

DEMONSTRATION EFFECTS: HOW THE HIRAK PROTEST MOVEMENT IS RESHAPING ALGERIAN POLITICS

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SUMMARY

- The Hirak protest movement has revealed flaws in Algeria's ruling system, which lacks the tools to reinvent itself or negotiate a new social contract with the people.
- The army has been unable to restore the "civilian president" narrative it used for two decades, while the current president has been unable to disguise his dependence on the military leadership.
- The regime can no longer use rigged elections as a substitute for negotiations with citizens.
- The regime is trying to promote a narrative on the removal of mafias connected with the former president as a guarantee of a new era.
- The Hirak has created a political culture of popular empowerment, but it still has to agree on a road map for a political transition.

Introduction

In December 2019, Algeria's top generals chose Abdelmadjid Tebboune as the country's new president. Although they organised a sham election to formalise the move, this could not disguise the fact that the army had once again appointed a national leader against the will of the people – as it had during the 20-year rule of the previous president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The process was one of the main triggers of the Hirak (mass protest movement) that began in February 2019, with much of the population boycotting the election. Indeed, for most Algerians, Tebboune lacks legitimacy as a product of the military regime. Nonetheless, many external observers have asked whether he can end the demonstrations by reforming the government from within. But any optimism on this issue is misplaced.

In the past 20 years, much Western analysis of Algerian politics has pointed to the renewal of the Bouteflika presidency and the lack of a revolution similar to the 2011 Arab uprisings as a sign of Algeria's stability. However, as such analysis failed to anticipate the emergence of the Hirak, it is misguided to ask whether the new president can persuade the generals to accept the demonstrators' main demand: for a state governed by civilians.

Therefore, rather than asking how a new president can start a transition towards greater stability, this paper – which is based on more than 100 interviews and a year of intensive field research in Algeria – analyses the ways in which the Hirak has revealed flaws in the country's ruling system. This system lacks the tools to reinvent itself after Bouteflika or negotiate a new social contract with the people.

A deteriorating power-sharing arrangement

In the 20 years leading up to the Hirak, Algeria's current system of governance allowed the army to find a way out of the so-called civil war of the 1990s, and to survive both internal disputes and external waves of protests. The generals' appointment of Bouteflika in 1999 temporarily solved the legitimacy problem the army had had since 1992, when it cancelled the Islamic Salvation Front's victory in Algeria's first free election. The latter decision started a conflict that led to the

deaths of 200,000 people and the disappearance of 20,000 others. The arrangement that emerged in 1999 involved informal power-sharing between a president chosen by the generals (and endorsed through a sham election), a security service (Department of Intelligence and Security, or DRS) that was determined to check the influence of the regime's civilian clientele, and a military that claimed to be above politics but largely controlled the distribution of economic and institutional resources.

The military and the DRS used the new president's purportedly civilian status to help deflect war-crimes accusations against it from foreign powers, especially as Bouteflika promoted policies of reconciliation primarily designed to redeem the military and the DRS for their involvement in the "black decade" of repression. They also used the president's status to end negotiations on processes of democratic representation with the outlawed Islamists and other opposition groups. Throughout the 2000s, this arrangement allowed the regime to depoliticise former parties to the civil war (including Islamist groups) through a narrative centring on the relaunch of the electoral process and a transfer of authority to a supposedly civilian president who had restored peace and security. The narrative helped re-establish a political environment in which the regime rigged elections and representative bodies such as parliament had little influence on real decision-making processes.

It also allowed for the depoliticisation of the people's demands for public participation. In 2001 Ali Benflis, then the prime minister, took advantage of mass protests in the Kabylia region to ban public demonstrations. These policies received tacit support from most civilians, who feared that the return of contentious politics would threaten national cohesion. Most Algerians abandoned their demands for a more accountable distribution of the country's resources – which were also at the heart of the civil war – after benefiting from public spending through various development projects and subsidies, supported by an unprecedented increase in oil prices in the early 2000s. Algeria's rulers also consolidated their position thanks to the spread of informal commerce and the expansion of corruption networks formerly limited to the clientele of top generals, allowing for the emergence of a broader crony elite.

Despite some discord between the army, the DRS, and the president's civilian

team, the regime continued to regard the automatic renewal of Bouteflika's presidency as a magic formula for maintaining control of the country's politics while avoiding accountability. However, the protests that erupted in response to the prospect of a fifth Bouteflika term deeply disturbed this balance of power. After six weeks of demonstrations, Ahmed Gaid Salah, then the army's chief of staff, reconsidered the alliance with the president. Sticking to the army's strategy of remodelling the presidential leadership to survive legitimacy crises, he forced Bouteflika to resign in April 2019, jailed some of the figures who anchored Bouteflika's regime – such as the head of the DRS and members of the presidential clique, who he began to describe as *'issabate* (mafias) of the former regime – and quickly organised a new presidential election. By doing so, Salah hoped to complete the political transition and allow the military to return to governing from behind closed doors.

However, even with the appointment of Tebboune, two main challenges have prevented the army from ending the protests. The first is a feature of the governance system. Ousting Bouteflika proved far easier than finding a viable replacement for him among the army's civilian clientele. Eroded by two decades of power concentration within the president's office, state institutions and political parties close to the regime no longer have the capacity to restore the "civilian president" narrative that generated some legitimacy for the system prior to the Hirak. Tebboune has been unable to disguise his dependence on the army leadership, whose only genuine policy has been to enforce the cosmetic transition of power through repression.

The second challenge is that a rising number of Algerians want to renegotiate the tacit social contract they established with the army in 1999, under which the security forces protect the people from terrorism in exchange for impunity and informal control of Algeria's politics and oil revenue. Since the protests began, the renewal of the social contract has become an increasingly central demand of the Hirak. The situation has put the military under pressure to enter a formal process of negotiation with civilians – something it has tried to avoid since the country won independence, in 1962.

Beyond the notion of stability, then, it appears that a new political cycle has begun in Algeria. Informal negotiations that enhanced the regime's resilience after the

civil war and smaller revolts in the 2000s and the 2010s – through fake democratic practices that engaged with the opposition but left the military leadership unaccountable – now threaten its attempts to renew itself through the monopolisation of the political transition. They do so by preventing ruling elites from cutting deals with one another or with trusted civilians. Indeed, many Algerians may have appeared to withdraw from political life due to the army's failure to provide them with clear rules on citizenship, state legitimacy, and even economic rights.

However, they have pushed back against the regime by moving outside formal institutional and ideological structures, thereby creating the conditions for the Hirak's emergence. The Hirak has created a new repertoire of peaceful political resistance that has already had major consequences for the country's future power structures. It has done so by creating an autonomous political culture that reclaims the idea of the state from the regime, challenging ruling elites' appointment of loyal presidents and efforts to neutralise demands for change through reforms that preserve their political, security, and economic monopolies.

The limits of a transition from within

The lure of another strongman leadership

When the demonstrations began, the Algerian regime was already in crisis. Bouteflika had been in power for two decades and the army could not resolve the succession impasse that followed his refusal to leave office, despite having been incapacitated by a stroke in 2013. If the generals and the DRS were mostly supportive of his first four mandates (as shown by the way they allowed him to abolish constitutional limits on presidential terms in 2008), they were much less enthused about his use of clientelism to bypass their mechanisms of allegiance. Taking advantage of the security forces' desire to maintain a low profile, Bouteflika marginalised parties such as the National Liberation Front (FLN) and the Democratic National Rally (RND) – guardians of the ideological legitimacy the army drew from the 1962 revolution – to ensure they would not produce challengers to his rule. He also appointed close allies and family members to important government roles (such as prime minister, and ministers of oil, the interior, justice, and foreign affairs), extending the benefits of corruption well beyond the military

networks that exclusively controlled the country's resources.

Thus, the Hirak's rejection of a fifth term for Bouteflika presented Salah (who the president had nominated to lead the generals in 2004) with an opportunity to restore some of the army's popular legitimacy and end the presidential clan's interference with its patronage networks. Salah did so by forcing Bouteflika to resign. If the army survived in 1999 by proclaiming the end of the civil war, it survived in 2019 by declaring that it would target Bouteflika's *'issabate* and initiate a transition that would help the people elect an honest president.

However, so far, this narrative has failed to placate the protesters, for several reasons. The most obvious of these is linked to the Hirak's rejection of a political transition limited to such narrow changes. But the main problem is the stalemate the army created after the civil war by unofficially imposing a president on the country while refusing to acknowledge its decisive role in politics.

Under Bouteflika, a series of unpredictable shifts in alliances between various parts of the army, the DRS, and the presidential clan weakened public institutions to the point that those in formal positions of power were unable to engage in the kind of genuine reforms that could have helped legitimise the regime. When he publicly took over the post-Bouteflika transition, Salah tried to compensate for his lack of skill in supporting a genuine transition within formal institutions by allowing members of Abdelkader Bensalah's interim government (including the new minister of justice, Belkacem Zeghmami, who Bouteflika had dismissed as Algiers' general prosecutor in 2015) to pass bills and replace ministers – as well as by imprisoning peaceful demonstrators, in violation of the constitution and criminal law. But Salah's sudden death in December 2019 – after he detained DRS chief Mohamed "Toufik" Mediene and marginalised Bouteflika and his allies – left Tebboune with no real way to rebuild the governance model established under his predecessor. This political vacuum in the Tebboune presidency frustrated the regime's plans to restore its legitimacy.

A former prime minister under Bouteflika and a supporter of his policies, Tebboune has been far from innovative in his management of the transition. Forced to reassure the public and foreign powers, Tebboune announced shortly after his election that Algeria needed to enact institutional reforms. These reforms

have included enhanced roles for parliament and the prime minister; constitutional changes to re-establish presidential term limits; and the revision of the laws on political parties, elections, associations, and the media.

Yet Tebboune simply replicated, word for word, reforms Bouteflika announced in 2011 when faced with demands for a genuine negotiated transition from small groups of street demonstrators and political parties. Just as in 2011, these top-down reforms have little credibility with most Algerians, who argue that, regardless of what the law says, nothing will really change without an end to governance practices that often ignore basic legislation.

Indeed, the regime's main strategy has been to keep in place loyal politicians and officials, who it tasks with ensuring that any significant reforms exist only on paper. As such, Tebboune failed to remove many figures in the government and the bureaucracy chosen by Bouteflika, including ambassadors and governors (who supervise the resources of Algeria's 48 provinces); senators (who can reject deputies' laws); judges; members of the Constitutional Council (who supposedly ensure that the president's decisions and laws are constitutional, but have never intervened in them); and ministers.

The regime has ignored the Hirak's demands for the dissolution of the parliament and the organisation of a National Constituent Assembly, which would discuss the creation of a new constitutional framework. It has merely announced that it will set up an in-house expert committee to draw up proposals on revisions to the constitution, thereby reproducing Bouteflika's tradition of never-ending consultations with technocrats and tame civil society actors and political parties. The regime has made no attempt to tackle issues that could have a real impact on its approach to governance, such as constitutional powers of decree (which allow the president to bypass any state body), systems for transparently monitoring the state budget, and mechanisms for appointing civil servants.

Due to the way it maintains the coexistence of a formal institutional life and informal decision-making processes to avoid bearing any responsibility, the regime has created problems that go beyond citizens' exclusion from governance. This coexistence now prevents the army from continuing to use its civilian clientele to hide its central role, for two reasons. Firstly, Tebboune's lack of political credibility

or a clear action plan further slows Algeria's famously inefficient institutions, in which officials fear taking even the smallest decision.

Secondly, the regime can no longer use rigged elections as a substitute for negotiations with citizens. As such, the president will need to organise legislative and local elections he announced for 2020 in a new way. Furthermore, political parties loyal to the regime, which it once used as go-betweens with its local clientelist networks to encourage them to participate in elections, are currently in no position to inject new enthusiasm into the national politics. Their former leaders – the FLN's Djamel Ould Abbas and Mohamed Djemai, and the RND's Ahmed Ouyahia – are serving prison terms while their supporters wait for new instructions. Meanwhile, the Hirak has become the true site of public discourse.

Tebboune's *mise en scène* has failed to placate the Hirak. As such, his position as president is in doubt – and will depend on the army's ability to find a new balance between political theatre and security measures.

The army's new approach to political management

Because it has shaken Algeria's military command structure and delegitimised its civilian institutions, the Hirak raises difficult questions about the types of political management the army could experiment with. Indeed, after Tebboune became president, Salah used the transition to regain control over factions within the military and the DRS that Bouteflika allegedly played off against each other, aiming to consolidate his power. During the 2010s, the media and figures linked to the establishment often presented the DRS as the only protector of the state against the politico-financial 'issabate of the president, and presented Bouteflika's third and fourth presidential terms as the sole guardian of the civilian state against both the DRS and the generals' disruptive behaviour.

This narrative on the war of the clans culminated in September 2013, when Bouteflika restructured the DRS by: dissolving its judicial police (a gesture designed to limit the pressure the department could put on the president's clientele for plundering public resources); giving Salah responsibility for the secret services' media and press supervision (a move seemingly intended to ensure that there would be positive coverage of political factions loyal to the president); and sending its chief, Mediène, into retirement in 2015. But, in February 2019, the

Bouteflika clan changed tack, preferring to try to withstand pressure from the Hirak by sacrificing Salah and working with the experienced Mediene.

The plan quickly fell apart: Salah, having benefited from past disagreements between the Bouteflika clan and the DRS, became a central political actor by using his command of the army to take charge of the transition. In May, he arranged for the arrest and prosecution of Mediene and Bouteflika's brother. Both received 15-year prison sentences. Salah also ordered the arrest of Mediene's successor, General Athmane Tartag, and the chief of the police, General Abdelghani Hamel.

The army imprisoned the chief of the DRS to control the institution's capacity to manage civilian affairs. As seen in his appointment of Zeghmati as minister of justice, Salah quickly placed opponents of Bouteflika in important positions within the secret services and the judicial system, aiming to make the security apparatus politically coherent. On 17 December 2019, following Salah's orders, then interim president Abdelkader Bensalah enacted a decree that formally placed the secret services under the command of the army. The move allowed the army to take charge of anti-corruption investigations, with Salah having been accused of being linked to many "affairs" without the approval of the judiciary.

The strategy of controlling the political transition through the secret services and the justice ministry also helped Salah weaken the Hirak through arbitrary arrests of political leaders and protesters. The secret services refocused media outlets once dedicated to glorifying Bouteflika, using them to launch a propaganda campaign against groups that supported the Hirak. On public and private television channels, reports on "ever-declining protests" preceded announcements about the army's success in arresting terrorists, seizing large quantities of illicit drugs, or shutting down people smuggling networks. Members of the security forces, the military, and the police also allegedly voted illegally during the presidential election.

The generals appear to see this close coordination between the army, the police, and the secret services as crucial to countering the threat to their power from the Hirak. Salah's death in December 2019 does not seem to have changed this. He has been replaced by his close ally, Said Chengriha, who was also on the front-line of the army's brutal campaign during the civil war. However, none of these changes

have been enough to meet the challenges created by Bouteflika's legacy of divisive governance.

This problem is most noticeable in Tebboune's lack of influence over the new balance of power between the military and the secret services. As the first Algerian president who is not a veteran of the independence war, he has been unable to draw on the revolutionary legitimacy and military networks of his predecessors. Accordingly, Tebboune has been unable to put forward any substantive policies that could create a consensus between the military and civilian parts of the regime – the kind of consensus that Salah emphasised in his attempts to convince Algeria's foreign partners that a new presidential election would stabilise the country.

This discrepancy between Tebboune's decisions and those of the security forces resulted in erratic appointments and dismissals of insiders – with varying political loyalties – in key positions in entities such as the national oil company, Sonatrach, and the customs agency (both of which provide major sources of income for patronage networks). The discrepancy has also led to incoherent policies on the Hirak – with the authorities' arrests of some protesters and release of others following no discernible pattern – and, most importantly, to a lack of progress in the anti-corruption campaign against the former regime's *'issabate*. Having failed to freeze detained oligarchs' assets or recover stolen public funds (as Tebboune promised), the campaign appears to be more of a way to serve the army's ambition of realigning the ruling elite in its favour. It does so by helping the regime control Bouteflika-era army officers, DRS officials, oligarchs, and bureaucrats with the threat of investigations into their activities.

The army has long used corruption as a tool of political negotiation. For instance, to help convince Bouteflika to become president in 1999, the generals overturned his 1983 conviction for embezzlement. In 2005, as a reward for the military and DRS figures who supported his re-election the previous year, Bouteflika enacted a presidential ordinance of the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation that repealed or blocked prosecution – and criticism – of members of the security forces for their role during the civil war.

Since then, the army, the security forces, and civilian members of the elite have mainly bonded over not a shared ideology but the mutual neutralisation of judicial

cases and fear of prosecution. The regime mainly distributed rents through its patronage networks to tamp down any kind of conflict within them and avoid discussions on the need for reform.

In the same vein, the army now promotes a narrative in which it justifies the imprisonment of the country's main oligarchs (without a fair trial) as measures to remove Bouteflika's *'issabate*. This process may also provide a way to restructure the security forces' base in various social groups without requiring transparent rules on the allocation of resources after the political transition. Nonetheless, although the campaign against the *'issabate* focuses on Bouteflika's supporters, the patronage networks that link the presidential clan to the government, the bureaucracy, and the military are too important to threaten with true reforms to the management of corruption cases. As a consequence, Tebboune will likely be little more than an administrator for the army's distribution of rents as it attempts to shape the political and economic transition.

The Hirak's drive for genuine political negotiations

The emergence of an independent political space

Although the demonstrators primarily describe it as a "revolution", the Hirak is not just a sudden revolt against a fifth term for Bouteflika. It is also the product of past political and social movements' techniques for pressuring and constraining the regime. By gathering several generations of frustrated citizens, demonstrations every Tuesday and Friday (as well as Sunday among the Algerian diaspora) have created an independent political space in which non-violence and popular unity come before ideology in the push for regime change.

Instead of avoiding disputes with the army and feigning indifference towards its capture of state resources, the Hirak quickly confronted the generals as the country's real decision-makers by asking them for political reforms. The main benefit of this has been in the Hirak's disruption of the post-civil war social contract, which is based on a promise to maintain stability (by ending terrorist attacks) in exchange for a depoliticised representative process. The process does not engage with citizens through a formal, transparent use of state institutions but centres on a tacit deal in which the sides avoid interfering with each other's

interests. In the past year, the Hirak has effectively dismantled all the regime's attempts to rebuild itself through formal political channels, which have no impact on the true centres of power.

With a lot of humour and irony, the protesters have used slogans, cartoons, and public discussions to reject both the interim government – asking for its resignation and for the cancellation of the laws it has passed – and presidential elections, forcing the generals to cancel two planned votes. The protesters have also mocked the various panels of experts nominated by the regime, as well as consultation and dialogue initiatives it launched after Bouteflika's removal. And they discredited Salah's efforts to portray himself as a champion of anti-corruption by calling for an independent judiciary and fair trials for everyone.

The Hirak has also given Algerians a physical space in which to discredit the regime's symbols of political authority – in a marked change from an era in which political contestation was limited to indifference, divisive identity politics, or boycotts of elections. For instance, the protesters have debunked myths of military nationalist and revolutionary propaganda by displaying the Algerian flag (and even the Berber one) across the demonstrations. Similarly, they have undermined groups the regime uses to monopolise representations of the popular will, calling for the disbandment of the FLN and the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA), and criticising state imams.

The Hirak even extends beyond the demonstrations: workers and executives at public companies, students, academics, journalists, and lawyers have refused to follow instructions from ministers and disturbed their public appearances, regarding them as illegitimate because they are overseen by a government not chosen by citizens. The same goes for Tebboune, who the protesters have condemned each time he makes a public announcement.

This process of rejecting the regime's monopolisation of politics through non-representative institutions has had a major impact on the structure of the Hirak, whose participants have refused to organise around any kind of hierarchy. However, this has not prevented several civil society groups and activists who have long opposed the regime from joining the movement. Independent unions (such as those representing public servants, the unemployed, and students) have contributed to the Hirak by drawing on their experience of politicising social grievances about poor working conditions and salaries, corruption, nepotism,

inflation, precarious and informal employment, oligarchs' efforts to loot public companies, and even the awful state of public hospitals. These unions generally view the sources of such grievances as deliberate *irhab idary* (administrative or bureaucratic terrorism), whose objective is to prevent Algerian workers from pushing for reforms.

Through the politicisation of personal experiences of injustice, the Hirak has also drawn in members of human rights organisations – not least groups that represent people who suffered at the hands of the security forces in the 1990s, such as the Collective of Families of the Disappeared. The movement has called for the abrogation of the 2005 Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation, and for Algeria to be condemned by the United Nations' human rights and torture committees (both of which have asked rulers in Algiers to prosecute and punish security personnel implicated in human rights violations during the civil war). These organisations found a place in the Hirak alongside families of *harraguas* (irregular migrants) whose children either died or were imprisoned while trying to leave the country.

More broadly, personal experience of the state's abuses has strengthened the movement with people such as marginalised veterans of the 1962 war (including Lakhdar Bouregaa and Djamila Bouhired), participants in the 1988 riots, political bloggers, pensioners, disabled people, young football fans from poor neighbourhoods, and other individuals who want to break out of the isolation they have faced for denouncing state-sponsored corruption and repression. This diversity has helped create a widespread feeling that the Hirak belongs to the real Algeria – one that exists outside the quarrels between opposition parties and the state that have occupied the political scene for so long. Combined with demonstrators' mutual support for one another's causes and specific social and regional challenges, these qualities have sustained the Hirak.

The movement is an experiment closely linked to the many episodes of societal rupture and reconciliation that run through Algerian history. Participants in the Hirak have gradually tailored it to not only their need for a way out but also the reinvention of channels of political participation – outside those the regime uses to dominate state institutions and marginalise ordinary citizens.

Given these factors, it is misleading to use analytical frameworks similar to those applied to the 2011 Arab uprisings – let alone to wait for the regime’s fall to produce a negotiated political transition between old and new elites. The Hirak has created a political culture whose impact on political change goes beyond variations in the number of its participants or its structure under a specific leadership for starting negotiations with the regime.

People of all origins, classes, and ages have joined the Hirak. They participate in it to be part of a movement that is unique in its attempt to force the regime to take specific forms of action rather than blame the people for their inaction. This is an important sign of progress in a country where the population has long felt trapped between the regime and the opposition – and, more importantly, between the regime and the Islamists. Even Algerians who engage in activity that aligns with the Hirak but does not form a central part of it – such as the use of social networks to share information about sit-ins in solidarity with political prisoners (most of which are organised by a limited number of lawyers and experienced activists) – are contributing to a project of political transition under the supervision of the people.

The resilience of the Hirak can be partly explained by the fact that it does not disturb Algerians’ normal patterns of life. One can join the protests for a time, leaving them to pause before coming back if there is a perceived threat against the movement.

In contrast, actions designed to homogenise citizens’ levels of involvement in the Hirak – such as general strikes or physical interventions to block presidential elections – have failed. Therefore, rather than ask when the Hirak will end, one should question when and to what extent Algerians will complement the marches with other forms of political organisation that loosen the regime’s everyday grip on society (sustained through clientelism and the bureaucracy) without tearing the social fabric.

Although the regime has not yet agreed to start genuine negotiations with the demonstrators, both it and the Hirak are aware of each other’s sources of power within their relationship. While the regime favours a leadership that will fit in its transition plan – comprising opposition parties and individuals who want to be acknowledged as central actors rather than to impose the Hirak on the political

scene – demonstrators hope the movement will produce new mechanisms that allow citizens to weigh in on genuine negotiations. Thus, followers of various parties or schools of thought – such as Islamists, secular leftists, economic liberals, protectionists, Berbers, and feminists – have been welcome to join the Hirak, albeit mainly as individuals. The Hirak remains reluctant to see these groups use the Friday protests to relaunch their own failed revolutions, put themselves forward as political actors with greater experience than other citizens, lead negotiations in the name of the movement, or exclusively represent the interests of political prisoners.

For most of them, the Hirak is a necessary break with opportunistic rulers they cannot trust and with whom they should only negotiate when there are clear and fair rules, enforced by transparent institutions under the supervision of the people. Many participants in the Hirak became even more committed to these conditions after magistrates used the movement to exact self-interested concessions from the regime, making ambiguous promises to support the protestors by refusing to try political prisoners. Indeed, the magistrates forgot their promise as soon as the government gave them a pay rise.

As a highly diverse movement, the Hirak primarily regards itself as an incubator for political initiatives that will eventually empower citizens to impose a transparent political transition on the regime. As a consequence, its ability to break political taboos – such as those concerning a civil state, equal rights for women, ethnic pluralism, sovereignty over national resources, and unconditional solidarity against repression – is slowly facilitating the emergence of a pluralist leadership of the movement. This is why the regime has imprisoned prominent public figures linked with the Hirak and persecuted citizens whose recurrent presence at the protests has turned them into symbols of resistance.

In just a year, the Hirak has deeply transformed the country's political culture, remodelling Algerian society's post-civil war dividing lines and reducing the regime's control over citizens' participation in politics. All the debates, placards, and slogans that the protesters have produced each week in the streets, on social networks, and in independent media outlets helped them spur debate on complex questions and pressure the regime – without becoming advocates of a specific ideology. This individual empowerment has helped them avoid the traps of co-

option or delegitimisation by the regime, and insincere negotiations with it.

Parallel transitions

The Hirak may have deprived the regime of its civilian mechanisms for retaining power (such as elections, constitutional revisions, and the renewal of parties and parliament), but it has not yet discovered ways to use these mechanisms for its own benefit. The regime's acts of repression and refusal to enter into any kind of formal political negotiations seem to have convinced the Hirak of the need to both sustain the demonstrations and substantially change the structure of the political transition.

But the movement still has to overcome three important barriers before the regime will acknowledge it as a negotiation partner. The protesters need to: agree on a transition road map and a redistribution of responsibilities that plays down divergences between them; reflect on the kind of concessions they will accept from the military, as well as the conditions required to demilitarise the state; and, finally, create a plan for gaining the support of the parts of society who fear political change.

The protesters have produced dozens of road maps for a transition, elaborating on them in coordination with political parties, intellectuals, artists, student collectives, independent unions, human rights groups, and civil society organisations. All these road maps have been careful to explain that they do not represent the Hirak but rather seek to help citizens think about mechanisms for supervising the political transition.

This reluctance to establish a leadership that represents a revolution has deep historical roots – not least in the FLN's takeover of all other ideological groups after independence and, more recently, the Balkanisation of the Berber Arouch Citizens Movement (a grouping of Kabylia village assemblies born out of the violent repression of peaceful demonstrations in 2001). In the latter case, the movement suffered from disputes over the need to enter a restricted dialogue with the government that empowered only a few of its members.

Disputes between political parties that have supported the Hirak mainly centred on their strategy for dealing with the regime. Some groups wanted to carve out a

niche for themselves even if it meant holding sham elections and trying to change the system from within, while others preferred to wait for the regime to fall by itself. Such differences reflected their previous experience of either co-option or marginalisation by the governing elite.

In recent months, however, the growing strength of the Hirak's peaceful mobilisation effort has led it to broadly favour a break with the current system, albeit without a forming a precise idea of the shape the transition should take. With minor variations, there is an emerging consensus within the movement on the need to replace parliament, the government, the FLN, the RND, and the UGTA with new representative bodies – particularly a High Council of Transition. This council would supervise a National Constituent Assembly process to, in time, reduce the power of the presidency and create greater political and media freedoms. Some participants in the Hirak have suggested that political prisoners should be appointed as supervisors of such transitional bodies, due to their popular legitimacy.

Current trends indicate that, even though the movement has no recognised leadership, there is a tacit relationship between the regime and the Hirak that builds on the sides' evolving arguments, limits, and plans. However, despite the protesters' emphasis on the need for civilian leadership of the state, there have been few substantive discussions on loosening the army's grip on governance structures. When Salah took the lead of the transition to fill the vacuum left by Bouteflika's resignation, this made it easy for the protesters to denounce the lack of legitimacy and authoritarian nature of the general-in-chief.

Nonetheless, his death has complicated matters. Chengriha has not intruded into the public debate as much as Salah did, preferring to hide behind his predecessor's memory as a man “who has protected the Hirak” and thanks to who “not a drop of blood was spilt”. This absence of a clear interlocutor weakened the Hirak's attempts to gather other Algerians around an assertive critique of the army leadership. No real discussion has yet taken place on: the fate of this leadership's social and economic privileges after a transition (and those of its clientele); the 2005 amnesty for those involved in war crimes; the military's involvement in the economy; the retirement of the old guard; or the future of those prosecuted for corruption. The regime needs to be prepared to provide answers on all these

issues. However, most of the road maps produced by collectives close to the Hirak have only pointed to the army's duty to limit its role to support for the political transition.

Although there is widespread participation in the Hirak, a large number of ordinary Algerians have not joined the movement out of concern that there is no viable alternative to the military state. Fear of repression has also prevented many Algerians from backing the idea of a transition led by the people. During the first two months of the Hirak – when Salah declared his support for the movement – adults and children waved Algerian flags in the streets, there were spontaneous demonstrations in high schools, and revolutionary chants resounded throughout the country even outside the weekly protests. But, with the security forces suppressing these activities following Salah's first attempt to impose new presidential elections in April, such public signs of support for a political change are now limited to the Tuesday and Friday demonstrations. In some parts of the countryside, police repression has even succeeded in drastically reducing the protests to small gatherings.

The Hirak has also struggled to coordinate local forms of resistance nationwide. The police have suppressed the village and neighbourhood citizens' groups that flourished during the first few months of the movement. They encouraged participation in both the demonstrations and civic action such as public debates and street-cleaning. The regime's repressive tactics largely restricted such bodies to the Kabylia region – which has long been neglected by the state, and whose activists are experienced in autonomous organisation. The regime has even used the prominent role of such Kabylia activists to portray the Hirak as having been infiltrated by secessionist Berbers.

The fate of the movement will partly depend on the extent to which the demilitarisation of the state will remain a red line for the Algerian people and the international community in supporting the idea of a transition. But, more importantly, it will depend on whether an army that leads from behind the scenes is willing to reconsider its arrangement with the president, who is responsible for political negotiations (however superficial). This could have a significant impact on whether the military will begin direct negotiations with the Hirak on specific issues.

Given that Tebboune has struggled to manage the state's relationship with civil society, it may only be a matter of time before his attempts to maintain the status quo break down in the face of a looming domestic economic crisis and the deterioration of security in the wider region (especially Libya). Indeed, the absence of a discourse between the army and the Hirak on a new social contract has begun to lead to the return of localised riots in poor urban and rural neighbourhoods. These events, which are disconnected from the Hirak's marches, are led by ordinary citizens for whom blocking the streets and burning public buildings have long appeared to be the only ways to gain employment, housing, or access to water or electricity.

Therefore, beyond the Hirak's revolutionary narrative and the regime's talk of an era of reform, Algeria will require new political initiatives to integrate ordinary citizens into mainstream politics. It remains to be seen how the two main parties will perform in upcoming local and legislative elections, but their failure to begin a discourse on a new social contract could prompt further riots designed to force the issue and reclaim control of the country's resources from corrupt actors. This outcome, which leaves no room for a political transition, would disrupt the plans of both the regime and the Hirak.

Conclusion

Slightly more than a year old, the Hirak has revealed the fragility of the regime's depoliticised, informal power-sharing arrangement. The army's undemocratic selection of a new president only delays attempts to shape a genuine political transition that could help it end the crisis.

Having traditionally relied on a post-civil war narrative of polarisation between the army and the Islamists, Algeria's charade of civilian governance is unable to address the challenges presented by a massive, heterogeneous, and unified movement such as the Hirak. Without the support of the security forces, Tebboune and his government cannot create the conditions for transparent negotiations between the regime and the people, such as guarantees of freedom of association, assembly, and the press, and unequivocal condemnation of the repression of peaceful demonstrations. So long as the military leadership prevents state

institutions from becoming representative – by ensuring that the same actors and practices dominate parties, constitutions, and legal frameworks – there can be no stable form of civilian governance. This stalemate is likely to have one of three outcomes:

- In the best-case scenario, the regime allows and honours Hirak consultations with the people on the type of transition Algeria should experience. Then, by creating delocalised representative structures, the Hirak leads the army to negotiate on establishing independent mechanisms to supervise a genuine political transition. Subsequent national, regional, and local elections re-establish citizens' influence over the government's decision-making processes and make it democratically accountable.
- In the worst-case scenario, the generals fall back on security measures, declaring a state of emergency and martial law as they did in the 1990s. As such repression would likely generate significant resistance from the international community – and, above all, from Algerians unwilling to abandon the liberties they gained through the Hirak – there would be a severe risk of an institutional split between the governing elite and citizens attempting to organise an autonomous transition. The long-term result of such a rupture is hard to predict.
- In another scenario, the stalemate persists. The army keeps Tebboune in office and continues to manage the country's affairs in an ineffective manner, while the Hirak gradually loses momentum, becoming part of the political background and lacking real ideas about how to make progress towards its goals. The movement waits indefinitely for the regime's permission to establish representative government structures – disappointing most Algerians much as previous opposition movements and parties have, resulting in more disorganised protests, and prompting young people to flee the country.

Elements of these three scenarios may intersect at some point. However, only a formal national consensus on the roles of the army and the security forces – and an assessment of the responsibilities of the army's Bouteflika-era clientele – can lead to productive negotiations on a new governance system. For this to happen,

the road maps created by organisations close to the Hirak must spur a national debate on truth and reconciliation, transitional justice, corruption, and models of future economic redistribution. Clarity about the Hirak's and the army's approach to the fate of the former and current regime elite could help establish the mutual trust the sides need to begin genuine negotiations on a political transition.

The international community has a strong interest in supporting such agreements. The European Union may be unwilling to take up a clear position on the legitimacy of Algeria's current governmental institutions, but it will be forced to do so on any transitional political structures established by the Hirak.

So far, foreign powers have had a largely negative role in Algerian politics. The army has used them to preserve its political role, scaring the people with talk of outside intervention. And the Hirak has mocked the financial support Algeria's foreign partners have provided it in the name of stability, advising them "to organise presidential election [ballot papers] in the United Arab Emirates" or to start exploring shale gas (a project the regime promoted to offset declining oil prices) in Paris.

European governments should attempt to dispel this disillusionment with candid support for true civilian rule in Algeria, partly by organising debates in Europe on the challenges the country faces. They should also hold more official meetings with independent civil society actors in Algeria. This would create new opportunities to consider the future of the country outside the control of its discredited formal and informal political leaders.

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