

LIMITING CHANGE THROUGH CHANGE: THE KEY TO THE ALGERIAN REGIME'S LONGEVITY

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Algeria is an island of stability in a tumultuous region. Almost seven years after the Arab Spring uprisings, the Algerian regime has shown a significant degree of resilience and adaptability. The country's relative peace and the regime's longevity reflect the capacity of elites to dispense political and economic resources in a controlled manner. This approach has created an appearance of change and pluralism that has allowed the regime to absorb social dissatisfaction, keep society in check, and strengthen the foundations of its rule. But the regime's success to date does not mean that these self-perpetuating mechanisms will work indefinitely.

The Art of Concessions Without Fundamental Change

- Despite shake-ups, reforms, and routine elections, the People's National Army still rules the country. This arrangement will likely continue for the foreseeable future.
- Opposition parties have shown little inclination to promote change. Instead, they have embraced the rules of the game and replicated the same illiberal patterns they decry.
- Civic organizations have been co-opted, marginalized, and coerced. Because the regime exploits their internal problems and undemocratic structures, they have failed to serve as a bridge between the country's leaders and citizens.
- Selective economic liberalization has chiefly profited select, politically connected individuals. Algeria's leaders have expanded their networks of clients, and hence their support base, to perpetuate their power.
- Corruption serves as a key feature of Algeria's system of governance and an important conflict resolution mechanism for stabilizing the political order.

The Status Quo Is on the Clock

Social change will continuously test the Algerian regime's ability to preserve itself. The likely continuation of current fiscal challenges due to overdependence on revenue from selling hydrocarbons might compel the regime to cede additional political inducements (such as greater political participation, the recognition of ethnic and cultural minorities, or government consultations with opposition parties and civil society organizations).

The government should consider formulating a national youth policy and a national youth organization. Given the country's young demographic profile, generational renewal, political participation, and public engagement involving Algerian youth could help the regime manage social discontent.

In certain circumstances, the government may have reason to allow more space for civil society organizations to channel popular sentiments. At some point, constantly disrupting their work could backfire and incite some people to join clandestine organizations and empower those who believe that only violence can generate real change.

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