LIMITING CHANGE THROUGH CHANGE
The Key to the Algerian Regime’s Longevity
Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck
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About the Author

Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck is a resident scholar at the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, where her work examines political and extremist violence, radicalization, Islamism, and jihadism with an emphasis on Algeria. She also focuses on the participation of women in jihadi groups. Ghanem-Yazbeck has been a guest speaker on these issues in various conferences and a regular commentator in different Arab and international print and audio-visual media.

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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.

**Summary**

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 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.
A famous line from Giuseppe di Lampedusa’s novel *The Leopard* aptly sums up Algerian leaders’ approach to politics since the country gained independence from France in 1962: “If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.”¹ In recent decades, the country’s leaders extended political rights and provided economic resources to citizens in a measured, selective way; the state created a semblance of change and pluralism designed to absorb popular discontent, reinforce the government’s control over society, and preserve the regime’s foundations. The regime went from being outright authoritarian to a hybrid mix of authoritarian and democratic. Scholar Larry Diamond has said of this type of regime that “their elections and other ‘democratic’ institutions are largely façades, yet they may provide some space for political opposition, independent media, and social organizations that do not seriously criticize or challenge the regime.”²

Despite these seemingly liberal changes, the Algerian system has remained by and large the same by design. Algeria’s decisionmakers, called the décideurs in French, consist mainly of senior members of the People’s National Army (PNA); political parties with close ties to the military, such as the National Liberation Front (FLN) and the National Rally for Democracy (RND); and other influential political and economic elites. These decisionmakers have granted citizens limited, selective latitude because they view such openings as necessary for their own political survival and that of the system more generally.

To maintain a balance between making concessions and avoiding fundamental change, Algeria’s power elites have designed political and economic adjustments to preserve their own authority. The more pluralist system that the regime has allowed to form remains tightly controlled. Even though elections have become routine, they are marked by irregularities; these elections are neither completely fair nor do they constitute a challenge to the country’s leadership.

Meanwhile, the regime has allowed opposition groups and civil society organizations a certain amount of space for contestation, but many of these organizations have been co-opted, demonized, marginalized, and repressed. Such
groups remain too weak to strongly challenge the government’s policies and actions. Meanwhile, selective economic liberalization has led to an expansion of economic resources, mainly meant to benefit Algeria’s powerful leadership circles and their clients through a more or less equitable distribution of oil rents. Political and economic resources are distributed to the general public to help ensure the stability of the political system. Through the complex interplay of constantly refined strategies for neutralizing political opponents and critics, the overall system sustains itself.

For instance, the Algerian regime was quick to respond adaptively during the Arab Spring uprisings throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region beginning in late 2010 and early 2011, and the regime did so again following the drop in oil prices in mid-2014. The regime was careful to avoid the mistakes of the past and offered political and economic concessions. The government enacted timely political measures to give the impression of encouraging political participation, including a package of constitutional reforms and the lifting of the country’s nineteen-year state of emergency. The regime also distributed generous handouts to various populations, especially young people, to calm social discontent. In addition to boosting the regime’s legitimacy, these steps impeded the opposition’s efforts to mobilize the people against the government.

This approach enabled the regime to weather the unrest that swept across the MENA region. While a series of protests and self-immolations took place throughout Algeria between 2010 and 2012, no full-on Arab Spring occurred. Although a number of protests (especially in 2010) prompted one writer to call Algeria “a country of one thousand and one demonstrations,” and despite several self-immolations and suicide attempts that took place in front of government buildings, the people’s demands remained nonsubversive. They asked for better working conditions, better salaries, and fewer taxes, but never for regime change. These spontaneous, divided protests lacked a unifying political figure and were swiftly brought under control by a sizable police presence. Consequently, amid this regional turmoil, the Algerian regime remained steady and maintained continuity.

In taking these steps, the Algerian government demonstrated that it had learned from its less successful, more costly attempts to maintain order in the lead-up to the country’s decade-long civil war. At the outset of the war in late 1991 and early 1992, the regime had failed to strike a balance between making limited concessions and maintaining control through violence; at the time, the country’s leaders had gone too far in resorting to repression and indiscriminate violence. This misguided approach allowed a radical party called the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) to channel the frustration of marginalized populations. As a result, the FIS became so popular that it seemed poised to win a parliamentary majority in the country’s 1991–1992 elections. To prevent this, the Algerian military halted the electoral process and effectively took control of
the country. The violent struggle between the Algerian military and the FIS that ensued did not lessen for several years. The security forces indiscriminately escalated the cycle of violence, and when the jihadist insurgency decided to start systematically killing members of the security forces (especially young conscripts), the military further scaled up its repression and retaliated in kind.

Amid the war, the government eventually managed to reinstate constitutional processes in 1995, and since then Algeria has held presidential, parliamentary, and local elections on a regular basis. The political arena has opened up somewhat, and opposition actors and parties (including Islamists) have since become part of Algeria’s political landscape. Islamists have entered parliament and government coalitions. The constitution, at least formally, grants freedom of speech, which has allowed for the emergence of a dynamic press. Over time, the number of newspapers, magazines, and civil society organizations in the country has grown considerably.

Over the years, the Algerian regime’s ability to fragment, co-opt, manipulate, or silence its opponents has helped to ensure the continuity of the country’s political system. While this requires the government to display a constant ability to adapt, the system is likely to survive for now. The real locus of power remains in the military, whose influence remains intact regardless of the façade of constitutionalism and pluralism. The military rules, even if it does not govern. It does so from atop a pyramid of power in which the interests of the military, the FLN leadership, and members of the political and economic elite are intertwined.

While it is true that the long-term sustainability of the system is questionable, it will likely continue in the short term. This is because of the closely knitted connections and interdependence between the country’s military brass, business leaders, and political elites—even if these relationships are not written in stone and even if alliances might change. The leadership will probably continue to protect the system against instability by disbursing political resources at critical junctures, as it did in 2012 and 2014. It is in the interest of these powerful elites to concede more political inducements, especially if the country’s economic crisis persists. Ultimately, the military will likely continue to hold the reins. With the threat of jihadism persisting and coming over the country’s borders with Libya, Mali, and Tunisia and across the adjacent Sahel, the governing elite will continue to glean some legitimacy from being able to provide security; the resulting sense of insecurity provides a tailor-made justification for the army’s involvement in politics to domestic and international audiences.

However, Algeria’s complex society is changing. The tactical adjustments that the regime has used and abused may not work in the future with new generations that are more educated, more urbanized, more connected, more demanding, and more determined to disapprove of the choices of their authorities than their parents have been. The evolution of Algeria’s young
population amid the challenges facing the country’s oil-dependent economy
give some indications that the government’s balancing act cannot continue
unchanged indefinitely, even if the status quo is likely to remain in place for the
foreseeable future.

Understanding Algeria’s governing system has important broader implica-
tions. Besides being the largest country in Africa and the Arab world, Algeria
is also one of the few countries that has remained relatively stable despite
the ongoing chaos that has been shaking the MENA region since 2011. This
instability in Algeria’s neighborhood shows no signs of receding, and Algeria
remains an island of stability in a highly unstable region. Stability in Algeria
is key for nearby countries in North Africa and Europe—especially France—
that have large stakes in Algeria’s well-being. At the same time, Algeria has
been an important U.S. trade partner and strong U.S. security partner since
the September 11 terrorist attacks and has become a crucial player in the War
on Terror in both North Africa and the Sahel. Algeria is also a regional peace
broker as shown by its active role in promoting political dialogue and regional
stability in Libya, Mali, and Tunisia.

In addition, Algeria is sometimes seen as a bellwether for trends in the wider
MENA region. Its war for independence opened the door for other African
and Arab countries that subsequently gained independence, and its civil war
with jihadists in the 1990s in some important ways prefigured the upheaval of
the Arab Spring. The future of the country may reveal insights into how the
region is likely to evolve. The European Union, the United States, and other
relevant external parties should not underestimate the importance of Algeria to
regional stability.

The Pillars of National Stability

Algeria’s veneer of a multiparty system does not guarantee citizens genuine
participation in state institutions. Instead, it remains a mere front for hidden
centers of influence and authority to wield power informally behind the scenes.
A true alternation of power is not really conceivable. The ruling elites have
effectively constructed an immovable political edifice of interacting parts that,
even if it changes, collectively reinforces itself. The foundations of this system
are, first and foremost, the still paramount senior military officers of the PNA.
In the political landscape, the former ruling party during the days of one-party
rule, the FLN, retains a primary role, and a second semi-official party, the
RND, was eventually created to counterbalance the FLN when needed.

The PNA: Devoted Guardian of Algeria’s Power

Algeria’s military, as the most stable, organized institution in the country,
is the main holder of national power. The PNA makes decisions, and the
government, as its civilian façade, implements them. The military has been in a position of authority since the beginning of the war for independence in 1954, and for the foreseeable future it will likely remain the “devoted guardian of Algeria’s power.”

One important source of the PNA’s political power is the substantial legitimacy it garnered from leading Algeria’s bid for independence. The PNA is not unique in leveraging its prominent position in a national liberation movement to become the real locus of political power—the military establishments of other countries have achieved a similar stature. In Algeria’s case, the central role of the military in the historical liberation struggle against France gave it a prime position in the subsequent quest for national power. In effect, the military became identified with the nation itself. For military leaders who carry such historical legitimacy, completely abandoning their political roles to give way to elected civilian officials would risk endangering the nation.

Another important source of the PNA’s power is the sway that senior military officers hold over presidential candidates and officeholders who may imperil their vital political interests. The PNA has conditionally supported ostensibly civilian presidents for the last fifty-five years. Needless to say, all Algerian presidents have, in fact, been military men from the first officeholder, Ahmed Ben Bella, to the current one, Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Despite being in fragile health, Bouteflika ran for a third and fourth term (in 2009 and 2014), which he could not have done without substantial military backing. The military did so because it does not regard him as a threat to the status quo and its interests.

The limits of Algeria’s civilian authority over the military have been made clear time and again. The military has rejected any civilian effort to oversee internal military affairs, define national security policy, make military officers accountable to civil courts, or diminish the military’s political functions. No Algerian presidential candidate can really even run without the military’s approval, or at least that of key military leaders. Algerians refer to such civilian leaders as *djabouboum*—which in Arabic means those who were brought. As a result, presidents must have the support of the leaders and representatives of the army. They have to share power with those that helped bring them into office.

On several occasions, there have been tensions between the PNA and Bouteflika, particularly when the president introduced changes to the military and its intelligence branch, the Directorate of Security Intelligence (DRS). During the civil war against the jihadists in the 1990s, the DRS grew more autonomous and became harder to control. Bouteflika eventually attempted to undercut its political influence to demonstrate a modicum of accountability after a series of jihadist kidnappings and attacks between late 2011 and
In early 2013. In 2014 and 2015, he fired or forced into retirement several DRS officers, including General Mohamed Mediène (nicknamed Toufik), who had been the directorate’s powerful head for a quarter of a century. Bouteflika even dismantled the DRS by presidential decree in January 2016 and replaced it with the Directorate of Security Services (DSS), which is under the direct authority of the presidency.

However, it would be an exaggeration to think that Bouteflika has managed to fundamentally undermine the power of the military or the DRS. Despite appearances, the Algerian president’s moves ultimately were more of a political sideshow than anything else. Technically, the DRS had always been under the authority of the presidency. Indeed, when the former secretary general of the FLN, Amar Saadani, criticized the DRS in 2014, Bouteflika himself severely reprimanded him, insisting that the “DRS with its status is an integral part of the People’s National Army,” and that it is “no longer time for insults and invectives.” This showed that the president, though he had made changes to the DRS himself, was in no way willing to allow such unbridled criticism of the DRS to stand. Saadani paid a hefty political price and was eventually dismissed.

Bouteflika’s actions did not represent significant changes, nor did they constitute a threat to the military and its security apparatus. Even Mediène’s departure was meaningless in that one loyal officer was replaced by another. Moreover, the creation of the DSS did not alter the core of the directorate’s power or its networks; this was not the first time that the DRS had faced restructuring. The sway of the PNA, of which the DRS was a part, has remained much the same. That is unlikely to change as Algeria faces rising potential external security threats, such as instability in Tunisia and Libya and tensions in the Sahel. Algeria’s president will not take steps that risk hollowing out the army or intelligence services.

In some ways, the Algerian civil war between 1991 and 2001 further bolstered the military’s political legitimacy, as the army played a crucial part in combating the jihadi groups then proliferating in the country. The success of the state and the military in ultimately combating this threat enabled both to regain a measure of popular support. Because of its crucial role in fighting jihadism during the civil war and bringing stability back to Algeria, the PNA, despite facing some public criticism (especially of its intelligence branch), remains the most trusted institution in the country. According to a 2017 Arab Barometer report on Algeria, roughly 75 percent of the 1,200 respondents, representing a wide cross-section of Algerian society, reported a substantial degree of trust in the armed forces, while the next most trusted institution was the police (60 percent). Even opposition figures implicitly and sometimes explicitly ask for the army’s intervention to resolve political disputes.

Fifty-five years after Algeria’s independence, the PNA is still effectively ruling the country through a civilian façade.
Consequently, fifty-five years after Algeria’s independence, the PNA is still effectively ruling the country through a civilian façade. Because it rules from behind the scenes, it is not held accountable for its decisions. This is, perhaps, the key secret behind its long-standing grip on power. As one military insider, himself an army veteran, explained:

[Have] you ever seen a demonstration where people were calling for the army to step back or [shouting] a slogan such as ‘Army, get out’? No, never! Why is that? Because the military, despite everything, is the only one that can protect this country and the people know that. The people out there, they call for better lives and salaries and that’s the government’s job, not ours.

While such a military insider would admittedly be predisposed to see the army as indispensable to protecting Algeria’s citizens, this quotation nevertheless illustrates that many people commonly view improving people’s livelihood as the responsibility of the government, not the military. This mentality allows the military brass to evade blame for poor governance outcomes.

The Regime’s Political Allies (the Everlasting Winners)

Aside from the entrenched influence of the Algerian military, another key reason for the perpetuation of the country’s current governing system is the measured, controlled way the military and its allies opened the rules governing the political arena. The song remains the same: two key political parties have been the primary forces in Algerian electoral politics and retain a tight grip on parliament—the FLN and the RND. Both of these parties defend government policies, put forth lists of candidates for all elections, and safeguard the loyalty and support of local political figures to help guarantee favorable electoral outcomes. In return, these parties are able to secure political and administrative positions for their leading members and benefit from the patronage and other perks of proximity to centers of power, a reality that reinforces the political status quo.

Algeria has not always had a multiparty system even in name. For almost three decades after gaining independence, Algerians lived under single-party FLN rule. The FLN was a self-proclaimed elite party that was supposed to lead Algeria toward socialism following independence. When former president Houari Boumédiène took power in 1965, the party began playing an instrumental political role in the country but had no existence separate from the military establishment and the state bureaucracy. The FLN did not organize a party congress from 1965 until 1979, when an FLN congress was organized ostensibly to designate Boumédiène’s successor after his death late the previous year. The military was strongly represented at this congress, as a significant number of its attendees had ties to the military in one shape or

Two key political parties have been the primary forces in Algerian electoral politics and retain a tight grip on parliament: the FLN and the RND.
In reality, however, Boumédiène’s successor, Chadli Bendjedid, was not actually selected at this congress but rather at an assembly composed of senior military commanders led by the chief of the secret services at the time, Kasdi Merbah.

Eventually, public pressure convinced the Algerian military and the FLN to allow a measure of greater political openness. In response to widespread riots in October 1988 due to popular dissatisfaction with socioeconomic and political conditions in the country, the government introduced a multiparty system in 1989 that allowed some ostensible political competition. Despite this injection of apparent pluralism, Algeria’s political order has since remained largely unchanged since independence in 1962. Each local and legislative election affirms the perpetuity of the political rules established at that time. The multiparty system—despite the emergence of new political actors, parties, and alliances—is, in fact, a means by which those in power create the mere semblance of change and openness.

Elections in Algeria have become routine, and carefully circumscribed political reforms have been instituted. The country has had five presidential elections since 1995 and five parliamentary elections since 1997, with the latter most recently held in 2017. Local elections have been held four times since 1997, and there have been three national referendums (held in 1996, 1999, and 2005). Additional electoral reforms in 2012 allowed many more parties to register, and today the country officially has more than thirty parties. In 2016, the government introduced further electoral reforms. This latest round of reforms improved voter (particularly female) participation, and it also strengthened electoral oversight and administration by creating a nominally independent electoral commission. The country’s political arena is mainly divided among nationalist groups, democrats, independents, Berber party supporters, and Islamists who have been integrated into politics since 1995. Despite these signs of pluralism, what are commonly called the parties of the administration, namely the FLN and the RND, invariably win a majority of seats in parliament.

Though it has been through severe internal crises and scandals, the FLN remains the primary political force in Algeria, alongside the RND (since the latter was formed in 1997). During the riots of October 1988 that prompted the introduction of multiparty elections, FLN offices were among the first to be vandalized, an apparent sign of its unpopularity. The party’s catastrophic defeat at the hands of Islamist FIS in the 1990 local and the 1991 parliamentary elections, despite blatant gerrymandering in the FLN’s favor, discredited and disgraced the FLN in the people’s eyes. The FLN would only recover somewhat in the late 1990s, mainly due to people’s disappointment with the Islamists.

Despite these bouts of unpopularity, the FLN is a party with strong historical legitimacy from the independence struggle, and it has a considerable electoral base. It also has a strong presence in the state administration. Considering the systematically low turnout in Algerian parliamentary elections, which reduces
the likelihood that the FLN’s and the RND’s rivals will be able to gain at their expense, it is unlikely that these two parties will lose control of their legislative majority and political monopoly in the immediate future.

The RND mainly serves to counterbalance the FLN in case of “indocility.” It was established in 1997 after the FLN sent representatives to the 1995 St. Egidio platform, which brought together Algerian opposition parties—including the FIS—in an attempt to end the country’s civil war. That decision irritated regime hardliners as well as the military hierarchy, many of whom threw their support behind the RND. During the 1997 elections, the RND secured more than twice as many seats in parliament as the FLN, a clear indication of the military’s willingness to challenge the FLN when necessary.

The representatives of both semiofficial parties are unable to truly convey and express the social demands of their voters in parliament. This generates public disdain for politicians and explains the relative lack of voter enthusiasm whenever elections are held. The political openings that have taken place in Algeria have not really led to credible alternative outlets for political and social expression, in large part because the political and military leadership has not allowed it. If anything, when it comes to politics and civil society, the Algerian government has long remained committed to this tune of supposed reform.

The Political Playbook of Algeria’s Actual Leaders

Algeria’s military establishment and its political allies in the FLN and the RND employ a host of tools to maintain their hold on power. This approach includes: (1) using patronage and repression to fragment opposition political parties and civil society organizations; (2) selectively liberalizing certain sectors of the economy to create and sustain a private sector business class with close ties to military and political elites, who can then widen the reach of their patronage networks and social base; and (3) an overall political system predicated on systemic corruption that has enriched the regime’s supporters and has marginalized its detractors.

The Neutralization of Opposition Parties and Civil Society

Although Algerian military and political elites have provided some space for political contestation, they have largely kept political opponents under wraps. For their own part, opposition parties and civil society organizations often have not offered coherent alternatives to parties backed by the country’s leaders. Rather, they have tended to behave in counterproductive ways that the regime has exploited to keep things as they are. So although opposition parties have been in Algeria’s parliament since 1997, their emergence has not made the country more democratic. In fact, the regime has used elections mostly
as a tool for sustaining the status quo by creating the appearance of an open and free political arena, and the opposition has been unable to push for more democratic rules. Algerian elites ensure FLN and RND political domination by a variety of means, including gerrymandering; hindering the formation and financing of opposition parties; repressing, publically demonizing, or co-opting opposition figures; and imposing legal restrictions on media outlets.

While the constitution formally grants freedom of speech (Article 48), the government continues to use administrative harassment, informal pressure, and the threat of jail time for journalists and cartoonists to control freedom of speech and of the press. To give just two examples among many, in 2015, journalist and human rights activist Hassan Bouras was arrested and sentenced to one year in prison, ostensibly for insulting a government entity, as well as offending a judicial official and a law enforcement officer. In actuality, Bouras was investigating a corruption case and was adamantly protesting against the extraction of shale gas in the Sahara. Similarly, in 2016, a journalist and blogger named Mohamed Tamalt was sentenced to two years in prison for insulting state institutions and the president. Tamalt died in jail under suspicious circumstances, after undertaking a hunger strike and spending three months in a coma.

In short, when citizens criticize government officials or state policies or when they write something that is deemed to be beyond the limits drawn by the regime, they are subject to fines or arrest. To cite another example, an Algerian activist named Zoulikha Belarbi was fined 100,000 dinars ($924) in March 2016 for posting on her Facebook page a photo of President Bouteflika that was deemed insulting. Belarbi was accused of defamation of the Algerian president according to Article 144 Clause 2 of the country’s Criminal Code. In July 2016, the government broadened laws on defamation to apply to retired military officers as well. According to the new terms of the law, retired personnel are “prohibited from any act, declaration or behavior likely to compromise the image of institutions and public authorities.” The laws went on to state that

any breach of this duty likely to compromise the dignity and authority of State institutions is considered contempt or defamation and may, at the request of the public authorities, result in the withdrawal of the medal of honor or filing a complaint with the competent courts in accordance with the provisions in force.

Meanwhile, the National Agency for Publishing and Advertising (ANEP) holds a great deal of leverage over daily newspapers that financially depend on ANEP-authorized advertising. It is safe to say that state-funded advertising allows the government to use and abuse its influence over print media.

However, despite the many limits the Algerian regime imposes on those who would seek to check its power, the regime is not entirely responsible for this status quo. Even as Algerian leaders have skillfully played on the opposition’s structural weaknesses, opposition parties themselves have failed to overcome
their perennial divisions or form successful alliances against establishment leaders and their allies. The main shortcoming of Algerian opposition parties is their lack of commitment to democratic principles and internal competition. Most of the parties have a dominant figure, often the founder of a party, whose reelection as party leader is rarely contested successfully. A notable example is the Socialist Forces Front, founded by Hocine Aït Ahmed, who remained party leader for half a century, even though for a large part of that time he lived in exile in Switzerland. Public criticism was not tolerated, and the party was shaken by several crises in the 2000s and even as recently as 2017. Even an opposition party that was ostensibly pushing for a more democratic Algeria could not, in fact, manage to embody those ideals within its own ranks.

The political programs of opposition parties have reflected little ambition for promoting change. They have not presented new initiatives to improve conditions for Algerian citizens, advanced new values, or engaged in novel forms of political action. Instead, they have embraced the rules of the game, replicating the same patterns of undemocratic behavior they have denounced in parties close to the regime. Indeed, what exists today is no longer the single party system once dominated by the FLN but, as two Algerian researchers have bitingly described it, a multiparty system made up of several “single parties.”

Many opposition figures have been co-opted and have focused on preserving their relations with the regime rather than focusing on society’s best interests. Consequently, their standing has fallen in the eyes of their constituencies. The pursuit for power seems to be the main objective of most Algerian opposition parties, and this limits their popular appeal and ability to spur public engagement. The activism of the country’s opposition figures seems less a struggle for democratization and a better future for the country than it is a way of gaining access to the high salaries and other benefits that accompany ministerial portfolios, parliamentary seats, other senior positions, and the resulting redistribution of economic rents. These benefits have created bonds of loyalty between opposition figures and the regime. Among many voters, there is a pervasive feeling that opposition parties often remain passive and uncommitted to making a tangible political impact, instead reappearing only when electoral deadlines loom. That may be why opposition parties are often unable to mobilize voters. This disheartening status quo likely reflects a sense of public cynicism that may help explain why opposition parties struggle to mobilize voters and why voter participation in elections tends to be low. Voters do not seem to believe in the usefulness of opposition parties’ work, share their values, or trust them.

According to the 2017 Arab Barometer, politicians (including establishment figures) are poorly regarded in Algeria. Asked to rank politicians’ honesty on a seven-point scale, 28 percent of the 1,200 respondents gave politicians
the lowest rating of one, and 25 percent gave them a rating of two. Similarly, political parties and parliament are the least trusted political institutions. Only 14 percent of respondents trusted parties, while 17 percent trusted the parliament. That, too, helps explain why so few people tend to go to the polls. In the 2017 parliamentary elections, the participation rate was only 35 percent. Parliamentarians are seen as incompetent at best and opportunistic at worst, their “only motivation” being to get “the $2,600 a month [salary]” that legislators earn, as one school teacher tersely put it in an interview, reflecting a commonly held view.33

Political actors, including parliamentarians, are co-opted in a variety of ways and at different levels depending on the resources available to the regime. The leadership’s capacity to absorb new actors only ensures the perpetuation of the system. In 2008, a presidential decree raised parliamentarians’ monthly salary from $1,500 to $2,400. This salary is fourteen times the legally mandated minimum monthly salary in Algeria (roughly $170).34

Parliamentarians receive other advantages as well, such as no-interest loans and benefits for religious feasts or the pilgrimage to Mecca—all perks given in exchange for never holding the government accountable. This co-optation has allowed parliamentarians to improve their social and economic standing and build relationships with other influential figures, especially in the business world.35 Such networking opportunities enable politicians and their parties to expand their clientelistic networks among their supporters, social groups, tribes, or people who are from the same region. Proximity to individuals in positions of power who can intercede on their behalf can confer a variety of advantages, including jobs, financial incentives, tax reductions, or even rent allowances during electoral campaigns.36 For example, during Bouteflika’s 2004 campaign, he visited sixteen provinces (wilayas) and allocated almost $454 million for local development programs, distributing between $53 million and $66 million in each of the provinces he visited.37

The Algerian regime has approached civil society actors in a somewhat similar way. The ruling establishment has implemented a variety of methods designed to control their activities and ensure that they do not disrupt the political system. These methods range from co-optation to coercion, as well as other steps—often through Algeria’s complex, opaque regulatory apparatus—to fragment civil society groups that may pose a challenge to the government.

But internal problems have also undercut the autonomy of Algerian civil society organizations, including undemocratic management structures, a lack of financial resources and limited access to foreign funding, a resultant dependency on state funds, and unsuccessful networking on the national and regional levels. These problems have rendered such groups more vulnerable to the government and often unable to challenge its actions. Furthermore, these issues have made them inept at transmitting the demands and articulating the interests of ordinary citizens to the government. Because Algerian civil society often
fails to facilitate communication between the state and its citizens, the people’s political, economic, and social demands either remain dormant or are expressed in a fragmented way, as shown by the thousands of spontaneous and disconnected yet unrevolutionary demonstrations that have been shaking the country for the last decade.\(^3\)

From the time of Algeria’s independence in 1962 until the mid-1980s, mass organizations affiliated with the FLN played a primary role as representatives of civil society. These groups included, among others, the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA), the National Union of Algerian Youth, and the National Mujahideen Organization (which represents veterans). The aim of such organizations was to mobilize Algerians, relay the official FLN party line, and control society, all under the banner of maintaining national unity.

The riots of 1988 compelled the government to introduce reforms, notably Act 90 of December 1990, which granted citizens freedom of association. During the country’s civil war, the state loosened its regulations to reinforce its domestic legitimacy. The government viewed civil society organizations as capable of helping rebuild the link between the people and Algeria’s leaders. Consequently, civil society representatives accounted for 90 of the 192 individuals who participated in the National Council for Transition; this provisional institution performed the legislative function in the absence of a working parliament when Algeria’s electoral process was interrupted, a state of emergency was declared, and the country descended into civil war.\(^4\)

Yet, since the 1990s, many Algerian civil society organizations have become extensions of the state and the public administration. These groups have helped mobilize society and have helped facilitate the redistribution of oil revenues to old and new clientelistic networks. Co-optation has been common, as most organizations do not have the means to be financially autonomous. Yet by forgetting their principal role as mediators between the population and their leaders, these organizations have helped bolster the regime and its allies, consciously or not. A good example is the UGTA. Originally a trade union tasked with maintaining and improving conditions for Algerian workers, the UGTA eventually became a supporter of the regime and its patrons.\(^4\) It remains the only interlocutor the government is willing to consult on labor matters, even as other independent unions are ignored and discredited. Over time, the impulse to maintain constructive relations with the government has turned the UGTA into a weakened counterpart of the regime, when it is not an open supporter. In 2004, for example, UGTA’s general secretary, Abdelmadjid Sidi Said, publicly endorsed Bouteflika’s reelection, and in 2016, he described strikes by civil servants with the same terms as the regime, declaring them as being organized by a notorious “foreign hand.”\(^4\)

The political co-optation of many civil society organizations has been profound under Bouteflika. In return for financial assistance from state, communal, or provincial budgets as well as the latitude to engage in activities in a safe
environment, these organizations have been called upon by the government to strengthen the sociopolitical base of the ruling elite and the state administration. They have participated in major events, such as ministerial visits and national festivals, and supported government policies as well as the president.

For instance, in 2004, most civil society organizations enjoying a “protected” status from the state were used to mobilize voters on behalf of Bouteflika’s reelection bid. The National Alliance of the Associative Movement and Civil Society coordinated with the Ministry of National Solidarity to open polling stations in each province. In the most recent presidential election in 2014, a Bouteflika spokesperson declared that some 40,000 civil society organizations had supported the president’s candidacy. At other times in the past decade or two, such organizations have played a similar mobilizing role in support of the regime’s agenda.

Civil society organizations’ failure to play any autonomous role in Algeria or serve as mechanisms for fostering government accountability or transparency have eroded their standing among the general public. According to a 2008 study, the percentage of the Algerian adults who were members of civil society organizations was very low, ranging between 3 and 4 percent against 10 to 15 percent for Morocco, a percentage that is still considered low compared with those of many European countries. The 2017 Arab Barometer similarly found that only 9 percent of Algerians belong to any organization or formal groups whereas 22 percent of Moroccans do, a figure that is still considered low.

What of civil society organizations that refuse to be co-opted? Their situation is more complicated, as the state may seek to marginalize them, using administrative or judiciary harassment or arrests and termination. There are plentiful notorious examples of the use of such legal measures to interrupt and disrupt civil rights activists’ work. Djilali Hadjaj, the president of the Algeria Association Against Corruption, was arrested on grounds of forgery and embezzlement of public funds in September 2010. In 2013, ninety-six Algerian activists who were supposed to participate in the World Social Forum in Tunis were prevented from leaving Algeria. In 2017, several activists from the National Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Unemployed (CNDDC) who were demonstrating for improved labor conditions were arrested for unauthorized gatherings. In the same year, Taher Belabès, a coordinator for the CNDDC, was arrested during a peaceful protest for obstructing traffic and inciting a gathering. Examples of these violations are numerous, and according to the 2016 report of the National Coalition of Algerian Civil Society and EuroMed Rights, “harassment of human rights defenders is worsening.”

When civil society organizations refuse to toe the government’s line, the regime can fall back on the legal framework for associations to control their actions. For example, a 2012 law on associations heightened restrictions on the activities of civil society organizations. This led to a sharp reduction in the number of government-recognized associations from over 93,654 in 2011 to
Moreover, there are almost 60,000 additional organizations that are considered illegal today by the government as they have not received formal recognition.

Algeria’s civil society sector has also fragmented due to ideological differences, personal conflicts, leadership struggles, and the lack of a consensus between different organizations. Divisions within single organizations and in the civil society sector at large have allowed the government to diminish their influence and control their work by creating or supporting new organizations close to the regime that compete with existing civil society organizations. In 2002, for instance, in order to discredit and counter the National Autonomous Union of Public Administration Staff (SNAPAP), the state created a rival parallel institution that was backed by the administration.

Algeria’s toxic political environment, coupled with economic challenges in the years ahead, do not favor the empowerment of civil society. The regime is more likely to tighten its grip and control over it.

Selective Economic Liberalization

Just as the Algerian government has co-opted civil society to maintain its grip on power, the regime has also used economic inducements to ensure that large segments of society will have no incentive to change the system. All economically relevant sectors—especially defense and hydrocarbons—have been transformed by the country’s politico-military elites into sources of political patronage. These elites are aided by a large state bureaucracy and by a private sector that profits from selective liberalization.

These three circles of state bureaucrats, business leaders, and especially politico-military elites are often connected by family, tribal, or regional ties. Ruling elites’ efforts to remain in power and maintain their positions in the system frequently blur the lines between public and private actions, increasing the opportunities for nepotism, favoritism, and corruption. A measure of cohesion among the ruling elite is maintained through a mutually agreeable distribution of oil rents negotiated between different elite groups. The benefits of such redistribution extend from the top of the state down to the lowest levels of society.

Private-sector enterprises gradually replaced public monopolies, creating oligopolies that were close to the military and the state bureaucracy. Business leaders and military figures, particularly former army officers, remain tightly linked to and involved in the public and private economic sectors. Due to high oil prices, Algeria’s business class was able to profit from the country’s economic expansion and the major infrastructure projects Bouteflika initiated.

48,957 in 2018. Moreover, there are almost 60,000 additional organizations that are considered illegal today by the government as they have not received formal recognition.

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in the early 2000s, right after the end of the civil war. Businessmen cultivated personal ties with the leadership and the politico-military establishment. As a result of their loyalty, their businesses flourished.

Instead of changing the country’s power structure and expanding access to resources, market liberalization in Algeria made even more permeable the already “porous boundaries” between political, military, and economic actors, as well as those between the formal economy and the black market. Amid these intricate, overlapping networks and various tangled interests, it is sometimes hard to determine who is doing what. Back in 2001, an International Crisis Group report estimated that approximately 600,000 to 800,000 individuals profited from their proximity to the country’s political establishment. Whether this estimate is accurate or not, what remains certain is that the actors involved include government officials, political leaders, business elites, military personnel, and even former insurgents who have become businessmen. Subsequent studies, including a 2009 Cambridge University Press book written by Miriam Lowi, echo the view that officials, political leaders, business elites, former insurgents, and military personnel are all bound by bonds of friendship, kinship, religion, or regional background that permit them collective access to economic rents and power.

The private sector has been penetrated by the regime to advance the interests of its actors and clients. Several import-export companies serve as good examples. Senior military figures in the regime and their relatives have used their positions of influence to establish private-sector companies that benefit from selective economic liberalization. For example, the son of Major General Ahmed Boustila, the former head of the National Gendarmerie, owns several companies including one that imports vehicle batteries. Similarly, the son of Major General Khaled Nezzar, one of the country’s most prominent generals in the 1990s, owns a private telecommunications company called Smart Link Communication (SLC). Presumably, their fathers’ prominent positions and political influence were helpful in ensuring these enterprises successfully navigated the difficult, tedious process of obtaining import licenses and loans.

The pharmaceuticals sector is another case in point. Until 1995, Algeria’s pharmaceutical sector was largely controlled by public companies. Today, however, 85 percent of the market is dominated by private companies owned by a dozen or so individuals that are close to the country’s politico-military elite. For example, Mustapha Aït Adjedjou is the head of the Algerian Pharmaceutical Laboratory, an important military contractor, and was known for his ties to the former army chief of staff, Mohammed Lamari. Similarly, family members of General Mohamed Ghenim, the former secretary general of the Ministry of Defense, own a pharmaceutical company called Apotex, while the daughter of the former head of the Department of Counterespionage and Internal Security, Smaïn Lamari, is the owner of Pharmalliance.

This new class of business leaders and their networks have been granted generous loans, privileges, and custom-made monopolies, or semi-monopolies,
in return for their loyalty and support. This has created a category of wealthy private-sector businessmen, such as Djilali Mehri, Karim Kouninef and his brothers, Mohamed Laid Benamor, Abderrahmane Benhamadi, and several others.

One of the most well-known among them is Ali Haddad, who owns the Enterprise for Roadwork, Hydraulics, and Buildings (Entreprise des Travaux Routiers, Hydrauliques et Bâtiments), one of Algeria’s largest private companies, which is involved in a variety of sectors, including construction, public works, transport, and tourism. Haddad benefited from a $2.5 billion loan plan under the successive infrastructure programs initiated by Bouteflika in 1999. He is also president of a leading economic institution, the Forum for the Heads of Enterprises (Forum des Chefs d’Entreprises, or FCE) that serves as an important political actor as well.

The revenues of Haddad’s companies have multiplied in the last fifteen years due to growing government contracts. Not surprisingly, he organized an intense campaign in 2014 to rally members of the FCE to politically and financially support Bouteflika’s reelection for a fourth term, reportedly garnering more than $1.7 million.

At the time Haddad did not head the institution. But although some in the FCE opposed the idea of involving their organization in political matters, he continued pressing on Bouteflika’s behalf. Haddad was seemingly rewarded in November 2014, when he was officially elected president of the FCE, confirming his links to the presidency. Several members of the government were present at his inauguration ceremony. Under Haddad’s leadership, the FCE has been able to influence decisionmaking, help the government implement its policies, and reshape the economic landscape, while containing any opposition to government policies. The FCE—which encompassed 7,000 companies, 300,000 employees, and combined revenues of approximately $35 million as of March 2018—is in a strong position to play such a role.

Such interactions benefit both the regime and the private sector. By establishing closer ties with the business class, Algeria’s leadership has broadened its networks and clients, thereby expanding its social base and perpetuating its own power. Meanwhile, by supporting political leaders, those in the private sector leverage their proximity to those in positions of political power to facilitate the introduction of measures that advance liberalization and privatization in ways that allow them and their businesses to prosper. In addition, military and security forces insiders revealed that, in times of economic crisis, the regime uses the productive and financial capacities of its clients in the business sector to help find creative solutions to problems and “pacify the population.”

**Governance by Corruption**

Clientelistic patronage is more than just an incidental occurrence or a mere tactic the regime uses to stabilize Algeria’s political order—corruption is an essential feature of the country’s system of governance. It pays for the loyalty
of people close to the regime, compromises competitors, and taints the opposition. According to a former vice president of a government-owned company called Sonatrach, Hocine Malti, in the energy sector “there are at least $5–$6 billion (some even give a figure of $10 billion) that go annually into the pockets of members of the [elite].”

This system of corruption endures by paying those excluded from the system and thereby reinforcing their dependence on existing centers of power, fragmenting and domesticating the country’s strategic elite, cutting political and civic leaders off from the masses, and discrediting opponents in the eyes of the people.

Corruption continues to be a major problem. In Transparency International’s 2017 Corruption Perceptions Index, Algeria ranked 112 out of 180 countries. As one observer has put it, corruption serves as “a mechanism of conflict resolution.” The myriad scandals involving political representatives show the pervasiveness of corruption in Algeria. In 2017, over 1,400 local elected officials were tried on charges that included mismanagement, embezzlement, the squandering of public funds, and other professional misconduct. Over 500 of them were convicted. In 2017, 250 mayors were charged with corruption.

Amid systemic corruption and fragile alliances, political and economic actors have had to diversify their ties to hedge against the risk of shifts within the circles of power. This, too, can bolster the stability of the system, as national and local actors seeking to protect themselves (particularly members of the business community) have greater incentives to respect the state’s redlines and show loyalty to those in positions of influence. Failing to do so can lead to isolation, undermining one’s business interests or political career.

The staying power of this venal system has made efforts to curb corruption exceedingly difficult, largely because any change could harm one influential group while favoring another. Any attempt at reform is very delicate. The recent dismissal of former prime minister Abdel Madjid Tebboune is a case in point. Upon taking office in May 2017, Tebboune set out to scrutinize a series of government contracts signed under his predecessor and other economic deals allegedly made on the basis of the close ties between the preceding government and political allies, including wealthy business leader Ali Haddad. Tebboune’s approach, which he described as aiming to “separate money from power,” was seen by the Bouteflika clan, as well as Ali Haddad and his friends, as a real danger to their economic and business interests. As a result, the president dismissed Tebboune after less than three months in office and replaced him with Ahmed Ouyahia, a product of the political system who understood that upsetting Algeria’s leading decisionmakers would be a mistake.

Therefore, while corruption may be an instrument of political governance, it also reinforces the existing state of affairs by making it far riskier to challenge the status quo. That means that real reform, because it could undermine the

Clientelistic patronage is more than just an incidental occurrence or a mere tactic the regime uses to stabilize Algeria’s political order.
very existence of the system, is very difficult to introduce and implement. But while the Algerian system is characterized by continuity, there are always risks that its immovability can generate the kinds of contradictions the regime seeks to avoid, contradictions that may threaten the survival of the system.

Algeria’s Future Prospects

Over the years, the Algerian regime has allowed just enough sociopolitical change to absorb and defuse popular discontent, so as to safeguard political stability and ensure that much remains the same. The resulting system has elements of authoritarianism and democracy. Major decisionmakers in Algeria have crafted, renewed, and refined strategies to sustain the system and their roles in it. The country’s next presidential election, scheduled for 2019, is not likely to constitute a turning point. Whoever is elected—whether Bouteflika secures a fifth term or someone else takes office—will be chosen by the military-political elite and will be purely a product of this system.

But while the regime has shown considerable resilience and adaptability, the system it has created is not invulnerable and will continuously be tested by social change in Algeria. Another drop in oil prices, similar to the one in mid-2014, or a lasting economic crisis might hinder the capacity of the regime to pacify contesting groups. In the wake of the plunge in energy prices that took place in mid-2014, the finances of Algeria’s highly oil-reliant economy have been significantly strained. In 2015, energy earnings dropped 41 percent and despite a subsequent rise of 16 percent in 2017, the country’s 2017 budget deficit amounted to 9 percent of GDP. Despite incessant talk of economic diversification to decrease reliance on hydrocarbons, the government has taken few measures to move in that direction. As a result, it is likely that the Algerian authorities will struggle more with further unrest as spending cuts put a substantial burden on the population.

Amid these financial difficulties, the regime may feel compelled to make more political concessions to mitigate further popular frustration. Such concessions may involve allowing greater political participation, recognizing ethnic and cultural minorities, inviting opposition parties and civil society organizations to join consultations with the government, and adopting a national youth policy. The country’s leadership should keep in mind that Algerian young people have the numbers on their side, with 55 percent of the population under thirty years old. Given Algeria’s young population, the formulation of a national youth policy and the establishment of a national youth organization would appear to be priorities for the country’s leadership. Established in 2016, the High Council for Youth is a good first step, provided that it starts offering tangible recommendations to better engage youth politically. One way or another,
the country’s leaders need to allow for some measure of generational renewal. Unless younger generations are given the means to participate in political life and engage in advocacy, and unless the government listens to their concerns, dissatisfaction may mount and could undermine national stability.

In the meantime, civil society organizations illustrate the potential pitfalls of the regime’s current strategy. Algeria’s leadership must bear in mind that its tendency to undermine civil society organizations, which may have worked until now, may not be sustainable. Generally speaking, civil society serves as a link between the population and the state, so discrediting and fragmenting civil society organizations may push some citizens to join underground organizations and empower jihadists who continue to believe that violence against the state is the only possible solution.

Although constrained in various ways, civil society organizations have had a limited positive impact on Algerian society overall. The regime stands to gain from ensuring that, as social conditions in the country change, such organizations are in place to provide outlets for popular expression and action. Stability is not just a consequence of the regime’s ability to adapt to popular challenges but is also a consequence of the latitude granted to society to adapt to social, political, and economic transformation. The emergence of civil society organizations has allowed space for a new culture of association and the professionalization of some organizations. This has allowed civic organizations to use their knowledge and experience internally, locally, and regionally to introduce (albeit limited) reforms. The establishment of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights or the Coalition for the Families of the Disappeared in Algeria are good examples. Similarly, another organization, the Center for Information and Documentation on the Rights of Children and Women, was able to prompt a public debate that eventually led to the passage of legislative reforms advancing women’s rights, especially in the workplace, as well as the rights of abandoned children.

There will be continued resistance from the military, which continues to claim to uphold Algeria’s national sovereignty. Transitioning to a system of popular sovereignty will take more time, and doing so would require that a new relationship between civilians and the military be formulated. This would not be easy, given the military’s historical legitimacy as the vanguard in the national liberation struggle against France, its essential role as a perceived savior during the civil war of the 1990s, and its image today as a bulwark against regional instability and jihadi threats. The military will remain a prominent player in Algeria’s politics for the foreseeable future.

The Algerian regime has been particularly adept at securing the continuity of its rule over the years. The regime has repeatedly felt obligated to adapt in limited ways that have rendered the political system more pluralistic; the country’s leaders are aware of the risks of failing to do so. But Algerian society is complex; it is constantly changing, and so are its expectations. What has worked for the regime up until now may not work indefinitely into the future. At some point, change may really have to be about change.
Notes


10 It is very difficult to determine who these key figures and decisionmakers in the military are. None could really tell definitively, but everyone agrees that the decisionmaking process is opaque and complicated. As a military colonel named Farid explained in an interview: “It involved several people from different worlds: the political, the business, and of course the military” (author interview with a retired military colonel, in a suburb of Algiers, December 2016). In another interview, a politician explained: “You know the circles of the pouvoir are complicated, even insiders are not capable of saying who does what and who decides . . . it is a delicate, complicated and multilayered process. Too much is at stake and many people from different factions have too much to lose. . . . You see they chose Bouteflika for a third and a fourth term because it is the best choice for their interests. And today he is still in power, because of that . . . but also because it is complicated to agree on someone. They will eventually agree but meanwhile we have a leader in a wheelchair and we’re the laughingstock of the village, as we say.” (This information comes from an author interview with a politician who was formerly a longtime member of the FLN, Algiers, January 2017.)

11 For example, one can cite the dismissal of Colonel Abdelkader (Fawzi) Lounis, who had been leading the Communication Center and Distribution (CCD). Similarly, General Hassan (who was responsible for counterterrorism and counterespionage) was brought before the military court in Blida on February 5, 2014, on charges of insubordination. A similar fate befell Major General Mhenna Djebbar, who was Toufik’s right-hand man and head of the Central Directorate for Army Security (DCSA). In addition, General Athman “Bachir” Tartag and General Rachid “Attafi”


17 These efforts at limited liberalization started after the end of the civil war. In 2002, for the first time in its history, the military organized a press conference with General Lamarai who answered journalists’ questions without any censorship. That same year, the PNA organized an international symposium on terrorism and for the first time generals mingled with researchers, academics, and journalists. The army also trained communications officers and opened a communications bureau. Yet it should be said that, while conducting fieldwork, the author was unable to reach out to anyone within the military establishment. All interviews with military personnel in Algeria were conducted off the record. One explanation may be the sensitivity of the topic of this paper. Yet during another fieldtrip in Algeria on a topic that is far less sensitive (women in the military), the same thing happened. See Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck, “Women in the Men’s House: The Road to Equality in the Algerian Military,” Carnegie Middle East Center, November 4, 2015, http://carnegie-mec.org/2015/11/04/women-in-men-s-house-road-to-equality-in-algerian-military-pub-61463.


19 Author interview with military personnel during fieldwork in Algeria, December 2016.


28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
32 Arab Barometer, “Algeria: Five Years After the Arab Uprisings.”
33 Author interview with a thirty-six-year-old housepainter named Zinou during fieldwork in Algiers, January 2017.
35 Hachemaoui, “Political representation in Algeria between clientelistic mediation and predation (1997-2002).”
36 Ibid.


43 The constitution was amended in 1996, 2002, 2008, and (most recently) 2016. Provisions were introduced to the amended constitution to protect fundamental human rights (Article 33), as well as to guarantee and protect the rights to freedom of expression (Articles 41, 41 (2a), and 41 (3a)) and peaceful assembly (Article 43).


53 Algerian Ministry of Interior, “Thematique de associations.”

57 Werenfels, Managing Instability in Algeria, 49–50.
58 “The involvement of the Sécurité Militaire and of current and retired regular army officers in the public and private, the formal and informal, sectors of the economy had been increasing since the 1980s and was indirectly encouraged by generous early retirement regulation.” Werenfels, Managing Instability in Algeria, 50.
60 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
67 Hachemaoui, “Political representation in Algeria between clientelistic mediation and predation (1997-2002).”
69 Lyas Hallas, "Les patrons qui finançent Bouteflika 4 ne cachent plus leur connexion" [The patrons who finance Bouteflika no longer hide their connections], Le Quotidien d’Algérie, March 11, 2014, lequotidienalgerie.org/2014/03/11/les-patrons-qui-financent-bouteflika-4-ne-cachent-plus-leur-connexion/.
71 “20 milliards de centimes pour la campagne de Bouteflika de la part des patrons” [20 billion of centimes from the patrons for Bouteflika’s campaign], Algerie 360, March 12, 2014, https://www.algerie360.com/20-milliards-de-centimes-pour-la-campagne-de-bouteflika-de-la-part-des-patrons/.
72 One individual who opposed the FCE’s involvement in politics was Issad Rebrab, who resigned from the FCE in 2014.
73 Attendees included former minister of finance Mohamed Djellab; former minister of industry Abdesselam Bouchouareb; former minister of communications Hamid Grine; the former minister responsible for relations with the parliament, Khelil Mahi; and the Wali of Algiers, Abdelkader Zoukh. See Cherif Dris, “Algérie 2014 : De l’élection présidentielle à l’émergence des patrons dans le jeu politique” [Algeria 2014: From the presidential election to the emergence of patrons in the political game], Année du Maghreb (2015), http://journals.openedition.org/anneemaghreb/2583?lang=fr#ftn23.
74 “Présentation,” Le Forum des Chefs d’ Entreprise (FCE).
75 The majority of these businessmen have been pushing for liberalization of the economy. More recently, they have been trying to accelerate the pace especially since...
the drop in oil prices has been causing public investment to shrink. The FCE, and especially Ali Haddad, has been strongly pushing for the privatization of all sectors, including air transport, hydrocarbons, and water resources. Haddad cites Article 37 of the constitution, which enshrines the freedom of citizens to invest in the country, to push for greater economic liberalization.

76 Author interview with a retired military colonel, in a suburb of Algiers, December 2016.
77 Hachemaoui, “Political representation in Algeria between clientelistic mediation and predation (1997-2002).”
80 Hachemaoui, “Political representation in Algeria between clientelistic mediation and predation (1997-2002).”
83 Hachemaoui, “Political representation in Algeria between clientelistic mediation and predation (1997-2002).”
84 Werenfels, Managing Instability in Algeria, 159.

Correction: The original version of this paper mistakenly included Abdelmadjid Kerrar in reference to endnote 68. His name has been removed.
Carnegie Middle East Center

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THE GLOBAL THINK TANK