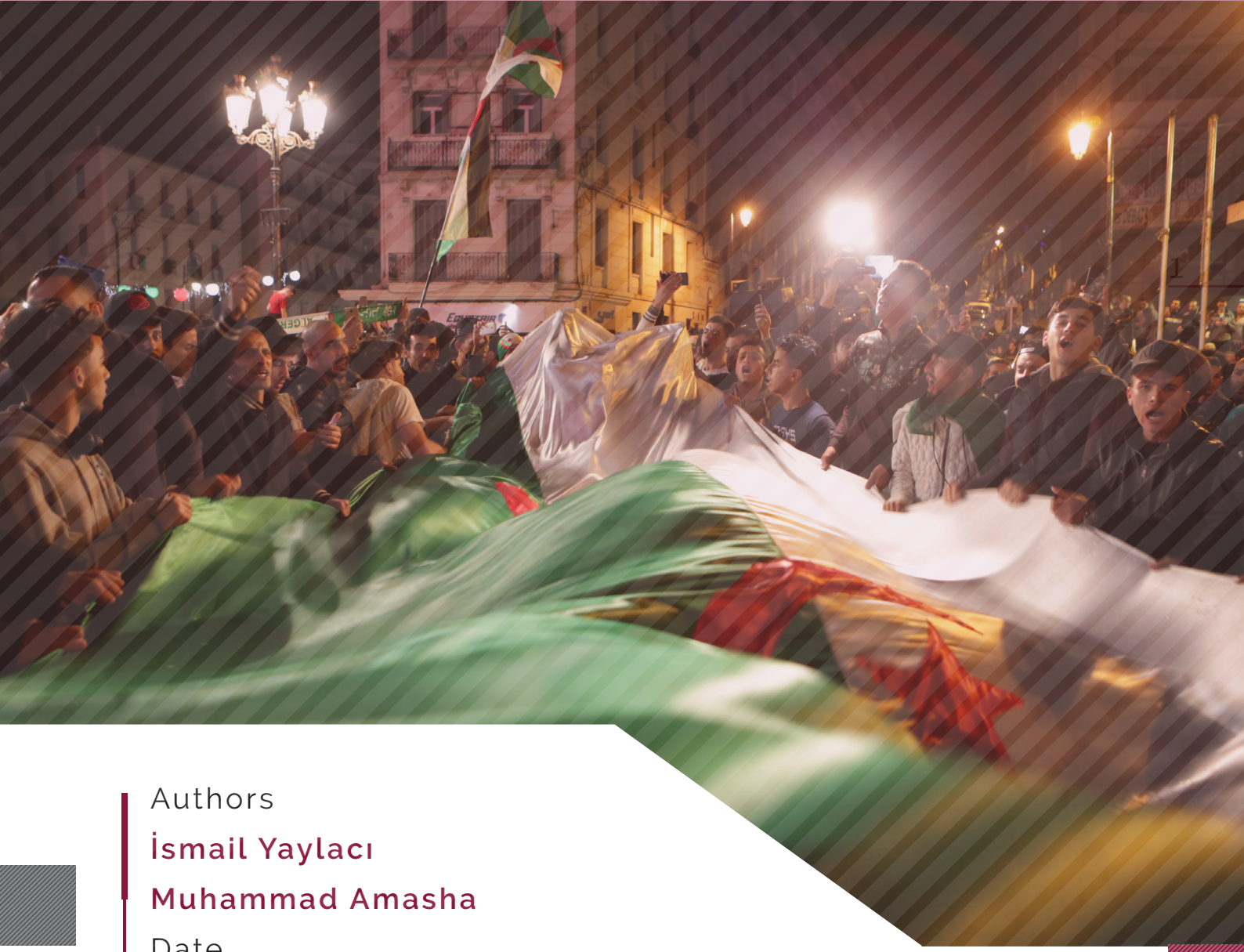

Authors

İsmail Yaylacı

Muhammad Amasha

Date

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ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS AND PARTIES IN THE ALGERIAN UPRISING

POLITICAL ISLAM MOVEMENTS

IN THE SECOND WAVE OF **ARAB UPRISINGS**

AL SHARQ
STRATEGIC
RESEARCH

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Introduction

On February 10, 2019, the ageing and ailing Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who had ruled the country since 1999, declared his decision to run in the upcoming presidential elections in search of a fifth term in office. This fateful decision created widespread discontent in Algerian society and on February 22 triggered the outbreak of a massive wave of protests, known as the *Hirak* movement. As this movement rapidly gained momentum, Gaid Salah, the Algerian Chief of Staff and Vice Minister of Defense, declared that the president had lost the authority to rule the country on March 30 and invoked Article 102 of the Algerian constitution. The article regulated the incapacitation of the president which stipulates the removal of the president if they become unfit to rule either for medical or other reasons.

Gaid Salah's statement clearly indicated that the military, as the real powerbroker of Algerian politics, had withdrawn its support from Bouteflika. Consequently, on April 2, Bouteflika resigned and was replaced by the President of the Senate with the mandate to prepare the road for new elections. In Bouteflika's resignation, the immediate aim of the protests had been achieved, but protestors insisted on capitalizing on that moment to force through comprehensive systemic change. Many protestors remained in the streets demanding the ousting of what they called '*le pouvoir*' (the power)—a group of people, mainly military and affiliated civilian elites, who wielded real power mostly behind the scenes. *Hirak* has thus become a leaderless movement which crisscrosses the ideological and ethnic lines in Algerian society and brings together all groups demanding a qualitative political and social change.

On December 12, 2019 the presidential elections took place with five candidates, almost all of them were considered part of the political establishment.[1] Amidst widespread boycotts of the elections which led to a very low turnout, the onetime Bouteflika loyalist Abdeljadjid Tebboune was elected in to power. The protestors were unsurprisingly dissatisfied with the result and have continued to mobilize every Friday to press for real reform.[2]

By the time the *Hirak* protests erupted in Algeria, the first wave of Arab uprisings had already come to a halt as a result of civil wars in Syria, Yemen, and Libya, and counterrevolutionary coups in Egypt and Libya. The only case in which the breakdown of authoritarianism had led to a democratic transition under a new constitution, drafted and adopted by a broad political coalition, was in Tunisia. In Algeria, the military refrained from resorting to brute force in response to *Hirak* protests. Some explain this restraint by the lack of certainty on the part of military rulers as to whether their commands would be followed in case they ordered to shoot at the protestors.[3] Others attribute it to the still vivid memory of the 'black decade' which claimed the lives of around 100,000 Algerians and the fear of repeating the same bloody course.

Hirak has been Algeria's Arab Spring moment. The grievances and discontent it has drawn from parallel those of people in the *maydans* of other Arab capitals; unemployment, corruption, repression, exclusion, humiliation. Similarly, their demands have also been comparable; social justice, respect for citizens' rights and liberties, dignity, transparency and a fair share from the economy. Indeed in the last decade of Bouteflika's rule, the Algerian Ministry of Interior recorded tens of thousands of *Protesta* - small and localized demonstrations where people voiced demands and laid claims on the state.[4] But this time the protests were able to overthrow the incumbent president and have since been demanding an overhaul of the system.

Algeria suffered deeply in the 1990s civil war between the state security apparatus and a plethora of violent Islamist groups. Moderate Islamist groups affiliated with or inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood expressly rejected the

violence perpetrated by some Islamist factions. Due to the heavy human and material cost of the civil war, the Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique du Salut, FIS) and some other violent Islamist groups were outlawed. As a result, they lost their footing in Algerian society and ceased to be consequential political actors.

This paper focuses on the position of Islamist political parties participating in the constitutional political process vis-à-vis the *Hirak* movement. It analyzes the positions, actions, and discourses of Islamist political parties with respect to *Hirak*. To do so, the paper first provides a brief historical context to explain the Algerian Islamist movements and parties emergence, organization and evolution, which focuses on the switch to multiparty politics, its subsequent breakdown and the ensuing civil war and Bouteflika's rule. Against this backdrop, the paper then discusses the main questions and issues faced by Islamist political parties with respect to the *Hirak* movement.

The Evolution of the Islamist Political Landscape in Algeria

Politically conscious Islamic activism in modern Algeria started in the 1920s and was represented by the movement led by Shaykh Abd al-Hamid Ben Badis, who was inspired by Muslim reformers such as Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida. The movement created the Association of Muslim Algerian Ulama (Association des Oulémas Musulmans Algériens, AOMA) in 1931 whose aim was to purify Islam by returning to the fundamental scriptural sources and by achieving a synthesis with modern science and rationality. With a modernist leaning, the movement was also critical of the practices of marabouts and other Sufi brotherhoods for tainting Islam with heterodoxy and superstition. Although the reform movement never enjoyed a massive following among the populace, it was key to the nationalist struggle in Algeria. The official motto of the independent Algerian state, "Islam is my religion; Arabic is my language; Algeria is my fatherland" was coined in 1932 by Ahmad Tawfiq al-Madani who belonged to this reform movement.[5]

Islamic identity was the backbone of the Algerian anticolonial struggle against France between 1954-1962 and remained a foundational pillar of the independent

state. Islam was then enshrined in the newly independent state's constitution as the "state religion." Since almost all ideological factions of Muslim Algerians united around the anticolonial struggle, Algerian nationalism did not have an explicitly anti-Islamist posture. In contrast, the National Liberation Front (FLN)'s proclamation of November 1, 1954 defined the objective of the Algerian anticolonial war as "the restoration of the sovereign, democratic and social, Algerian state in the framework of Islamic principles."[6]

The new independent state, the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria, adopted socialism as its ideology, Arabic as its official language and Islam as the state religion. The Algiers Charter drafted by the FLN under President Ahmed Ben Bella included a last-minute addition which declared socialism to be consistent with Algeria's Arab-Islamic heritage.

The 1963 constitution identified the FLN as the single legal party in the country, thus creating a decidedly authoritarian regime which put economic development and political centralization before political rights and participation. In this political landscape, characterized by the authoritarian single party regime of the FLN, Islamist political and social movements took hold. What is noteworthy in terms of the relationship between Islamism and the postcolonial state in the Algerian context, is that contrary to the Baathist regimes of Iraq and Syria, and Nasserist Egypt, the formation of the Algerian state did not rest on an open confrontation with Islamist movements.

In 1963, some former AOMA members who were influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood's ideological framework formed The Islamic Values Association (al-Qiyam).[7] The association was active in social and cultural issues pertaining to Islam in Algeria, such as advocating the Arabization of education and criticizing religiously inappropriate television programs. It was al-Qiyam's letter to the then Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1966, protesting the sentence to execute Sayyid Qutb, which caused a diplomatic problem with Egypt and led to the association's demise. Although the organization had survived for only three years, its impact on Algerian Islamism was significant.

Another modernist Islamist trend was formed by Malek Bennabi upon his return from Egypt in 1963. With his French intellectual background, Bennabi had a different vision to that of the *Islahi* trend which was still confined to classical methodology. Instead, he started lecturing university students (also with French education backgrounds) about his civilizational vision which diagnoses the 'Muslim illness' as an intellectual problem. His students would constitute the first (secret) organized Islamist group in the 1960s when they opened the first mosque in the University of Algiers, which served as a center for Islamist youth. The group would later call themselves Civilizational Edification Group but came to be known in literature as the 'Algerianists.'

Because of the heavy control of the media and the stifling of public discourse, throughout the 1970s and 1980s mosques turned into the major spaces where opposition to the regime was mounted. The state created the Ministry of Religious Affairs in order to keep the Islamic field under control, yet the 'free mosques' (mosques which were built by private individuals and not by the state) gained traction and became bastions of Islamist political opposition led by influential preachers. Individual preachers and scholars also gained attention and followers in that period. The 'official Islam' promoted by the regime as a source of popular legitimacy was countered by this alternative Islamist public which questioned the regime's Islamic credentials.

In the 1970s, two groups influenced by or linked to the Muslim Brotherhood took hold in densely populated cities in Algeria. One was centered in the east of the country and was known as the 'Eastern Group.' It was led by Abdallah Djaballah who was inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood's teachings. The other group was led by Mahfoudh Nahnah who was acting as a branch of Muslim Brotherhood. He was then imprisoned (1976-1980) with his friends because of their activities protesting President Boumedienne's National Charter. In the 1980s, polarization and rivalry among those groups increased, especially over the question of who properly represented the Muslim Brotherhood. As the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood recognized Nahnah as its official representative, Nahnah's group came to be known as the 'international' Muslim Brotherhood and the Eastern Group as the 'local' Muslim Brotherhood.

After Boumediene, President Chadhli Benjedid followed a dual policy of repression and rapprochement regarding Islamist movements. He crushed any movement which had the potential to upset the *status quo*, as was evidenced in the events of the Central University in 1982. Yet he also aimed to coopt Islamist currents through his policy of Arabization of the justice and education system to boost his popular approval.[8] In order to build coalitions against the 'Marxo-Boumedienists' on the left, the Benjedid government accelerated the already ongoing process of Arabization. This created friction with both the francophone elites and with the Kabyle.[9]

Bloody protests in October 1988 led Benjedid to adopt a new constitution in February 1989, which, for the first time since independence, allowed the formation of political associations other than the FLN. Though closely monitored, much more freedom was allowed in terms of political speech and pluralism in the public sphere. This was a historic transition to a multiparty system. By 1991, thirty-three parties were able to obtain official recognition from the state, some of which were center and left parties challenging the FLN's long hold on power and criticizing the corruption and ineffectiveness of the regime.

In this new political landscape, two influential independent preachers, Benhadj and Madani, decided to establish the FIS comprising different Islamist groups with varying ideological positions; but some Islamists refused to join. Directly after the formation of the FIS, Djaballah turned his newly established association into a political party, named the Renaissance Movement (al-Nahda). 'Algerianists' initially opposed the FIS but joined it after the arrest of its leadership in 1990 and took up leadership positions in the party. Nahnah also formed a political party, the Movement of Islamic society, later known as Movement for Peaceful Society (HAMS) in 1991.[10]

The FIS won the majority of the votes in the 1990 municipal elections and managed to repeat their success in the first round of the legislative elections in December 1991. Before the second round in January 1992, the military

intervened, forcing Bendjedid to resign and assigning the High Council of State to run the state. A month later, a state of emergency was declared and the FIS was outlawed, with all its local and regional administrations disbanded. Some groups within the FIS responded with violence, ultimately leading to the bloody and prolonged civil war which lasted from 1991-2001 and is referred to as the 'Black Decade' of Algerian history. This attempt at political liberalization and democratization was unsuccessful, with devastating consequences for the country.

During the civil war there were two divergent attitudes toward the regime on the Islamist side. One saw violence as justified and even necessary, and the other rejected violence and sided with the state. The Islamist militias which took up arms against the state were quite heterogeneous: Some resorted to violence against the state's security forces and civilian collaborators in order to overthrow the state and establish an Islamic state, taking the War of Independence as the model; the Islamic Armed Group (GIA), which was heavily composed of Algerian Afghans) prioritized imposing 'correct' Islamic practices on the population in areas they controlled; and the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) fought as the armed wing of the FIS to force the regime toward a negotiated solution.[11] Surprisingly, a group of Algerianists joined the most violent militia, the GIA, but he was later executed by the group in 1995 following their efforts to moderate .

In contrast, the Islamists of the Muslim Brotherhood explicitly rejected violence and participated in the presidential and legislative elections in ways which legitimized the regime. In the midst of the civil war, Nahnah ran for the 1995 presidential elections and won more than a quarter of the votes. However, he was barred from running in the 1999 elections and his party HAMS supported Bouteflika instead. In the 1997 legislative elections HAMS finished second with 14% of the votes, accepting cooperation with the government by assuming ministerial positions in the cabinet.

Djaballah's al-Nahda movement also rejected violence, but it also refused to cooperate with the regime so as to avoid being coopted by it. Instead, al-Nahda decided to support Bouteflika in the 1997 election, in support of Djaballah's rigidity, resulting in Djaballah's ejection from the party and the foundation of the Movement of National Reform (al-Islah) in 1999.[12]

As a result of HAMS's efforts to strike a balance between state-loyalism and opposition credibility,[13] it emerged from the Black Decade as the Islamist group which had benefited most.[14] This was because HAMS had been able to present itself as the moderate and responsible antidote to the excesses of the FIS. HAMS' gradual and bottom-up approach aimed to work within the system and was anathema to FIS, which adopted a staunch anti-systemic rhetoric. The stark difference in approaches was especially evident in the assassination of Muhammad Bouslimani, one of the co-founders of HAMS, by the militant Islamist groups for his insistence on moderation. HAMS even downplayed its Islamist discourse and highlighted its nationalist credentials in order to distinguish itself from violent Islamists and to maintain its credibility in the public's opinion. At the same time, they cooperated with the state and served as an Islamist watchdog in parliament.[15]

In 1999, Abdelaziz Bouteflika contested the presidential elections with the promise to put an end to the bloody years of the war. The other presidential candidates, including Djaballah, withdrew from the election because of expected fraud, and Bouteflika became the president. The Civil Concord was adopted in the 1999 referendum and some of the insurgents, including AIS, lay down their arms and ended their insurgency. This was supplemented by the 2005 referendum which extended an amnesty to insurgents, excluding those accused of rape and murder, in an attempt to turn the page on the civil war. This failed to address many of the grievances.[16]

Bouteflika's early years as president were marked by two notable international incidents which he capitalized on. The first was the September 11 attacks and the

ensuing 'global war on terror' which strengthened Algeria's international position as a state experienced in countering 'Islamist terrorism.' The other was the boom in oil prices between 2002-2015, which provided the regime with the economic power to strengthen its position against popular opposition.[17] Bouteflika managed to win four consecutive elections in 1999, 2004, 2009, and 2014, despite suffering a stroke in 2013, and regardless of his ailing health Bouteflika nominated himself for a fifth time in 2019, leading to the establishment of the Hirak movement.

The Fragmentation of the Islamist Political Space

The internal divisions and splits among Islamist movements and parties are for the most part results of organizational disputes and divergences over the question of relations with the regime. Despite the apparent ideological similarities between Nahnah's and Djaballah's groups, the fact that they developed independently from each other due to their different geographical locations rendered any efforts to unite obsolete. The fact that this division existed even before the 1992 coup indicates that it was not solely a result of their divergence on the question of cooperation with the regime. Each group preferred to maintain their leadership over their respective support bases which they had built up over many years. The unfolding events showed that Djaballah adopted a more critical, distanced, and non-cooperative relationship with the regime, whereas Nahnah and HAMS adopted a more gradual, centrist and cooperative approach. But, as HAMS sided more with the Arap Sping protests in opposition to the regime, HAMS and Djaballah were able to agree on many of the issues.

HAMS faced several major splits because of disagreements over organizational issues and regarding the main question of whether to work with the regime or against it. After Nahnah's death in 2003, Bouguerra Soltani was elected leader of HAMS. Soltani's election for a second term in 2008 led to the exposure of many of HAMS internal disputes. In 2009, a group of HAMS leaders (including founding members such as Mustafa Belmahdi and ministers like Abdelmadjid Menasra and Abdelkader Bengrina) founded the Association of Da'wah and Change to return to the path of Nahnah, which, they claimed, Bougerra had led the party away from.[18]

They accused Bougerra of institutional corruption by changing the party's laws, running the party based on his whims not the rules of the party, and marginalizing his opponents. Also, they were accused him of allying with the regime at the expense of society, preferring power and positions to the ethical nurturing of party members.[19] This was embodied in the 2004-2012 presidential alliance in which HAMS aligned itself with the ruling coalition of the FLN and Democratic National Rally (RND) and subsequently participated in In 2011, the Da'wah and Change founded a political party called Front of Change (FC) under the leadership of Menasra..[20]

However, after three years, a group of FC members led by the HAMS co-founder Mustafa Belmahdi also split from the FC, forming the National Construction Movement (al-Bina) in 2012, which gained the recognition of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Later, in 2017, the FC reunited with HAMS, whose new leader Abdelrazzak Makri shifted the party away from cooperation with the regime back towards opposition. As a result of this change in direction, HAMS parted ways with some of its pro-regime members who were led by Amar Ghoul and later established another party (Rally for Hope in Algeria or TAJ).

As alluded to above, al-Nahda also endured internal divisions, the first of which was in 1999 when its members decided to vote for Bouteflika despite Djaballah's insistence on staying in opposition. Consequently, Djaballah left al-Nahda to found al-Islah and ran for president in the 1999 presidential elections, receiving just 4% of the votes.[21] Such principled stances attracted many votes for al-Islah in the 2002 legislative election in which it achieved the highest share of the vote after the FLN (9.5%), for the first and last time.[22] Nonetheless, after the 2004 presidential election in which Djaballah won only 5% of the vote, some party members accused Djaballah of being autocratic and not respecting intra-party democracy.[23] Djaballah, in return, accused them of being part of the regime's plot against the strongest Islamist party and of being tempted by a share of power with the regime.[24] Following four years of disputes which ended up in court, Djaballah was expelled from the leadership of al-Islah by the resulting court decision in 2008.[25] After which, Djaballah formed the Justice and Development Front (al-Adalah) in 2011.

The fragmentation of the Islamist political landscape also brought about several attempts at unification and bloc-formation, such as the Green Algeria Alliance (AVV) (between HAMS, al-Nahda, and al-Islah, 2012-2017) and the Union for al-Nahda, al-Adalah, and al-Bina (since 2017).

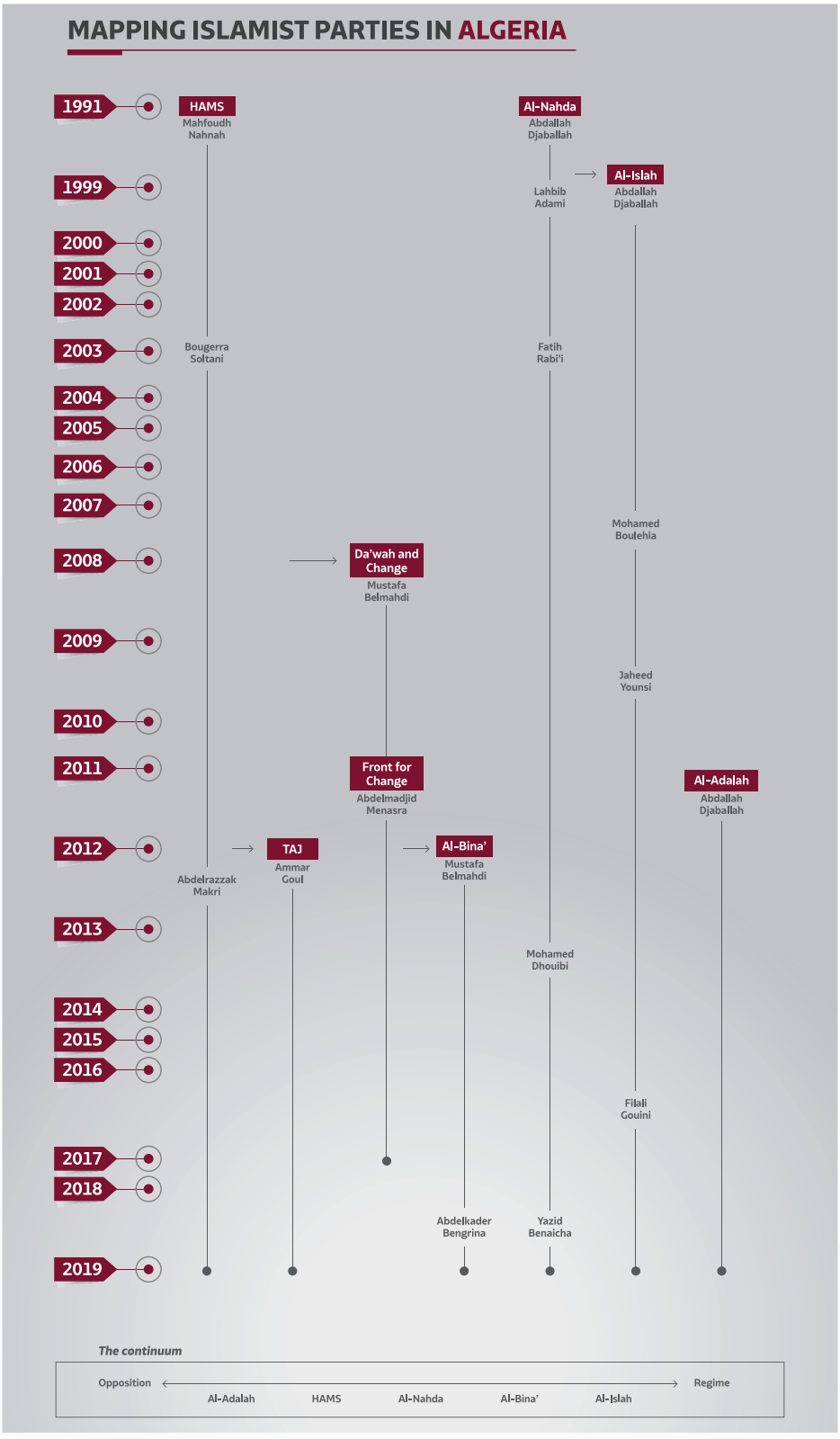
Due to the trauma of the civil war and the underperformance of the regime, the 2000s witnessed growing antipathy towards political parties, including HAMS, as they came to be seen as loyal opposition which only served to perpetuate the regime. There were also charges of corruption related to HAMS-controlled ministries, but HAMS attempted to overcome this problem by increasing activism in civil society such as professional and student unions, youth programs, orphanages, religious outreach and education institutions. HAMS aims to keep the politics (party) and the *da'wah* (movement) separate, and thus its network of civil society associations enables it to reach non-politicized groups.[26] HAMS also penetrated traditionally state-controlled socialization mechanisms like student unions and the Scouts. Although Makri tried to further the political alliances with non-Islamist parties to consolidate opposition to Bouteflika's fourth term, as in the case of the National Coordination for Liberties and Democratic Transition, his attempts were unsuccessful.

Year	FIS	HAMS	Al-Nahda	Al-Islah	FC	Al-Adalah	Al-Bina'	TAJ	Valid/ registered votes
1991	47.3	5.4	2.2						
June 1997		14.8	8.7						62.7
May 2002		7		9.5					41.3
May 2007		9.6	3.4	2.5					30.5
May 2012		AVV (6.2)			2.4	3.1			35.3
May 2017		6.1 (+FC)	ANAB (3.7)	1.2	+Hams	ANAB (3.7)		4.2	27.8

The electoral results of the Islamist parties (in %)

The new decade saw the outbreak of the Arab Spring protests and was also full of changing dynamics, not just for the Islamist movement, but also for Algerian politics in general. As part of the Presidential Alliance, HAMS's reactions to the 2011 Algerian popular uprisings were mild,

avoiding harsh criticism of Bouteflika and saluting his decision to end the emergency law[27] and his promises for reform.[28] But HAMS's discourse would change toward opposition by the end of 2011 and contended the 2012 legislative election as part of an Islamist alliance AVV.[29] Later, HAMS and the FC decided to unite after running separately but in alliance in the 2017 legislative elections, receiving 6.1%.[30] This election also witnessed another Islamist alliance of al-Nahda, al-Adala, and al-Bina (ANAB), receiving 3.7% of the votes. Intra-Islamist disputes within al-Nahda reemerged again in 2018 between its president and some of its top members, eventually leading to resignations when Yazid Benaicha replaced the disputed president in the party's own elections.[31]



Finally, it is important to note the increasing power of quietist Salafism and Sufism in Algeria. Both these religious groups receive implicit, and at times explicit, state support for their non-partisan, avowedly 'apolitical' positions. Whilst the Salafists do not engage in party politics as they see the system as being heretical, they forbid rebellion against it. The regime allows their expansive existence in society, in some cases in competition with the partisan movements, because they don't constitute a threat to the regime.[32] The Sufis, on the other hand, played an important political role under Bouteflika when the regime treated them as moderate local Islam and used them as a counterbalance to the militant Islamist groups and even partisan Islamist movements. The regime also mobilized the Sufis to support the FLN in elections and even as an instrument of African and Western foreign policy.[33]

The Hirak Movement: The Struggle for Algeria's Spring

Bouteflika's candidacy for a fourth term in the April 2014 presidential election consolidated cooperation between Algeria's opposition parties, transcending their ideological differences and rivalries. HAMS, al-Adala, al-Nahda, the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD), and Ahmed Benbitour (a presidential candidate who later withdrew from the race) constituted the 'Coordination of Parties and Figures Boycotting the 2014 Election.' This group advocated a boycott of the election among the other parties, citing a fraudulent election process in an effort to delegitimize it.[34]

Directly after the election, the group adopted a new name- the Coordination for Liberties and Democratic Transition (CLTD)- which convened a National Conference (known as Mazafran Conference, June 10, 2014) with the unprecedented outcome of many opposition parties and activists adopting a roadmap for democratic transition.[35] The other Islamist parties (al-Bina, FC, and al-Islah) also participated in the Mazafran Conference.[36] Later, the Coordination and Follow-up Committee among the Opposition (ISCO) was formed.[37] But despite such achievements, the opposition could not sustain a unified stance vis-à-vis the regime.[38]

The presidential elections in which Bouteflika announced his candidacy for a fifth term had been scheduled to take place in April 2019, but when the popular Hirak uprising

started on February 22, Bouteflika postponed the election and promised not to run for a fifth term.[39] On April 2, he was forced by the Chief of Staff Gaid Salah to resign.[40] Gaid Salah then emerged as the most powerful man in Algeria, arresting all potential threats, including General Toufik, Osman Tartag, the ex-President's brother Said Bouteflika and his close circle of businessmen and ministers.[41] These arrests later included Hirak activists who opposed the military's roadmap for conducting the presidential election as soon as possible to avoid the 'constitutional gap' of being without a president.[42]

However, the opposition were insistent on two other divergent roadmaps: The first was to conduct the presidential election under democratic conditions in which the figures of the old regime would be banned from running, especially those such as Noureddine Badawi, the prime-minister appointed by Bouteflika during the Hirak. The second, and more radical, was to have an interim period in order to amend the constitution under a presidential council composed of trustworthy figures, before the legislative and presidential elections took place. The 'secularist' opposition were pushing for the latter position,[43] the largest Islamists parties for the former, and some Islamists adopted the military's roadmap as it stood. The Islamists were afraid that amending the constitution without the relative power they would acquire through elections would lead to the cancellation of Article 2 of the constitution, which recognizes Islam as "the religion of the state."[44]

Despite continuous protests and efforts by the opposition parties, the military insisted on its plan and in an effort to legitimize its roadmap, tried to introduce some cosmetic reforms. The President of the Parliament, Mouad Bouchareb, resigned and was replaced by an Islamist from al-Bina after the regime's candidates withdrew.[45] A National Dialogue Committee (known as the Karim Younis Committee)[46] was established to facilitate political actors' acceptance of the roadmap.[47] Finally, Bensaleh announced the establishment of the Independent National Authority for Election Organization, headed by a former Justice Minister.[48]

Despite being boycotted by major political parties, on December 12, the presidential

elections were held, with a turnout of 39.9% (12.9% of which were invalid, hence the valid turnout was only 34.8%).[49] Adelmajdid Taboun, a former prime minister known to be the military's candidate, won the election in the first round with 58.1% of the votes.[50] Just a few days after Taboun's inauguration, Gaid Salah died, leaving the intra-regime power struggles open for speculation.[51] However, Taboun promised to initiate dialogue with political actors vis-à-vis the Hirak, to amend the constitution, to fight corruption, and to fix the economy.[52] He held some meetings with political actors and formed a committee to amend the constitution.[53] Many prisoners were pardoned or released (including one of Bouteflika's businessmen and some of the Hirak activists),[54] but not all political activists were released and indeed one activist was arrested in February 2020.[55] Rejecting the military's roadmap and its consequences, the secular-leaning Democratic Alternative coalition decided to boycott dialogue with Taboun and opposed his rule from the outset.[56]

Islamist Parties During the Uprising

From the moment Bouteflika announced his intention to seek a fifth term until the election of Abdelmadjid Taboun, the Islamist parties adopted very different positions regarding the regime and the protests. When placed on a continuum, al-Adala of Djaballah adopted the most confrontational position against the regime (probably unsurprisingly, given its leaders track record since the early 1990s), and ironically, Djaballah's former party, al-Islah, adopted the most pro-regime posture in the process. On this sliding scale between pro-regime and opposition, we can see the Islamist parties' positions in the figure below.

Islamist parties' political position during the uprisins

Before Hirak erupted, the Islamist opposition parties were planning for the upcoming presidential elections. HAMS,[57] al-Bina,[58] and al-Adala[59] presented their independent initiatives, but each chose the same theme for their slogans. In late

2018, there were efforts to bring al-Bina's initiative "Algeria is for All" and HAMS's "National Consensus" under one umbrella, but to no avail.[60] Having failed to reach a consensus by January 2019, HAMS and al-Bina declared they were planning to field their own candidates in the elections with - Abdelrazzak Makri[61] and Abdelkader Bengarina respectively.[62] Al-Adala, then suggested a consensual candidate for all opposition parties,[63] even gathering the possible candidates, but with no decisive agreement.[64] After the Hirak, on March 3, when Bouteflika's candidacy papers were submitted, HAMS decided they would not participate in elections if Bouteflika ran.[65] On the one hand, al-Nahda, like al-Adala, had already decided not to run,[66] but on the other hand, among Islamist parties only al-Islah decided to support Bouteflika's fifth term in line with the decision they had taken back in November 2018.[67]

The February 22 Hirak protests were not organized by any of the political parties in Algeria, in some ways attesting to the rift between the people and the political elite. Despite their oppositional stances and support for political activism, Islamist parties did not publicly endorse the February 22 protests beforehand. Even Djaballah, who has consistently been the most critical of and non-cooperative with the regime, indicated in an interview that he was rather cautious in supporting the protests due to his skepticism about the organizers.[68] One year after the Hirak, Makri stated that HAMS members were told to participate in the February 22 protests, but without spearheading them.[69] Indeed, two days before the Hirak, he stated that it is the people's right to protest the fifth term.[70]

Al-Nahda also issued a statement saluting the Hirak the same day it erupted.[71] Al-Bina's did the same the following day and supplemented it by stressing the importance of conducting the presidential elections as planned, respecting the constitution, and avoiding any exceptional conditions which might jeopardize the stability of the state (and not necessarily the stability of the regime).[72] Such a position almost aligned al-Bina with the roadmap adopted by the military, even if it competed with the latter's candidate. Al-Islah followed its pro-regime agenda with Bouteflika's post-Hirak decisions (March 13).[73] Even after Bouteflika's resignation, al-Islah's leader, Filali Ghouini, excluded from other opposition groups, met with Bensaleh to discuss possible "ways to solve the crisis."[74]

The National Coordination for Change, the umbrella group of Hirak protestors composed of Islamist and non-Islamist activists, put forth the 'constitution first' roadmap in March, before Bouteflika's resignation. The signatories included secular parties and former-FIS members, and many of the signatories came to deny being part of the coordination, deeming it obsolete.[75] Parallel to this were the longer-lasting consultation meetings organized by Forces of Change to Support People's Choice which included al-Adala, al-Nahda, al-Bina, and the non-Islamist Liberties Vanguard (Talai' al-Houryet) headed by the former head of FLN and prime minister and presidency candidate, Ali Benflis, and the diplomat Abdelaziz Rahabi.[76] They demanded the establishment of a presidency council composed of uncorrupted patriotic figures, all prior to Bouteflika's resignation.[77] They also refused Bensaleh's proposal to reschedule the election in July and demanded a longer timescale to enable the Hirak to engage in the political process.[78]

On July 6, the Forces of Change to Support People's Choice organized the Ain Benian Forum which was the largest dialogue among the opposition, including more than 800 people representing HAMS and the non-Islamist New Generation (*Jil Jadid*) movement as well as the above-mentioned parties and many other groups and figures. In their concluding statement the forum agreed to accept the military proposal for a rushed election but only under certain conditions. It demanded the removal of old regime figures (especially from Badawi's government), dialogue with the military run by an independent committee composed of consensual figures, and an election run by an independent entity to be founded based on the recommendation of a technical committee.[79] The Ain Benian Forum could not engage other secularist opposition groups which constituted the Democratic Alternative coalition as the latter demanded the establishment of a second republic with a new constitution and a new parliament before the presidential elections.[80]

Indeed, the establishment of Bensaleh's Younis Committee (July 25) and Independent National Authority for Election Organization (September 15) were later presented as the fulfillment of Ain Benian's demands. Yet, in reality, they were not, since they were headed by figures of the old regime, in addition to the military's rejection of changing Badawi's government. Additionally, Younis's

demand to release the arrested activists of the Hirak to ensure trust between all sides was rejected by Gaid Salah.[81] As a result, HAMS and al-Adala refused to meet the Younis Committee. While HAMS stated in a single sentence that it refused to meet Younis,[82] al-Adala criticized the committee for being formed by an illegitimate interim president who ignored the recommendations of the Ain Benian Forum, provided no guarantees on which to build trust, and limited the dialogue to the election. This seemingly missed the fact that Algeria was experiencing a real revolution.[83]

The three other Islamist parties accepted the invitation to meet with the Younis Committee, but with varied responses: Al-Nahda argued that the committee did not meet the expectations of the Hirak.[84] Al-Islah, on the other hand, saluted the committee,[85] whilst al-Bina, also cherished the role played by the committee and accepted the invitation in line with their earlier agenda for an election as soon as possible.[86]

As the December 12 elections approached, the Ain Benian Forum was abandoned as its participants adopted different positions in regard to the election. Talai' al-Houryet and al-Bina decided to run in the election with their candidates Ali Benflis and Abdelkader Bengrina, respectively. HAMS and al-Adala decided to boycott the elections,[87] both criticizing the regime's human rights violations against the Hirak activists, perceiving the conditions as being unsuitable for a democratic election, doubting the trustworthiness of the Independent Authority of Election,[88] and fearing that the election would not meet the aspirations of the Hirak.[89] Whilst al-Nadha did not put forward a candidate, it tried but failed to find a consensus candidate,[90] opting instead to leave its members free to choose from the other candidates.[91] Al-Islah, on the other hand, supported Taboun.[92]

The elections which took place on December 12 and resulted in Taboun taking victory in the first round, with Bengarina coming in second with 17.4% of the votes. Hence '*le pouvoir*' was able to abort the Hirak's hopes of effecting substantive change in presidential elections. Nonetheless, the Hirak did not

stop mobilizing and pressing for its demands to be met, with protests continuing every Friday. That was until the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic which led the government to ban demonstrations, and subsequently the protests seem to have come to a halt, at least for the meantime.

Conclusion

Only ten years after Algeria had emerged from a bloody civil war, the traumatic memories of which were still very vivid, came the small and scattered protests heralding the first wave of the Arab Spring in Algeria in 2011. In contrast, the second wave or Hirak, in 2019 was massive enough to force a change in political rule.

The relationship between the political Islamic movements and the Algerian state has an intriguing and complex historical trajectory which casts its shadow over the post-Bouteflika political landscape. During the Algerian war of independence, Islamic identity was affirmed by all ideological groups as a symbol of anti-colonial resistance. To the point that Islamic identity was enshrined in the November 1, 1954 Proclamation of the FLN, which is mentioned in the preamble of the Algerian constitution, and frequently referred to by Islamist parties. As the political system opened-up for multiparty competition in 1989, there was a window of opportunity for the Islamists, which tragically descended into the Black Decade of civil war between 1991-2001. The parties affiliated to, or inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood did not participate in the civil war as they refused to resort to violence and this position enabled rapprochement between these Islamist parties and the regime, which led some Islamists to hold ministerial positions in the cabinet. But this engagement with the regime has now come to haunt these parties as they are perceived, by some sections of society, to have been manipulated by a corrupt regime in return for material benefits.

Over the last two decades, one of the fundamental and most divisive questions of the Algerian Islamist movements and political parties has been whether to cooperate with the regime or not, and if so, in what capacity and over which issues? Coupled with the fragmentation of the Islamist movement, with several

splinter groups forming new political parties, the resulting Islamist parties adopted a variety of political positions regarding their relationship with the Algerian state. Some party leaders, such as Abdallah Djaballah, assumed a staunchly oppositional attitude toward the regime and declined any prospect of cooperating with it on major issues such as election participation. Indeed, because of his disagreements with his own party's factions over the question of whether to cooperate with the regime, Djaballah had to leave his own al-Nahda movement to form al-Islah, only to leave this new movement in order to form al-Adalah.

Some Islamist parties, such as HAMS under Aboudjerra Soltani, joined Bouteflika's coalition and attained ministerial positions in the cabinet in return. Both Abdelmadjid Menasra's FC and Amar Ghoul's TAJ split from HAMS were because of disagreements over the quintessential question of whether to work with the regime or not. Here the Muslim Brotherhood-inspired parties try to walk a fine line by trying not to delegitimize the political system (as FIS has done in the early 1990s) but also trying not to grant legitimacy to a corrupt autocracy. Hence some see them as patriotic figures putting the interests of the country above their factional interests, but some view them as a loyal opposition with no effective solutions to the entrenched problems of the country.

Due to the traumatic memory of the civil war, the mainstream Islamist movements were careful not to openly attack the regime. But when the second wave of the Arab Spring hit Algeria in the form of the Hirak movement, this became a mixed blessing for Islamist parties. On the one hand, they have retained a modicum of legitimacy as they have categorically rejected violent rebellion against the state since the 1990s and have built up their patriotic credentials. On the other hand, precisely because they participated in the Bouteflika coalitions to varying degrees, they have also been seen as part of the ruling order which hundreds of thousands of protestors wanted to bring down. This dynamic in particular has put parties such as HAMS, who have been generally loyal to Bouteflika but broke with him in 2012 under the

leadership of Abderrazak Makri, in a precarious position: Wanting to thoroughly distance themselves from a corrupt order which they now oppose, yet, at least in the eyes of some protestors, these Islamists were in fact a part of that corrupt order.

The fragmentations and internal splits within and among the Islamist parties have weakened their organizational capacity to mobilize supporters. Some argue that this explains their inability to capitalize on the political openings created by the first wave of the Arab Spring, in contrast to their counterparts in Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco.[93]

While some protestors adopted a rejectionist stance toward the Islamists, Hirak also witnessed attempts to go beyond the ideological and cultural binary of 'Islamists versus secularists.' This can be seen in one of the new slogans of the movement: "It's not Islamists. It's not Secularists. It's the gang that's robbing us openly."[94] This resistance to division seems to be absolutely essential to Hirak to achieve its goals. After all, the Algerian regime is a master in the art of coopting its opposition and providing positive and negative incentives to produce favorable outcomes. If there is one big lesson the Hirak can learn from Egypt, and even more recently Sudan, it is that unity among protestors is key to successfully pushing for their demands. Otherwise, the regime will utilize the cracks within the opposition and fragment them by means of divide and rule, pitting one section against another, and consequently it will be the *status quo* which wins out. Today, the protests have been halted by the unprecedented situation created by the Coronavirus. But if Hirak cannot maintain its overarching organization and unity, this will prove far more destructive than a global pandemic.

Endnotes

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

İsmail Yaylacı is Assistant Professor and Chair in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Istanbul Şehir University. He studied Political Science and International Relations and also Sociology at Boğaziçi University (2005), and then attained his MA degree in Political Science and International Relations from Boğaziçi University with his thesis, titled "'A 'Democratic Realist' Foreign Policy: U.S. Democracy Promotion Policy Toward Egypt." (2007) The same year he started his doctoral studies in Political Science at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, U.S.A., and completed his Ph.D. with his dissertation, titled "Performative Socialization in World Politics: Islamism, Secularism and Democracy in Turkey and Egypt." (2014)

Muhammad Amasha is an MA student in sociology, had a BA in political science and his areas of interests include political sociology and sociology of religion.

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Address: Istanbul Vizyon Park A1 Plaza Floor:6
No:68 Postal Code: 34197
Bahçelievler/ Istanbul / Turkey
Telephone: +902126031815
Fax: +902126031665
Email: info@sharqforum.org

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