQIM launched a series of suicide bombings and other attacks against soldiers and civilians. Situations deteriorated and in 2013, the country experienced its worst terror attack since 2007 as an AQIM splinter killed 40 hostages in a gas facility in Tinguentourine, in the Algerian Desert near In Amenas.<sup>71</sup> The state responded with military operations, as well as with more comprehensive counter-extremism measures such as banning fundamentalist discourses in mosques, schools, the media and the internet.<sup>72</sup> In 2010, Algeria joined efforts with Mauritania, Mali and Niger to create an anti-terrorism center. These strategies proved successful, as terror attacks have subsided in recent years (for instance, AQIM has not launched an attack in Algeria since 2016).

Coinciding with high oil prices, Bouteflika's time in office was also marked by economic recovery, as the middle class regained its purchasing power; the youth benefited from job creation and loans; and massive fortunes emerged out of the opening of import markets and booming of real estate sector. Despite rapid economic development, corruption and rent distribution to regime allies became pervasive, while a surge in basic food prices (culminating in 2008) hit poorer households.<sup>73</sup> Throughout the years, Algeria experienced regular, localised protests around specific issues such as housing and social services.

Because mobilisation was not oriented against the regime despite the frequency of protests, analysts described Algerian society as removed from politics at the time, suggesting that a fear of return to the violence of the civil war prevented Algerians from demanding political change.<sup>74</sup> Accordingly, during the 2011 Arab uprisings, Algeria did not experience the same level of unrest as in neighbouring Libya and Tunisia. Algeria's relative immunity to the Arab Spring could also signify

70 Daum, P. (2017, August). *Mémoire Interdite en Algérie. Le Monde Diplomatique*. Retrieved from: <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2017/08/DAUM/57773>

71 *Ibid.*

72 Counter Extremism Project, *Algeria: Extremism & Counter-Extremism*.

73 Labouari, *Système politique et paix civile en Algérie*

74 McAllister, *Immunity to the Arab Spring?*

the government's early measures to contain unrest, including increased oil-funded state spending, promises of constitutional changes, and a lift in the 19-year- state of emergency. The high repressive capacities of military-controlled police and security services also deterred people from staging nation-wide mass protests.<sup>75,76</sup>

The government undertook some reforms after the Arab Spring, but these measures were only cosmetic and did not translate into greater state legitimacy.<sup>77</sup> Changes such as the lift of the state of emergency were counter-balanced by new restrictive laws on political parties, NGOs, the media, and elections.<sup>78</sup> In 2016, a constitutional reform enacted a limit to 2 presidential terms, but because it was not retroactive, the law did not prevent Bouteflika from seeking another term.<sup>79</sup> Lack of consultation for reforms, in addition to Bouteflika's limited public appearances since having had a stroke in 2013, as well as a series of corruption scandals involving high-ranking officials,<sup>80</sup> furthered the perception that the state was ruled by a closed web of unaccountable leaders.

Amid frequent rumors of the president's death and limited government communication, initiatives calling for peaceful political change such as the Barakat civil society campaign, emerged in the run-up to the 2014 election. That year, a massive drop in international oil prices also revealed the limits of oil rent distribution by diminishing the financial capacities of the state. By imposing taxes on non-subsidized goods to fund its resources, the government broke an implicit social contract that had been at the heart of social peace under Bouteflika. In January 2017, the East of Algeria experienced national-level protests in response to the declining purchasing power induced by a rise in taxes further revealing the unsustainable character of the economic model based on external rent.<sup>81</sup>

Algerians' changed perception of the state's ability to provide development and stability,<sup>82</sup> already apparent in

75 Spencer, C. (2012, July 25). *Strategic Posture Review: Algeria. World Politics Review*. Retrieved from: [https://www.chatbambouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Middle%20East/0712wpr\\_spencer.pdf](https://www.chatbambouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Middle%20East/0712wpr_spencer.pdf)

76 Zeraoui, *Algeria: Revolution, Army and Political Power*

77 Martínez, Luis, and Boserup, Rasmus Alenius. *Algeria Modern : From Opacity to Complexity*. 2016. Print. CERJ Ser. in *Comparative Politics and International Studies* (London, England).

78 Tlemçani, R. (2019, April 9). *Algeria: Inventing New Political Rules. Arab Reform Initiative*. <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/algeria-inventing-new-political-rules/>

79 Zoubir, Y.H. (2016). "Algeria after the Arab Spring," *Foreign Affairs*, February 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/algeria/2016-02-09/algeria-after-arab-spring>

80 Belabkdar, *L'Indépendance, c'est maintenant*

81 Labouari, *Système politique et paix civile en Algérie*

82 Belabkdar, "L'Indépendance, c'est maintenant!"

the rise of boycott campaigns during the 2009 and 2014 election, gradually changed the dynamics of protest in the country by encouraging the rise of large-scale mobilization.<sup>83</sup> In February 2019, the people staged massive peaceful demonstrations to contest Bouteflika's decision to run for a 5th term in the election planned for April 2019. After 5 weeks of protests, the mobilisation of the Hirak, which was unprecedented since the 1980s, led to Bouteflika's forced resignation and the postponing of the April elections.<sup>84</sup>

Perceiving Bouteflika's departure as a superficial victory, as it was clear that the political sphere would remain dominated by the same elite, protests continued and denounced the appointment of Abdelkader Bensalah (the head of the national assembly and a Bouteflika ally) as interim president. The demonstrators' suspicion remained even after the detention of numerous high-ranking officials, prominent businessmen and other regime figures (including Bouteflika's brother, Said, and the two former heads of the DRS) in the name of the fight against corruption. Many saw this wave of arrests as an internal power struggle dominated by Ahmed Gaid Salah, the then head of the army and self-proclaimed safeguard of the transition.<sup>85</sup>

As demonstrations went on throughout 2019, the government offered to set up a civilian commission to hold a national dialogue but protesters rejected it accusing the commission's proposed members of lacking independence.<sup>86</sup> After a failed attempt to hold elections on 4 July, the polls were postponed again to 12 December, due to the absence of valid candidates. This situation led to a political vacuum, as the interim president's mandate constitutionally ended at that time. In November 2019, five candidates were announced to run for the presidency, all former members of the Bouteflika regime.<sup>87</sup> While protesters continued to call for a constitutional reform and a consolidation of the rule of law before the holding of elections, the authorities intensified their crackdown on

demonstrators and activists, including protesters accused of 'threatening national unity' for waving the Amazigh flag.<sup>88</sup>

In this tense climate of contestation, the 12 December election was held and won by Abdelmajid Tebboune, former prime minister of Algeria (May–December 2017). Tebboune was elected with 58.14% of the vote, in an election marked by a record abstention rate (while the official participation was 41% of the electorates, analysts estimate the actual rate to be between 10 and 15%.<sup>89</sup>). After his election, Tebboune offered the Hirak to have a dialogue to "build a new Algeria"<sup>90</sup>, promised to restructure the economy away from hydrocarbon-dependence and to give the youth greater opportunities in politics. Protesters continued to take the streets of Algiers to contest the election and the formation of a new government, which mostly included ministers who served under Bouteflika.<sup>91</sup> On 23 December, Ahmed Gaid Salah, who had opposed the Hirak's demands for substantive reforms and for pre-election transitional institutions, died of a heart attack. The general's death became another challenge for the new government, as he was a strongman backing Tebboune as a presidential candidate.<sup>92</sup> Tebboune now has to work with Said Chengriha, the new interim head of the army (who had less influence than Gaid Salah over the military elite), to devise a way out of the crisis.<sup>93</sup>

83 Martínez and Boserup. *Algeria Modern: From Opacity to Complexity*

84 IRIS. *Algeria: What's fuelling the country's mass protest movement?*

85 Ayari, M. B. (2019, March 7). *Post-Bouteflika Algeria: Growing Protests, Signs of Repression*. International Crisis Group. Retrieved from: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/algeria/en-algerie-la-rue-met-le-pouvoir-face-ses-contradictions>

86 Aggad, F. (2019, September 12). *Algeria's Establishment Wants Quick Elections. Protesters See it as a Trap*. African Arguments. <https://africanarguments.org/2019/09/12/algeria-establishment-wants-quick-elections-protesters-see-it-as-a-trap/>

87 Al Jazeera. (2019, November 3). *Algeria Presidential Election: Five Candidates Announced*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/1/algeria-presidential-election-candidates-announced-191103064535822.html>

88 Guenanfa, Hadjer. (2019, November 3). *Quand l'Algérie donne un nouveau souffle au Hirak*. Le Point. [https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/algerie-quand-novembre-donne-un-nouveau-souffle-au-hirak-03-11-2019-2344942\\_3826.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/algerie-quand-novembre-donne-un-nouveau-souffle-au-hirak-03-11-2019-2344942_3826.php)

89 Zoubir, Y. H. (2020, January 15). *Can Algeria Overcome its Long-lasting Political Crisis?* Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/01/15/can-algeria-overcome-its-long-lasting-political-crisis/>

90 *Algeria's New President Promises to Tackle Corruption*. (2019, December 20). Arab news. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1601546/middle-east>

91 *Boubekeur, Listen to the Street*.

92 *Algeria's Powerful Military Chief Ahmed Gaid Salah Dies*. (2019, December 23). BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-50891741>

93 Alexander, P, Salem Solomon. (2019, December 29.) *After Algeria's Leadership shakeup, Observers Look for Break with Past*. VOA News. <https://www.voanews.com/africa/after-algerias-leadership-shakeup-observers-look-break-past>



# CURRENT RESPONSE ASSESSMENT

In the wake of the 2019 transition crisis, external actors have highlighted the need to refrain from interfering in Algeria's domestic developments. Since independence, the Algerian state has put a particular emphasis on protecting its sovereignty and still firmly rejects foreign interference. For instance, contrary to other MENA and African countries, Algeria has never allowed the official setting of a foreign military base in its territory.<sup>94</sup> By contrast to the 2011 Arab Spring, the international community was more cautious about actively supporting protesters, a lesson learned from the instability that followed uprisings in Libya and Egypt. Consequently, international actors, out of concern for regional terrorism and migration flows from Algeria, gave support to the stability of the Algerian state over the promotion of political freedom in the country.<sup>95</sup>

## THE AFRICAN UNION (AU)

In reaction to the anti-Bouteflika protests, in March 2019, the African Union called for a 'national dialogue' to bring Algerian crisis to an end. The AU Commission Chairperson declared that the AU was "closely following up developments in Algeria" and highlighted the peaceful nature of the protests, and praised Bouteflika's decision not to run for a fifth term.<sup>96</sup> Later, in June 2019, Moussa Faki called on all stakeholders of the Algerian crisis to compromise in order to avoid chaos.<sup>97</sup> Following the December 2019 presidential election, in January 2020, the AU praised the Algerian government and people for their peaceful management of the country's political crisis, and commended the government's decision to lead consultations for constitutional amendments noting that respect for the rule of law should be the basis of the new constitution.<sup>98</sup>

## THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU)

The European Union has a wide-range of relations with Algeria and has a high interest in supporting stability in the country, especially since the rise of insecurity in neighboring Maghreb countries and the resulting migration flows towards Europe. The EU consequently engaged with Algeria in regional security and counter-terrorism.<sup>99</sup> Because of its colonial history with Algeria, France has refrained from commenting on the Algerian transition crisis and repeated its support for Algerian sovereignty.<sup>100</sup>

## RUSSIA

Algeria and Russia have close military ties which date back to the Soviet Union's support to the FLN during the independence war and the Algerian state's alignment with socialism during the cold war.<sup>101</sup> Algeria is Russia's largest client in Africa for arms purchases, and its third client worldwide. Between 2014-8, Russia provided Algeria with 66% of its weapons.<sup>102</sup> The two countries also cooperate economically in the field of hydrocarbons. During the 2019 protests, Russia insisted that the Algerian issue should remain an internal crisis and expressed its support for negotiated settlement. While not officially backing the status quo, Russia is willing to maintain its influence over the country and keep Algeria dependent on Russian arm sales, arguably making Moscow cautious about regime change in Algeria.<sup>103</sup>

94 Harchaoui, *Too Close for Comfort: How Algeria Faces the Libyan Conflict*

95 Fahmi, G. (2019, March 22). *Are We Seeing a Second Wave of the Arab Spring?* Chatham House. Retrieved from: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/are-we-seeing-second-wave-arab-spring>

96 Middle East Monitor. (2019, March 18). *African Union calls for 'national dialogue to bring Algerian crisis to an end.* Retrieved from: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190318-african-union-calls-for-national-dialogue-to-bring-algerian-crisis-to-an-end/>

97 TSA Algérie. (2019, June 17). *L'Union africaine s'exprime sur la situation en Algérie.* Retrieved from: <https://www.tsa-algerie.com/lunion-africaine-s'exprime-sur-la-situation-en-algerie/>

98 African Union. (2020, January 16). *African Union Commends Algeria on New Constitution.* <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20200116/african-union-commends-algeria-new-constitution-0>

99 Council on Foreign Relations, *Political Instability in Algeria*

100 *As Algeria Protests Grow, France Keeps a Silent Watchful Eye.* Deutsch Welle. Retrieved from: <https://www.dw.com/en/as-algeria-protests-grow-france-keeps-a-silent-watchful-eye/a-47825078>

101 Zoubir, Y. H. (2011). "Russia and Algeria: Reconciling Contrasting Interests," *The Maghreb Review*, 36( 3): 99-126.

102 Ramani, S. *Russia's Cautious Calculus in Algeria.* (2019, March 22). Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Retrieved from: <https://carnegieendowment.org/sadal/78667>

103 *Ibid.*

# SCENARIOS

## Worst case scenario

The worst-case scenario would be an increased control of the army over politics after a crackdown on escalating protests. As the army achieved its goal of holding elections as soon as possible without addressing protesters' demands and despite widespread boycott, anti-government mobilization could intensify.<sup>104</sup> Such new protests could be harshly repressed and followed by a military takeover just like Egypt after the Arab Spring. However, this scenario is less likely given the protesters' insistence on achieving civilian rule and given that the army wants to avoid confrontation with the Hirak to preserve its image. At a time of high regional turmoil, a reduced legitimacy for the Algerian military could have dire consequences for the country.

## Most likely scenario

The way ahead will depend on Tebboune's ability to create a dialogue with Algerian protesters. Many Algerians keep protesting and contesting the legitimacy of the new government. Tebboune will have to struggle to mitigate the influence of the army, whose strategy to rush elections was to impose Ahmed Gaid Salah's roadmap, and maintain his own clan to replace Bouteflika's. The fact that new ministers have almost all served under Bouteflika suggests that Tebboune's presidency could only bring limited changes in Algeria's underlying power structure. On the Hirak's side, disagreements among protesters over the way to break the stalemate could prevent the emergence of a legitimate representative and reduces the chances for a dialogue with the state. While the absence of individual leadership figures initially benefited the Hirak by preventing the regime from co-opting the movement, it is now proving detrimental to the achievement of a negotiated settlement. However, Tebboune's administration should not just expect a waning of popular mobilization over time. Hirak protesters are aware of the regime's track record of introducing cosmetic reforms to survive and seem determined to keep demanding genuine change.<sup>105</sup> Given the Hirak's insistence on ending military rule, it will be more difficult for the regime to maintain status quo of the Bouteflika era, which could lead to the regime making concessions towards more transparency. Regardless of the outcome, the Hirak will have significantly transformed Algerians' conception of politics and citizenship.

## Best case scenario

The best scenario would entail a transition to genuine civilian rule through substantive reforms addressing protesters' demands, including the release of political prisoners, guarantees for political freedom, and constitutional reforms and restrictions over the army's role in politics. Tebboune's release of thousands of prisoners, and his announcement on January 8 that he will amend the constitution show positive signs. However, the constitutional amendments should be more significant than the previous ones, and the revision process should be genuinely consultative in order to truly impact Algeria's social contract.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Cook, *Don't Get Your Hopes Up About Algeria*

<sup>105</sup> Zoubir, *Can Algeria Overcome its Long-lasting Political Crisis?*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*



# STRATEGIC OPTIONS

## To the government

The government should enact a clear roadmap for political transition and open a dialogue to build confidence with the opposition and CSOs to address the Hirak's demands. It could draw on existing local initiatives set up by the Hirak to organize public consultations.<sup>107</sup>

It should also release all political detainees and remove restrictions over freedom of association and expression to set grounds for genuine negotiations with the Hirak.

Furthermore, to make decision-making less opaque and arbitrary, it should increase transparency within itself and public finances, and improve state communication to the public. To fight against corruption, the transitional government should appoint independent corruption commissions and set up administrative legislative reforms, instead of opening trials that are perceived as politicized.

It should enact economic reforms by encouraging the private sector and businesses, improving opportunities for the youth, diversifying the economy and reforming the subsidies system.

## To the AU

In line with Article 12 of the PSC Protocol, the PSC should closely monitor early signs of tensions in the transition process so as to avoid conflict and ensure prompt responses by the Panel of the Wise.

## To the Arab Maghreb Union

The UMA member states should increase efforts to revitalise the regional union and take steps towards the integration of Maghreb countries.

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<sup>107</sup> Boubekeur, *Listen to the Street*

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# CONFLICT TIMELINE (1954-2019)

|                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1954-1962</b>    | Algerians fight against French colonial rule during the country's war of Independence.                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>1962 July 3</b>  | Algeria becomes independent from France after 132 years of French rule.                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>1963</b>         | Ahmed Ben Bella becomes Algeria's first president.                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>1965</b>         | Col. Houari Boumédiène deposes Ben Bella through a military coup                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>1976</b>         | Col. Boumédiène is elected president                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>1978</b>         | President Boumédiène dies and is replaced by Col. Chadli Bendjedid                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>1988</b>         | A series of strikes and riots take place, as the country has plunged into economic crisis, which is worsened by the drop of hydrocarbons prices                                                                                                                |
| <b>1989</b>         | The National People's Assembly suppresses the ban on new parties and establishes multiparty rule, allowing opposition parties to take part in elections. The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) is among the newly founded parties                                  |
| <b>1991</b>         | December The FIS wins 188 seats in the first round of general elections, and is expected to obtain absolute majority in the second round                                                                                                                       |
| <b>1992 Jan-Feb</b> | President Chadli dissolves the parliament, resigns, and is replaced him with a Higher State Council headed by Mohamed Boudiaf. The government declares a state of emergency and dissolves the FIS, starting ten years of violent conflict                      |
| <b>1992 June</b>    | Mohamed Boudiaf is assassinated by one of his bodyguards who was linked to the Islamists. The Armed Islamic Group (GIA) engages in increasingly bloody attack                                                                                                  |
| <b>1994</b>         | Retired Colonel Liamine Zeroual is appointed chairman of the Higher State Council. He wins the presidential election in the next year.                                                                                                                         |
| <b>1997</b>         | The newly-founded Democratic National Rally wins the parliamentary elections                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>1999</b>         | Former Foreign Minister and General Abdelaziz Bouteflika is elected president and promises a return to peace and development. A referendum approves civil concord President Bouteflika's law on civil concord and thousands of Islamist fighters are pardoned. |
| <b>2001</b>         | A wave of protests takes place in the Kabylie region and is heavily repressed by the authorities, leading to the killing of dozens of people.                                                                                                                  |
| <b>2002</b>         | President Bouteflika announces that the Amazigh language would be recognised as national language                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>2004</b>         | President Bouteflika is elected for a second term.                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>2005</b>         | A referendum approves the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation that grants amnesty to many people who committed crimes during the 1990s civil war.                                                                                                    |
| <b>2006 Dec</b>     | Roadside bomb hits a bus carrying staff of a US oil firm, killing one man. The (GSPC) claims responsibility.                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>2007 Jan</b>     | The Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) becomes the the al-Qaeda Organisation in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and intensifies attacks in the country                                                                                                  |

|                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>2007 Apr</b> | Two Al Qaeda bombing attacks in Algiers lead to the death of 33 people                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>2009</b>     | President Bouteflika is elected for a third term after constitutional changes allowed him to do so in 2008                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>2010 Apr</b> | Algeria, Mauritania, Mali and Niger establish a joint military operations center to fight against terrorism                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>2011</b>     | Protests erupt against the rise of food prices and unemployment. President Bouteflika lifts 19-year-old state of emergency in response to protesters' demands.                                                                                                         |
| <b>2013 Jan</b> | The Islamist group al-Murabitoun kills dozens of foreign hostages at the In Amenas gas facility in the East of Algeria.                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>2014 Apr</b> | President Bouteflika is elected for a fourth term amid growing opposition against his presidency                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>2014 Sep</b> | Islamists behead a French tourist calling for the end of France's support to the operation against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>2015</b>     | President Bouteflika dismisses the powerful intelligence head Mohamed "Toufik" Médiène.                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>2016</b>     | Constitutional reforms limit presidents to two terms and recognise the Amazigh language as an official language.                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>2019 Feb</b> | Algerians take the streets to contest Bouteflika's intention to run for a 5th presidential term. Bouteflika resigns and elections are postponed to later in the year. Parliament speaker Abdelkader Bensalah becomes interim president amidst continuing contestation. |
| <b>2019 Dec</b> | On 12 December, Abdelmajid Tebboune is elected president with a very low turnout. On 23 December, General Ahmed Gaid Salah, who was considered the strongman of Algeria's transition, dies of a heart attack.                                                          |





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