Why did not authoritarian regime fall in Algeria?

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Abstract

The completely unexpected wave of political protests, spread at the end of 2010 from Tunisia to other North African and Middle Eastern countries, has challenged many granitic insights developed by the so-called literature of the “persistence of authoritarianism”. However, since “only” a few autocrats were overthrown, we cannot completely discredit this vast literature. Considering this issue, explaining Algeria stability, as a counterfactual case, it is relevant. In order to understand why Algeria, even though was one of the first countries in the region to be affected by the wave of uprisings, failed to seriously threaten Bouteflika’s regime, I use a multifactorial explanation. It is based on historical heritage of the recent civil war, a cohesive ruling elite, a successful co-optation of opposition elites topped off by the regime, a powerful redistributive patronage, an effective use of the security apparatus, and a reciprocal distrust between Islamist and secularist oppositions.

Introduction

On January 4, 2011, while Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali was still in office in Tunisia and Tahrir Square in Cairo was a normal roundabout crowded with cars and trucks, Algeria was rocking by protests. Clashes started, as is quite normal for such things, with a series of minor events (Brown, 2011(a)). In Kolea, a small town no far from Algiers, there was an argument between a young man and a shopkeeper over the price of sugar; while in the capital, actually in Bab el Oued to be more specific, at the end of a soccer game, a dispute erupted between disgruntled fans and the police. Bab el Oued is everything but an anonymous district in Algerian political history (Rabia, 2011; Brown, 2011(a)). In fact, it was a stronghold of the anti-independence OAS (Organisation de l’armée secrète) during the
so-called Algerian revolution (1954-1962); and the epicentre of the October 1988 events, in which the security apparatus massacred hundreds of young people who were protesting unarmed in numerous cities. Thus, Bab el Oued was the spark which ignited the entire prairie once more. In fact, soon after that riots had taken place there, other working-class quarters in Algiers went ablaze; while the following days protests swept through all the main Algerian cities: from Oran to Constantine, up to Annaba.

It has been widely underlined that these disturbances were triggered by either a sudden increase in commodity food prices or a domino effect emanating from neighbouring Tunisia, where on December 17 2010 all started. The well-known trigger was the tragic decision of a 26 year-old fruit seller, Mohamed Bouazizi, in the small city of Sidi Bouzid to set himself on fire in order to protest the ill treatment he was receiving at the hands of local officials. In general, it seems that local journalists in Algeria have mainly sponsored the idea that the protests were brought about by price increases (Rabia 2011; Khadige 2011), while the international press has been more in favour of the contagion effect explanation (Joshi 2011; Rooksby 2011). Yet, both interpretations are strikingly incomplete. The theory of the domino effect, while it can be considered important to capture one of the relevant factors, it is incapable of explaining both the absence of uprisings in other countries of the region and the national economic and political specifics. Likewise, the astonishing and unexpected increase of many basic food goods, especially sugar and cooking oil, was certainly one immediate cause of Algerian unrests. It need hardly be said that for the working-class and poor Algerian families the sudden 30 to 45 percent increase in the prices of staple foodstuffs in a few days since January 1 were difficult to absorb. These growths were involuntarily created by the government action, which was trying to impose new regulations on payment transactions. In particular, Bouteflika’s cabinet main goal was to curb the increasing flourish informal sector of the economy, which accounted for about 40 percent of the total (Chibani, 2011; Darbouche 2011). However, government underestimation of the plausible reaction of private sector traders was dramatic. In fact, the latter raised prices of their own products sharply, fostering a vast social discontent. That said, there can be little doubt that the price increases were simply the last straw (Roberts, 2011). The Algerian society has been in a constant state of revolt against the regime in the last decade, since the so-called Black Spring took place in Kabylia, the main Berber region of the country, in 2001. All these different forms of protests and riots occurred in the Algerian political landscape in the last decade are probably tied together by just one aspect: the innate refusal of al-hagra, in general mistranslated as hogra in French. This term is used by the Algerians to indicate the brutal contempt and arrogance with which the authorities

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1 Several cases of self-immolation were reported in the following months even in Algeria. According to Boubeker (2014), more than 150 Algerians have set themselves on fire since 2011, usually in front of governmental and public buildings. Actually, I did not find any confirmation to this astonishing number.
routinely treat ordinary citizens. This reciprocal distrust between people and political institutions has fostered alienation and disengagement of many citizens from public life, while the manifestation of discontent has been limited to spurious and disarticulated explosion of rage. Then in January 2011, substantially for the first time, the Algerians were able to riot all over the country simultaneously, challenging Bouteflika’s regime.

Yet, unlike in Tunisia and Egypt where the protesters toppled long-standing dictators, in Algeria the upheaval failed to gain momentum. On Monday 10, after that five people dead (three rioters; a 36-year-old man trying to protect his father’s alcohol store; and a 65-year-old taxi driver after inhaling tear gas), hundreds wounded (many of whom were police officers) and around 1,100 arrested, peace was restored practically everywhere (Khadige, 2011). Obviously, this does not mean that other less relevant events did not occur in Algeria in the following weeks, when several countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) were rocked by mass upheavals. Yet, the Algerian protesters were not able to avoid the routinization of discontent and a tendency to focus more on moderate salary requests rather than on disruptive political demands. A good example of what I am saying is the manifestation called by a vast coalition of independent trade unions, opposition parties, and human right organizations, known as the National Coordination for Democratic Change (CNCD in French), on February 12 2011, the day after Hosni Mubarak’s resignation. In fact, not only in this occasion protesters were outnumbered by security forces, but also the spontaneous rush of early January was vanished. Therefore, in this article it will be argued, unlike in many other publications, that the decisive turning point in the Algerian crisis was that of the protesters inability to gain momentum in the first two weeks of the year. In this short time span, a window of opportunity to overthrow the authoritarian regime in power remained open. However, the regime was able to quickly overcome the challenge. This was both the effect of a favourable balance of structural resources towards the regime and the result of political actors’ behaviour. In fact, even though any choice is always historically and contextually rooted, this does not mean that political forces are only playing a predetermined script. On the contrary, and especially when a polity faces potential or real critical junctures, decisions made by leaders can be decisive (O’Donnell & Schmitter, 1986). This is exactly the realm of politics and political scientists should not hide it. To conclude this short introduction, it can be stated that four main reasons can give account of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s ability to avoid his downfall: a) the absence of divisions in the dominant coalition; b) Algeria’s status of rentier state; c) the distrust among the opposition forces; d) the security apparatus ability, at the same time,  

2 Different ways of understanding politics and, above all, conducting the protest rapidly emerged within the CNCD. On the one hand, there were human right organizations and trade unions; while political parties were located on the other hand. The latter sponsored the idea of maintaining demonstrations every Saturday in Algiers. This is not only the best example possible of routinization of rage, but also the exact opposite strategy used in Egypt and Tunisia, where daily manifestations proved to be extremely efficient.
to avoid mass demonstrators’ concentration or even martyrs. Yet, before dealing in detail with these aspects, it should be clarify my single-case choice: namely, Algeria.

Why Algeria?

Algeria is the largest and richest of the three countries in North-Western Africa and it is a strategic partner to Europe thanks to its natural resources, notably gas and oil. Nearly 40% of Algerian oil production is destined for the European market. Moreover, Algeria is the third-largest source of gas imports to the EU. Yet, the relevance of the country is not only economy. In fact, Algeria is both a key player in the Mediterranean theatre and a decisive actor in the Sahel region, since its southern boundaries make this country the natural gateway to Mali and Niger. Another important element is Algerian military and counter-terrorism capabilities. Algeria has the largest armed forces in Maghreb, the highest defence expenditure in the region, and its intelligence service (Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité, DRS) is considered as one of the most effective in fighting Islamic terrorism. To cut it short, Algeria is economically, geographically, and military a relevant country. However, the main reasons to study in depth Algeria are related directly to the so-called Arab Spring. Regarding this event, it should be easy to assess that the media and the scholars have overwhelming focused on those regimes swept by mass unrests, which either brought to absolutely unexpected decades-old dictators’ defeats (Ben Ali in Tunisia, Mubarak in Egypt, Qaddafi in Libya, and Saleh in Yemen) or to serious risks for them of being overthrown (Isa al-Khalifa in Bahrain, and al-Assad in Syria). Accordingly, Algeria, as many other countries less affected by the protests, received a consistent more limited theoretical attention. In particular, this unbalanced distribution of academic resources can be considered as the direct effect of scholars’ reaction to their inability of predicting these astonishing events, in a region in which authoritarian regimes were supposed to be

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3 As strongly argued by some scholars (among others, Alhassen, 2012; Bayart, 2013) there are many theoretical problems related to this Western-coined term: a) it is seasonally inaccurate, since protests erupted at the beginning of winter; b) it is not a new one, considering that this label was originally applied to describe the expected democratic domino effect in the entire Middle East after the elections in Iraq in 2005; c) this catchphrase is not able to avoid a too wide generalization among the diverse upheavals occurred in the region; and d) it is not only Arabs who lived in Arab countries and joined the protests. Actually, I do not completely agree with this last point. Indeed, it should not be forgotten that the use of this term is able to address the wide-spread belief of an Arab exceptionalism, namely that there is something of inherently undemocratic in the way in which Arab societies are organized (see for instance, Stepan & Robertson, 2003; Diamond 2010). This perspective, which heavily relies on the un-falsifiable Orientalist logic previously theorized through the so-called Islam exceptionalism (Huntington, 1991), has been seriously challenged by the wave of protests which began in Tunisia at the end of 2010.

4 Although the Syrian civil war is still ongoing, Bashar al-Assad’s troupes seem close to re-gain political and military control over the entire national territory.

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absolutely stable\textsuperscript{5}. Thus, it is not surprising neither the impressive number of articles, chapters, and books which have already been dedicated to these events nor scholars’ focus on decades-old dictators’ downfall rather than on authoritarian regimes’ ability to halt protests. Yet, it seems to me that in this scholars’ attempt to react to their lack of prevision there is something paradoxical. Revolutions, breakdowns, and changes of regime are, in fact, visible only in retrospect. This is because two decisive aspects of these processes often become apparent only once large-scale protests have begun (Goldstone, 2011; Way, 2011). The first one is the depth of the break-up within the apparent granitic dominant coalition; while the second one is the degree of popular discontent. After all, both alienated elites and semiloyal individuals, have many reasons, especially to avoid punishments and repression, to hide their true feelings until a crucial moment arrives\textsuperscript{6}. Nevertheless, what is even more serious regarding this scholars’ concentration on only those countries rocked by mass protests is the extraordinary selection bias which has been introduced, sometimes even without recognising it, in many studies. Indeed, as well-explained by Barbara Geddes (1990), when only those cases that have achieved the outcome of interest are studied, the result is exactly a selection bias. The quite predictable conclusion has been that authoritarian regimes in the region have been regarded, since January 2011, as inherently unstable (Masoud, 2011; Ieraci, 2013), while for decades had been theorized as absolutely stable. Yet, in this article it is argued that this statement is not only empirically wrong, but also incapable to deal with: a) the full range of variance in protests occurred across the entire region; b) the idea that different forms of authoritarianism break down in characteristically different ways (Geddes, 1999); and c) the assumption that each authoritarian regime is vulnerable to some particular forms of mobilization (Linz & Stepan, 1996; Volpi, 2013). To put it in a nutshell, while many previous studies have analysed the main reasons why revolts broke out in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, it could be of great interest looking at a non-case. Actually, to be even more accurate, regarding Algeria we should talk of a potential positive case of autocrat’s downfall which did not occur. The basic and simple question is why, although the Algerians share many social grievances that triggered turmoil among populations in neighbouring states, they failed to seriously threaten Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

Extremely high unemployment rates and limited economic opportunities for well-trained youth have been repeatedly pointed out as two decisive elements to understand the Arab upheavals (Masoud 2011; Schraeder & Redissi, 2011; Catalano 2012). Algeria is not a deviant case at all with regards to

\textsuperscript{5} Regarding this well-established belief, at least among Western scholars, a valid proof was that the MENA region was the only one practically untouched, with possible partial exceptions of Lebanon and Iraq (Plattner, 2011), by the third way of democratization (Huntington, 1991). Moreover, this world region traditionally lacked not only democracy, but also massive popular movements requiring it (Bellin, 2004).

\textsuperscript{6} A different logic inspires, on the contrary, disloyal opposition forces’ behaviour. Repression is in fact the price, more or less consciously paid, to political and intellectual coherence towards a precise way of understanding the reality. On the differences between semiloyal and completely disloyal opposition forces, see Linz (1978).
these aspects. Although, there was a sharp decline in unemployment in the first decade of the millennium, fell from 25 percent in 2000 to just above 10 percent in 2010, it should be remarked that not only official data on this issue are notoriously underestimated in developing countries (Khan & Mezran, 2014), but also that youth account for three-quarters of unemployed Algerians. Moreover, the great majority of jobs created lately are scarcely stable and badly-paid ones. Fifty percent of jobs created during the period 2005-2010 were temporary, compared to 30 percent during the 1990s and 20 percent before the 1990s (Achy, 2013). Thus, it is straightforward that the youth suffer more than adults from this situation, which is potentially explosive given the so-called youth bulge. As a matter of fact, over the last decades, Arab countries have combined three tendencies: a reduction of infant mortality; a higher life expectancy; and a constant high fertility rates. The results have been a relentless increase in Algerian population, which was estimated at 36.3 million inhabitants in 2011, compared to 18.8 million in 1980; and a demographic pyramid in which children and young adults are overrepresented in society. Regarding the latter, Algeria is, without a doubt, a paradigmatic case, since it has one of the world’s youngest population with nearly 70 percent under the age of 30. The demographic problem is worsened by a growing over-urbanisation, especially in Algiers, Oran, and Constantine. When the French left the country in 1962, the bulk of the Algerians still lived in the countryside and in small towns, while nowadays 73 percent of them live in cities. The plausible consequences are inefficient housing policies; the presence of some of the most densely populated quarters in the world (for instance, in Bab el Oued lived more than 100,000 people in an area not even a half mile); and possible unsafe food production, which forced Algeria to be strongly dependent on food imports. Moreover, all these social grievances are exacerbated by the sharp contrast among the precarious life conditions of many Algerians and the astonishing richness of relatively small echelons at the top of the social pyramid. In particular, the connections between high-ranking officials and the business sector at the expense of ordinary citizens is even more unacceptable given that this unfair collusion fosters a widespread and rampant corruption, which in turn brought to waste a vast amount of hydrocarbon rents, in general used to buy social quiescence rather than increasing living standards. Even in this case, corruption is no less a problem in Algeria than in the neighbouring countries. For instance, on Transparency International’s 2012 Corruption Perception Index, Algeria ranks 105 out of 176, with many countries in the Middle East and North Africa with a higher standard (Achy, 2013). The problem of corruption in Algeria is not only confined to high profile scandals, as affairs affected Sonatrach, the state-owned oil company, in 2010 and

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7 Considering that about a quarter of the population is below the poverty line, this datum, as many others, confirms the suspicion that Algerian government statistics are not completely fair.

8 In the early 1990s Algeria’s dependence on food imports reached as much as 80 percent of the country’s requirement, while nowadays it is still Africa’s number one importer of food products, with nearly 75 percent of its imports.
2013 assessed, but it also regards an everyday abuse of power by low- and mid-level officials. The situation is even aggravated by a judicial system whose independence from the political power is the smallest, except for Lebanon, in the entire region. To sum up, the two elements which have been considered decisive to trigger mass upheavals, namely well-spread socio-economic grievances among the population and a rampant crony capitalism, were commonplaces even in Algeria. Yet Bouteflika held on. Therefore, this final outcome asks for explanation. Even because the republican states, as Algeria, proved themselves less capable, compared to monarchies, of dealing with the unexpected wave of unrests which swept the region in 2011. To explain this striking correlation between regime type and regime persistence, many scholars have pointed to culture and institutions (Hudson, 1977; Eriksson, 2014). The cultural explanation is not a very convincing one and it is derived from the idea that kingdoms in the Arab world enjoy a high tribal and religious legitimacy. Yet, this perspective ignored that powerful ruling monarchies rely more on modern structure of power rather than indigenous forces. The institutional approach is instead more interesting. A brilliant exposition of this hypothesis has been furnished by Jack Goldstone (2011). According to him, monarchies have more room to manoeuvre to pacify the people, since they can retain considerable executive power while ceding legislative power. However, it seems that this theoretical perspective can be more applied to liberalized monarchies as Morocco and Jordan rather than to traditional ones as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. The key element to understand why Goldstone’s explanation is partial it is introduced by Yom and Gregory Gause III (2012), who underline that institutional capacity to reform does not always result in the will to do it. Thus, the two authors tend to switch from a static and structural explanation towards a more contingent one, in which the monarchical exceptionalism is figured out through the link between the historical legacy of domestic choices and a favourable international environment. Nevertheless, in authoritarian republican systems the transfer of power and hereditary succession are in general more complicated than in monarchical regimes, especially when long-serving leaders (20 years and over) show a clear propensity to promote nepotism and dynastic succession (Darbouche 2011; Albrecht 2012; Ieraci 2013). Regarding this issue, the insight that authoritarian regimes, unlike democracies, tend to become more unstable as long as they are in power is certainly correct (Quandt, 1998; Ieraci, 2013). Yet, this does not mean that autocrats’ downfall can only occur when a generational threshold has been achieved. As the Algerian case shows, the President Chadli Bendjedid was seriously challenged by the October 1988 events: at the

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9 The dichotomy between capacity and will was used by Eva Bellin (2004) to explain different coercive apparatus reactions when facing serious challenges.

10 The Egyptian case, with Mubarak’s failure attempt to promote his son Gamal as new President is paradigmatic here.
time he was in power for only 9 years\textsuperscript{11}. All in all, when regime type dichotomy is crossed with rentier state variable\textsuperscript{12}, it is self-evident that Algeria, as well as Bahrain, are interesting countries to study\textsuperscript{13}.

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<th>TABLE 1- THE STRUCTURE OF THE ARAB REGIMES, 2010-11</th>
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Notes: A country's name in boldface type indicate a serious challenge to the regime in power. Countries in italics experienced an "autocrat's downfall". An asterisk (*) indicates a "foreign-imposed autocrat's downfall". Source: My re-elaboration on Brownlee, Masoud, & Reynolds' (2013) work.

Inaccurate explanations

In their attempt to point out why Algeria’s regime was able to overcome the revolts that overturned several other governments in the Arab world, the vast majority of scholars have heavily relied on an explanation based on the Algerians plausible reaction to events understood as a recurrence of October 1988. The well-established statement is that the recent horror of the Algerian civil war

\textsuperscript{11} When the protests erupted again in 2011, Abdelaziz Bouteflika was in power for 12 years. Yet, what should be emphasized is that in November 2008 the Parliament approved a constitutional amendment which opened the way for Bouteflika to run for a third mandate in April 2009, transforming him in a “President-for-life” (Aghrout & Zoubir, 2009).

\textsuperscript{12} The article will deal in detail with the concept of rentier state and its implications in the next paragraphs.

\textsuperscript{13} The attempt to demarcate the boundaries of the MENA region is not an easy task. However, combining geographical and political criteria I will consider fourteen Arab countries: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait. My decision can be justified in this way: \textit{a)} Iran, Israel, and Turkey are excluded in that they are not Arab countries; \textit{b)} Western Sahara and especially Palestine are not included since in those regions or states the central issue is political sovereignty, rather than banished authoritarian dictators; \textit{c)} Sudan is excluded since it was involved in a particular violent civil war (1983-2005) that cost nearly 2 million lives and was followed by a referendum in 2011 that established the independence of South Sudan \textit{d)} although Iraq and Lebanon are not electoral democracies, both these two countries show a high degree of multiparty competition (Brownlee, Masoud, & Reynolds, 2013); even more important at the beginning of 2011 there were no autocrats to oust in Iraq and Lebanon; \textit{e)} Djibouti is excluded since this country is located in the Horn of Africa; \textit{f)} Mauritania is not considered since it resembles more Sub-Saharan countries rather than North African ones.
(1992-2002), in which, according to the last assessment of the government, 200,000 people lost their lives, discouraging many Algerians from seeking a radical and violent change (Achy 2011; 2013; Brown 2011(b); Entelis 2011; Khan & Mezran 2014; Eriksson 2014). In October 1988 throughout the country young adults took the streets to protest against the austerity measures imposed by the government. The dramatic collapse in oil prices in 1986, which dwindling from its high of $30 per barrel in 1982 to a low of around $10, had forced the regime, highly dependent on hydrocarbon revenues, to reduce both food imports and public spending, thus implicitly diminishing its ability to buy people quiescence. Even nowadays it is not clear what induced the armed forces, when protests erupted, to shoot at peaceful and unarmed demonstrators, triggering a sudden and vast political liberalization which in turn brought to the end of the one-party system, based on the former leading political force of the independence war, namely the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale). In the following months a new free press release flourished and nearly 30 political parties, representing a wide range of ideological tendencies, were registered. Among these, there was also the fundamentalist FIS (Front Islamique du Salut) which conquered a sweeping victory in municipal and provincial elections held in June 1990 and it even took an apparent untouchable leading-role in the first round of Parliamentary elections held in December 1991. However, in order to prevent that Islamists took over the power, the army stepped in forcing Chadli to resign and cancelling the second round of the elections. It was a military coup. Violent clashes erupted between the army and the demonstrators across the entire country, while thousands of FIS supporters were arrested. In February the state of emergency declared in January was renewed indefinitely and the Islamist initiative passed to a number of armed groups: a crawling and long civil war erupted immediately. It was not until Bouteflika’s first mandate (1999-2004) that political violence returned to be a more isolated and less recurrent event. As should be straightforward by this brief re-cap, the Algerian civil war has been an extremely significant event for the recent history of the country. Yet, stating that the *Black Decade* loomed over the Algerian upheaval in 2011 preventing a generalization of the vast social discontent is, at least for three reasons, completely incorrect. First of all, when we are dealing with cultural explanations, the main risk is that these can both explain too much or too less (Quandt, 1998). Furthermore, an historical legacy which affected political actors’ behaviour is inherently unfalsifiable. Thus, to assess the validity of similar statements are decisive the so-called *auxiliary*
outcomes (Mahoney, 2010), which are not part of the main causal sequence, yet provide valuable inferential leverage. Considering this aspect, the validity of the thesis that imagines the civil war as a decisive deterrent for the rioters, would be strongly confirmed by the lack of violence, protests, and upheavals in the Algerian society in the last decade. However, this is not the case at all. According to Maj.-Gen. Abdelghani Hamel, the head of the Direction General de la Sûreté Nationale, Algeria witnessed more than 9,000 riots and unrests between July 2010 and July 2011. Moreover, it seems that, given the block door of traditional political channels, Algerians have learned that rioting often works and, above all, it is the only way of getting things done. In particular, it is of great interest for my purpose to underline the striking contradiction between assessing the state of permanent revolt of the Algerian society since the Black Spring in 2001 and stating its supposed intention to avoid an escalation towards completely disloyal behaviour. Yet, someone could also believe that, while rioting is a normal political attitude in Algeria, these events are limited to some specific and local issues as, for instance, the lack of drinking water and electricity in some quarters or the absence of housing facilities in others. This argument retains, without a doubt, a certain degree of validity. In fact, when interest organizations are weak, opposition parties are crutches for the regime rather than channels for disgruntled citizens, and the National Assembly does not have any real power, it is not surprising that the bulk of people relies on direct action, rather than on more traditional ways of protesting, to raise their requests to the authorities. Nevertheless, this kind of explanation is weak with regards to the so-called Black Spring. In fact, the civil war thesis should prove its validity during the entire period between the outbreak of the civil war itself and the moment in which a new generation of young adults, who did not experience it, will be socialized into politics. Needless to say, exceptions are extremely problematic here, since a culture attitude which is believed to boost a precise political behaviour can be present or absent in a society, but when it is present, it cannot work only in certain circumstances. What is remarkable of the violence which erupted in Kabylia in April 2001 it is not only the duration of the upheavals, but also the brutality of the coercive apparatus reaction in a dispute that, although the Algerian and French media immediately described as being about the linguistic and cultural issues relating to Thamazight, the Berber language, was actually related to more mundane and traditional socio-economic grievances. Oceanic manifestations took place in Tizi Ouzou, the Kabyle regional capital, and even in Algiers, which has a large Kabyle population and where in June 2001 more than 500,000 people took part in the largest demonstration in Algerian history since independence. At the end of the Black Spring events, the Algerian press reported that

16 The main reasons why protests, especially in the first weeks, were substantially limited to Kabylia were three: a) the protests were reactions to the killing of a secondary school student while in police custody and other gendarmerie’s provocations which took place in the region; b) the two political parties, the Socialist Forces Front and the Rally for Culture and Democracy, interested in sponsoring the protests were mainly based in Kabylia; c) the media encouraged a representation of the protests as strictly related to cultural and identity issues, thus inhibiting the Algerian population at large to join the upheaval (Roberts, 2003).
126 people were killed and thousands were severely injured in the riots, many of whom have become permanently disabled. As should be self-evident, the scale of these protests assess the bitter hostility of many Algerians towards the regime and their readiness to serious challenge it; while the inability of the main political forces to guide the upheavals should be regarded as the fundamental reason of a meagre spread of the turmoil to other regions in the country. Yet, what is even more relevant it is that these events are in sharp contrast with the aforementioned belief that a fresh memory of the civil war, which was to some extent still ongoing at the time, could prevent the adoption of radical and disloyal behaviour by protesters.

Another well-spread judgment among political scientists is that Bouteflika avoided his downfall at the beginning of 2011 thanks to the regime ability to learn from the mistakes of neighbouring countries. In particular, the Algerian regime did not respond to protests with outright violence, but with concessions (Brown, 2011(b)). Among these, the government lifted the state of emergency which had been in place for 19 years and it increased the social spending in 2011 by almost $25 billion, promising higher public salaries, more social housing, increased subsidies for basic food products, and easier access of loans for the youth (Darbouche, 2011). Yet, a simple temporal reconstruction of the events is problematic for this hypothesis. First of all, Algeria was the second country in the region, after Tunisia, which was rocked by unrests. It basically means that the possibilities to learn from others were extremely limited. Secondly, the high degree of violence and riots in the country was scored at the beginning of January 2011 (between 4 and 10), while Bouteflika announced that the state of emergency was to be lifted shortly on 3 February 2011 and that the country was to carry out a number of major reforms only on 15 April 2011. Thirdly, as a brief comparison with the positive cases of Tunisia and especially Egypt can show, the success of protesters in overthrowing autocrats was largely dependent on their ability to gain momentum and constantly escalate from mundane salary requests towards disruptive political demands. On the contrary, after the first weeks in January protests in Algeria had ups and downs. Moreover, these manifestations of rage were intermittent and people were aiming to obtain higher wages and better working conditions rather than asking for the downfall of Bouteflika. To conclude, both the hypothesis that states the important role of the recent civil war in preventing a vast spread of a well-rooted social discontent and the explanation that imagines decisive the role of the government in buying people quiescence are, at least in the way in which have been formulated, profoundly inaccurate. However, this does not mean that the loom of the civil war and the extraordinary amount of economic resources derived by hydrocarbon rents did not affect the final outcome at all. They did, actually. Yet, as we will see in the next paragraph, they worked in different ways compared to those commonly hypothesized.
Abdelaziz Bouteflika held on

The unexpected and unpredictable downfall of long-standing dictators in Tunisia and Egypt brought many scholars to talk about a new wave of democratization in those days (Plattner, 2011; Way, 2011). However, a few months later a political freeze hit some countries of the region, raising several doubts regarding their political future (Diamond, 2011). Needless to say, misinterpretations can be considered, at least to some extent, the collateral effect of drawing historical parabolas of events still ongoing. Having said that, it seems to me that among the bulk of political scientists there was also an unfair equation between autocrats downfall and authoritarian regimes breakdown. In fact, while four dictators in the region, as we have already seen, were toppled, the fact that a transition from an authoritarian regime towards democracy is a more complex path should not be overlooked. It basically means that the downfall of an autocrat can be considered as a necessary, but not a sufficient condition, since this can lead to either an authoritarian breakdown, namely a regime change, or an authoritarian renewal, namely the imposition of another, even if somehow different, authoritarian regime. Considering this issue, it can be stated that Egypt, after the military coup against the democratically elected President Mohamed Morsi, and Yemen, are two paradigmatic cases of authoritarian renewals; while Libya is engulfed, if possible, in an even worse situation in which tribal divisions, a rampant corruption, and a limited monopoly of the force by central authorities have fostered an extremely dangerous vacuum of power. On the other hand, Tunisia is the last hope, even though political assassinations and a long parliament stalemate have threatened its path, of a positive transition towards a democratic regime. All in all, what should be clear is that the conditions to achieve an authoritarian breakdown are more complex than those necessary to oust an autocrat. In this regard, I would like to point out that, although quite paradoxical, the lack of those crucial aspects for the stability of an authoritarian regime can be regarded as necessary conditions of an autocrat downfall rather than of an authoritarianism breakdown. In fact, the type of regime that will emerge when a dictator is removed from power depends on many further conditions that are not only less simple to figure out but also excluded from this study that, in turn, it mainly tries to furnish an answer to Bouteflika ability to stay in power. As I have already mentioned, four main reasons can give account of this outcome: a) the absence of divisions in the dominant coalition; b) Algeria’s status of rentier state; c) the creeping distrust among the opposition forces and their limited political credibility; and d) the intelligent and moderate use of force by the regime.

The absence of divisions in the dominant coalition. A vast and substantially uncontested literature underlines the determinant role of a split in the dominant elite to bring about an authoritarianism breakdown, or at least trigger a serious challenge to the authoritarian regime in power (among others, Dix, 1982; Linz & Stepan, 1996). Regarding this extremely well-known statement, there are
two main problems: *a)* the argument tends to be self-validating; that is, when an autocrat is ousted scholars claim that there were evident and profound rifts within the coalition in power; while, on the other hand, as far as an autocrat remains in power they assume that he is faithfully backed by key players within the regime; *b)* many Western scholars, in order to analyse authoritarian regimes, apply a theoretical perspective that it is too focused on the way in which electoral democracies manage conflicts among relevant actors. In democracy, as known, elections are the main tools to canalize struggles and avoid disruptive competitions. On the contrary, in those regimes in which elections are either no present or substantially a façade, power is constantly contested through even less clear manoeuvres. Moreover, and this is the decisive aspect, while in democracy the equation between the absence of conflicts in the dominant coalition and political harmony retains a certain degree of validity, in authoritarianism is more likely that it can be a sign of un-resolved conflicts in which more groups are competing to take full control. This is exactly the most unstable situation in that alienated sectors in the dominant coalition, which are too strong to be defeated and too weak to take over power, can coalesce with emerging social forces to achieve a twofold aim: challenge indirectly the group in power and setting aside themselves from the dead wood of the old order (O’Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Quandt, 1998). Therefore, assuming that the struggle for power is structurally without end, the conclusion is that in authoritarian regimes purges tend to mean political stability, while apparent harmony can hide internal strife and political instability. Having said that, if my assumptions are correct, the dominant coalition in Algeria at the beginning of 2011 was granitic. A key role was played, as for the entire Algerian history since independence, by the military. Considering this issue, it should be sufficient to stress that, at least up to now, all the Algerian Presidents have been coopted by the army, and of these Ben Bella, Chadli, Boudiaf, Kafi, and Zeroual were victims of military coups, assassinations, or forced resignations following disagreement with the Ministry of Defence (Parks, 2005). Even the first election of Abdelaziz Bouteflika in April 1999 followed the same path with his five competitors’ last-minute withdrawal to protest a suspicious rigged military-sponsored Bouteflika victory. Yet, once elected the new President tried to exercise real power and build an inner circle of trustworthy members. In December 1999 he succeeded in placing members of his own entourage in a number of key positions in the new government headed by Ahmed Benbitour, while in February 2000 he announced the most wide-ranging changes to the military high command since 1988. In particular, these included the astonishing replacement of four out of six regional military commanders. Yet, the most senior positions remained unchanged: Muhammad Lamari (Chief of Staff); Muhammad Mediène (head of

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18 To be more accurate, Boudiaf was killed by one of his security guards in June 2001. Yet, the question on behalf of whom is still unanswered.
the military intelligence and security, the DSR in French); and Smain Lamari (head of counter-espionage and internal security). Another important step in Bouteflika’s attempt to affirm his prominent position in Algerian political landscape was the creation of the so-called Corrective Movement within the FLN, which in turn fostered divisions in the party and weakened the position of the former Prime Minister, and then his adversary, Ali Benflis. Yet, the real turning point in Bouteflika efforts to de-militarize Algeria by sideling the highest army officers and re-asserting the central role of the executive office in the national decision-making process was between mid-2004 and mid-2005, when two high-level resignations came to symbolise the relative decline in the influence of the once super-powerful military officers (Entelis, 2011). In fact, in August 2004 Bouteflika forced Muhammad Lamari to resign19, while a year later, Larbi Belkheir, the Director of the President’s office in charge and a retired general who maintained a pivotal role in the balance of power within the regime, was sacked and sent as plenipotentiary ambassador to Morocco, in a clear attempt to dismiss him from the inner centers of power. However, the prodigious endeavour of Bouteflika was compromised by two main events. First and foremost, his precarious health. In November 2005, when he was 68, Bouteflika underwent a problematic surgery operation in Paris and took many months to complete post-operative examinations. His uncertain health raised serious concerns about the succession process and, above all, undermined his position. In brief, jumping on Bouteflika bandwagon was no more an interesting political option. Secondly, the President was not able to oust the entire old guard, since three of the senior military officers who had played a fundamental role in the 1992 military coup were still there: Abdelmalek Guenaizia, and most notably, Smain Lamari and Muhammad Mediène. In particular, after that the Parliament approved a Constitutional amendment in 2008, which permitted Bouteflika to run for and win a third mandate as President the following year, the confrontation between Bouteflika and General Toufik, as Mediène is commonly known in Algeria, escalated dramatically20. As was pointed out by Huge Roberts (2007), the political power of the intelligence services has never been higher than after the onset of the civil war. This is shown by the fact that since 1990, Algeria has had five heads of state and fourteen heads of government, but only one head of the DRS: General Mediène. The plan designed by Bouteflika to limit the extraordinary power of the military intelligence service pointed to counterbalance it through the reinforcement of an influential concurrent power: namely the DGSN (Directeur General de la Sûreté

19 According to Jeremy Keenan (2010), the dismissal of Muhammad Lamari, Algerian strong man during the Black Decade, was the effect of a deal between Bouteflika and Mediène to share power.

20 It is not clear what exactly broke the deal between the two men. It can be supposed that the manoeuvres to planning the succession of Abdelaziz Bouteflika with his younger brother, Said, and Mediène’s attempt to not to share the same end of Muhammad Lamari, brought the head of the DSR to an intransigent position towards Bouteflika. Yet, considering the limited political skills of Said Bouteflika and Mediène uncontested primary position in political scenario, these explanations are weak. More interesting would be to underline the attempt of Said to get closer to General Mohamed Betchine, Mediène’s former security superior and probably the only officer in Algeria powerful enough to challenge Mediène.
Bouteflika worked hard to pledge a modern equipment, an expansion in personnel, and new police station to the DGSN, which reports directly to the Ministry of the Interior and thus it was thought to be more independent from army influence. Yet, when Ali Tounsi, the national police chief in office for over 10 years, was mysteriously killed by a subordinate and was replaced by Maj.-Gen. Abdelghani Hamel, former commander of the Republican Guard of the Gendarmerie Nationale, many speculations have been raised by the Algerian press on the successful attempt of the military to re-establish their prominent role (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2010). Moreover, Ali Tounsi’s assassination immediately followed a huge corruption scandal that rocked Sonatrach, the state-owned oil company, in which the president of the company, Mohammed Meziane, and three of the four vice-presidents were sacked. Three elements should be underlined here: a) the corruption investigation was initiated by the DSR; b) the four men removed were considered close to Bouteflika, while the only vice president who was retained, Abdelhafid Feghouli, was related to a close colleague of Mediène, Larbi Belkheir; and c) the scandal determined a political upheaval of vast proportion that forced Bouteflika to announce a cabinet reshuffle at the end of May 2010. The removal of Chakib Khelil from the Ministry of Energy, Nourredine Zerhouni from the Ministry of the Interior, and Abdelhamid Temmar from the Ministry of Investment Promotion, three men associated with reformist economic policies and personally close to Bouteflika, represented a straightforward political victory of the old guard led by Mediène (Entelis, 2011). From the mid-2010 on, the change in the balance of power within the regime was completed. Bouteflika appeared extremely weak and feeble, his attempt to promote his younger brother as successor was over, and even the presidential endeavour to reduce the DSF and Mediène influence was dismissed. The lame duck was formally in office and the real owners of power were quietly hidden behind him. In particular, the power hierarchy was unequivocal and Mediène was still the most influential man in the Algerian political life. After all, it should not be forgotten, he was trained by the KGB.

The last proof of this profound shift in the balance of power is, given the relevance of this voice for the army, the trend of the military expenditure (Bellin, 2004; Barany 2011; 2013). As we can see in the graph below, this amount was slightly dwindled, but substantially constant, in the first Bouteflika’s presidential mandate (1999-2004). Then, during the years of the highest Bouteflika political influence the percentage of the GDP devolved to the military expenditure sharply declined. Finally, after the President’s illness and moreover after the turning point in 2010 the trend was completely reversed. In 2013 Algeria had the seventh highest military expenditure in the world and it spent for its armed forces, in percentage, more than the US and Russia.
The distrust among the opposition forces. The recent horror of the Algerian civil war did not halt, as it is commonly underlined by many scholars, the radicalization of social discontent, yet it mattered. Past crucial political events, in fact, tend to affect the future. However, they should be considered historical legacy rather than ghosts. The main consequences of the civil conflict were two. On the one hand, a fragmented political community in which opposition forces distrusted one another as much as they gave no credence to the regime emerged. In particular, the positions assumed by the Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens (UGTA), the main trade union in the country, and Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD), the main Berber-speaking party, of open support towards the 1992 military coup, fostered a profound division and resentment among secularist opposition forces and Islamists, which manifested its strength even during the 2011 events. A paradigmatic fact of what I am saying took place on 12 February 2011, when Ali Belhadi, former FIS leader, and a few hundreds of his supporters were pushed back while trying to join a manifestation in one of the main squares in central Algiers by other demonstrators, who feared that Islamists might hijack their protest as it happened in 1988 (Volpi, 2013). On the other hand, the civil war even brought to a significant switch from a classic form of authoritarianism towards a hybrid regime. According to Larry Diamond (2002), all hybrid regimes are characterized by pseudodemocratic tendencies, in that multiparty elections and other classic political institutions of democratic regimes are just a façade which masks the reality of an authoritarian domination. The great advantage for a regime in setting into motion an apparent fair electoral process is the possibility to include and co-opt oppositions within the legal political
environment, without sharing the power with them, in that the final decisional centers are located in other institutions. Two different theoretical approaches, but substantially derived by the same logic, give account of this mechanism: the so-called inclusion-moderation thesis (Schwedler, 2006) and the dichotomy divided-undivided political environment (Lust-Okar, 2004). In Algeria, this mechanism was applied with particular emphasis to Islamist forces in an attempt to narrow the potential popular support towards the banned FIS and, above all, armed groups after the outbreak of the civil war. Two key actors here were Mahfoud Nannah and Abdallah Djaballah. The two men were among the fifteen founding members of the FIS, yet both ended up quarrelling with Abbassi Madani and Ali Belhadi, the two most prominent leaders of the party, and went on to form parties of their own: respectively, Hamas and Ennahda. As was empirical shown by Driessen (2012), these two Islamist parties responded to offers of inclusion by moderating their discourse towards democratic rules while continuing to work towards some Islamist political goals. In particular, the party led by Nannah, who died in 2003, has been constantly included into coalition governments together with the former party-state, FLN, and RND (Rassemblement National Démocratique), a new political force created a few months before the 1997 general and local elections to strength the political support towards the regime. Yet, the tacit support to Bouteflika was not limited to Islamist forces, but it included even leftist and Kabylia-based parties. Considering this, it is not surprising the striking distance among citizens, who assumed that the National Assembly and other formal institutions have nothing to offer them, and political parties, which were instead concentrated in struggling to either entering in governmental coalitions or opposing the regime’s action through a parliamentary logic. Accordingly, an unbridgeable gap between ordinary people and political forces emerged and this reciprocal distrust brought parties to blame rioters of being without any political view as demonstrators refused parties help, since this support was thought to be just a tactical and instrumental manoeuver to gain a greater contractual power with the regime. Thus, the foregone conclusion of January 2011 events was rioters incapability of articulating intelligible political demands and their concentration on meaningless explosion of rage rather than on a political escalation towards disruptive requests for the regime stability.

21 Both parties have frequently changed names and composition, while the founding fathers and protagonists have largely remained the same. Harakat Mujtama al-Islami, generally known as Hamas, became Mouvement de la Société de la Paix (MSP), and then Harakat Mujtama al-Silm; while Ennahda was renamed Mouvement du Rénouveau National (MRN) and then El Islah. Moreover, El Islah, Harakat Mujtama al-silm, and another Islamist party, Nahda, formed a new alliance, Alliance Algérie Verte, to compete in the 2012 parliamentary elections. Yet, the electoral result was not good at all.
**TABLE 2 - PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN ALGERIA (1997-2012)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FLN (Front de Liberation Nationale)</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RND (Rassemblement National Démocratique)</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFS (Front des Forces Socialistes)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCD (Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamas/MSP/HMS (Harakat Mujtama al-Silm)</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ennahda/MRN/el-Islah</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRI/Nahda</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT (Parti des Travailleurs)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FJD (Front pour la Justice et le Développment)</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The total seats in the National Assembly was: 380 in 1997; 389 in 2002-2007; and 462 in 2012
RCD boycotted the 2002 and 2007 elections, while the FFS boycotted the 2002 and 2007 vote
The FJD was founded in 2011 by Abdallah Djabbalah, former leader of the Ennahda/MRN/el-Islah
*In 2012 the three Islamist parties presented a common list of candidates, named Alliance Algérie Verte
Source: A. Layachi (2013)

Algeria’s status of rentier state. The vital concept here is rent revenues that a regime obtains from external sources to the society. This can take different forms: oil, gas, and mineral revenues paid by foreign companies; or international economic aids that go directly to the state budget. The fact that the principal recipient of the external rents is the government it is of paramount importance since the political elite in power can decide how to reallocate this wealth to the population. Moreover, only a small part of society is engaged in the generation of this wealth, and this means that these industrial activities are labour-saving (Beblawi, 1987)\(^{22}\). However, what is even more significant it is the exception that rentier states introduce to the rule that claims the relationship between incomes rise and government tendency towards more democratic forms. According to Ross (2001; 2011), the statement **oil impedes democracy** is empirically valid and works in many different ways. Nevertheless, it seems that three factors are decisive. The first one is the so-called taxation effect. In fact, when governments obtain sufficient revenues from oil, they are likely to tax their population less heavily or not at all. Consequently, similar populations will be less likely to demand accountability from their government. Reversing the slogan originated during the American Revolution, many Middle Eastern scholars have concluded with the following statement: **no representation without taxation**\(^{23}\). The other two direct mechanisms by which oil can hinder democracy are: by enabling an autocrat to buy the quiescence of citizens through a clientelistic

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\(^{22}\) It should be even emphasised that there is no pure rentier state and every economy has some elements of rent. In other words, a rentier economy is one in which rent situations are predominant.

\(^{23}\) For a brilliant historical study on the relationship between the sovereign’s attempt to raise taxes and the following demand for representation in government, see Tilly (1975).
redistribution of wealth\textsuperscript{24}, and by permitting a dictator to spend a high amount of resources on internal security. Both these two aspects were widely present in Algeria at the end of 2010. In fact, the country had, and still has nowadays, one of the least diversified economy in the world, with hydrocarbons (gas and oil) production that represents 97 percent of its exports, about two-thirds of government receipt, and one-third of GDP (Darbouche, 2011; Volpi, 2013; Khan & Mezran, 2014)\textsuperscript{25}. This impressive flow of \textit{petrodollars} towards state coffers has mainly fostered, with regards to a clientelistic redistribution of wealth, three processes. First and foremost, in Algeria the share of the government total expenditure in GDP was one of the highest in the region in the period 2009-2012. More in general, the pivotal role of the state in Algerian economy, with the public sector that is still the largest employer, not only can be regarded as the historical legacy of the so-called socialist period under Houari Boumédiène (1965-1978), but it has also brought to grandiose and substantially unnecessary five-year plans in which the deficient economic results obtained were the natural consequence of public expenditure aimed at buying loyalty rather than strengthening the economy (Achy, 2013)\textsuperscript{26}. Secondly, the government maintained an extensive system of direct and indirect subsidies covering food, gasoline, housing, and soft loans (Khan & Mezran, 2014). Thirdly, the government granted generous salary, at least for regional standards, to civil servants in the hypertrophic public sector (IMF, 2012). All in all, these mechanisms were relevant to narrow the potential base of social discontent, which assumed not only, as in the neighbouring countries, a clear generational connotation, but also was restricted to marginal sectors of Algerian society excluded from the channels of redistributive patronage rather than engulfing a vast spectrum of the population as in Tunisia or Egypt. Therefore, hydrocarbon revenues should be regarded as decisive in limiting the strength of the challenge faced by the regime in power, instead of being considered, as unfortunately is quite common, crucial in weakening it through vast plan of public spending\textsuperscript{27}. On the other hand, the impact of hydrocarbon revenues is also relevant to strength the effectiveness of the security forces and buy their allegiance. The Algerian armed forces consisted in 2011 of 130,000 soldiers (Army 110,000; Air Force 14,000; and Navy 6,000) with a reserve force of 150,000 military

\textsuperscript{24} For instance, just a few days after Ben Ali’s fall, oil-rich Kuwait announced a grant of $ 3,500 to every man, woman, and child. Without a doubt, a good way to obtain social peace.

\textsuperscript{25} However, less than 2 percent of the entire Algerian labour-force is employed in this sector. For instance, Sonatrach only has 50,000 employees. Accordingly, one of the main actors in the process of democratization, the working-class, and especially those workers employed in directly productive sectors, are marginal in Algeria (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, & Stephens, 1992).

\textsuperscript{26} Nevertheless, thanks to the consistent and deliberate underestimation of the price of oil and gas in budget calculations, Bouteflika’s governments have been able to build a large reserves of foreign currency, which should amount to more than $ 200 billion, namely three years of Algerian imports.

\textsuperscript{27} As I have already pointed out, a simple temporal reconstruction of the events assesses the validity of what is written. The government revised the annual budget to increase public spending by 25 percent “only” in February 2011, when the storm had already passed. Probably, a more important role was played by the regime decision to cut taxes on basic foodstuffs on January 8. Yet, even this resolution should not be overestimated.
and 187,200 paramilitary (EU, 2013). The relevance of these numbers is assessed by the comparison between Tunisia and Algeria. The former, an oil-poor country, spent in 2008 only $53 per capita on its armed forces, while the latter, an oil-rich country, spent $141 per capita (Ross, 2011). Moreover, according to Cook (2007), Algerian high military officers profited from the delivery of business licenses and exclusivity contracts, strengthening their material interests in preserving the system. The rank-and-file security personnel benefited, too. For instance, in December 2010, just a few weeks before Algeria was rocked by protests, the government promised an increase in police forces wages by 50 percent and promoted a three-year back-pay deal (Volpi, 2013). All these points can help explain the coercive apparatus allegiance towards the regime and, at least to some extent, their intelligent behaviour when faced with protesters.

The intelligent and moderate use of force by the regime. In the October 1988 events, a completely unfair reaction of the coercive apparatus to peaceful protests triggered a vast and unprecedented process of political liberalization in Algerian history. In January 2011, by contrast, the security forces adopted a completely different behaviour, targeting key urban areas in central Algiers and simply abandoning the suburbs to the rioters (Volpi, 2013). Moreover, according to the Minister of the Interior, Dahou Ould Kablia, declarations, security forces were ordered to show restraint (Khadige, 2011). They carefully followed orders and avoided to provide protesters with the necessary ingredient for a potentially successful rebellion, namely martyrs (Brown, 2011(b)). Three main elements, already discussed in detail, can give account of this intelligent use of force: a) the dominant coalition was not crossed by internal struggles and evident divisions; b) the military and the security forces in general were cohesive units with vast political and material interests in preserving the status quo. Therefore, they were prone to use force to restore order, yet this choice was seen as the last resort and it was considered potentially dangerous; and c) the challenge advanced by the protesters was limited in that there was no political network (for instance, the Islamists, leftist forces, and so on) capable of gathering the vast social discontent and transforming disarticulated riots in political manifestations.

Conclusion

Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s ability to stay in power and the Algerian authoritarian regime resilience were largely determined by four factors: a) the absence of divisions in the dominant coalition; b) Algeria’s status of rentier state; c) the distrust among the opposition forces; and d) the intelligent and moderate use of force by the regime. Yet, it does not mean that this is a stable regime in the full

28 The military received a similar treatment the following year.
sense, but only that it was not vulnerable to the particular type of mobilization that marked January 2011 events. Moreover, authoritarian stability is challenged by several problems: a dwindling political legitimacy and a vast social discontent; a difficult presidential succession after that Bouteflika, although evidently ill and incapable of even walking, was re-elected for a fourth mandate in April 2014; an extraordinary economic dependence on hydrocarbon revenues, which is translated in the vulnerability of Algerian fiscal policy to the volatility of international oil and gas prices. Moreover, if domestic hydrocarbon consumption continues to grow at its current rate, Algeria will be exporting only gas by 2023 and importing oil. It could even become a net hydrocarbon importer by 2026 (Achy, 2013). Thus, it is likely that in future the regime will deal with new and serious challenges. Yet, the possibilities of a smooth process of democratization are extremely limited in Algeria, given the key role historically played by the military, the weakness of civil society organizations and opposition parties, the extremely small size of labour-force directly employed in productive activities, and the modest political relevance of a powerful and enterprising bourgeoisie. Having said that, we should not forget that future, given the non-predetermined script played by political actors, largely remains to be written.
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