



Arab Reform Initiative

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# **Algeria: Independent Unions and the Stalled Democratic Transition**

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## General Overview and Key Questions

This analysis starts by providing a brief historical overview of Algeria's trade union experience. It considers the movement's historical depth, doctrinal foundations, and significant milestones. It then explores the conditions that contributed to the rise of independent unions in their earliest form, as well as their evolution over time in terms of demands, labour rules, and utilized methods of expressing demands – such as prolonged and recurrent strikes. The study also examines the relationships between unions and official political institutions, which directly introduced roles assumed by skilled middle-class workers during a time of political and socio-economic turmoil. This situation has raised concerns from middle-class Algerians, who have become accustomed to the comfort zone and protection of the rentier national state and have therefore turned to union action – a novelty for the middle class.

Since Algeria's independence, skilled middle-class groups have acted as a “political force” and a sizeable part of the regime's social base within national state institutions. Their union, party, and administrative experiences were fundamental to state bureaucracy. These groups also promoted ideological propaganda from within official educational, religious, and media structures they monopolized. They were empowered by their education and command of the Arabic and French languages in a society that suffered from illiteracy in the first years following independence. However, when more factions of Algerian society became educated, these groups lost some of their functions and advantages.

The main focus of this study addresses the roles of independent unions and union members both as individuals and elites. They emerged to partake in the political labour movement that Algeria had fostered to demand democratic change, following the Arab Spring. Protest movements began in January 2011 and reproduced the now-prevailing form of popular protest in Algeria until the start of the popular Hirak movement in 2019, which was distinguished in several ways. Then came the COVID-19 pandemic, the subsequent economic crisis, and further social and political fallout.<sup>[i]</sup>



## Arab Reform Initiative

Algeria has in recent years witnessed a highly dynamic political period, with the launch of the Zeralda conference,<sup>[iii]</sup> where the democratic transition was considered for the first time by a wide range of opposition parties from across the political and intellectual spectrum around specific political demands.<sup>[iiii]</sup> The participation of unions took many forms, such as union Organizations, while some union leaders preferred to participate as public figures to preserve their union role set forth by law.<sup>[iv]</sup> They also had concerns about the unity and cohesiveness of unions, which were made up of activists from various political backgrounds who do not necessarily share the same ideologies.<sup>[v]</sup> However, this position did not prevent some union members from supporting the transition or engaging in the political sphere as known national figures. Independent unions have transformed into pivotal collective participants advocating for social demands.

These events took place at a time of crisis for a regime that refused to engage in reforms. There were several opportunities the regime could have seized to achieve a smooth democratic transition, facilitated by at least three important factors. For one, the country's improved financial situation could have covered the social cost of the transition. Also, a new school of thought overtook the masses, with a focus on popular socio-economic demands. It was characterized by negotiation and compromise. It overtook the culturalist and religious rhetoric that had prevailed during the 1990s. At the time, this rhetoric had turned into a real obstacle that prevented various parties from engaging in negotiations and reaching consensual solutions.<sup>[vi]</sup>

As a result, Algeria was pushed into what was described as a civil war with high human and material costs. International and regional lobbyists also advocated for political reforms. The regime introduced some reforms by announcing a constitutional amendment, promoting audio-visual investments in the private sector, and issuing a new law for associations and political parties. However, these reforms fell short of the opposition's expectations and failed to address the imploding political situation. This was confirmed a few years later in February 2019. To learn about the role of unions within this context, the study will focus on this political period, which was characterized by widespread calls for democratic transition. The role of unions exposed the Algerian regime's inability to change and engage in democratic transition. Based on historical experiences and lessons



learned, this stance became a well-established political ideology among official political figures, military institutions, and the Algerian elites.

### Key Questions and the study's problématique

It would be difficult to grasp the pluralistic experience fostered by independent unions in Algeria, without reflecting on the history of unions in the country,<sup>[vii]</sup> as well as their socio-professional rules and roles inside and outside the labour market. The experiences of union and their relationship with official political and institutional entities between 1962-1988 (while it persisted) should be considered. That dynamic had many comparable traits to other Arab and African experiences, especially during a historical period characterized by single-party systems and unionism.

The single union – the General Union of Algerian Workers (*l'Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens - UGTA*) monopolized union action in both public and private sectors, as well as all economic sectors, including the service industry and administration. The agricultural sector was dominated by the General Union of Algerian Farmers, but it later lost its advocacy function after the transformation of the Algerian agricultural sector and the move from large and medium-sized private ownership of European colonists to self-managed properties in the post-independence era, and finally back to privatization in the early 1990s.

Union action first began in the industrial and service sectors, mainly in the private sector during the post-independence period. At the time, the state-owned public sector rose to prominence as a competing economic sector, as a result of the nationalization of foreign companies expanding further, or the construction of new public institutions following the launch of development projects in the mid-1970s.<sup>[viii]</sup>

During the colonial period, union experience in Algeria was characterized by pluralism on French and Algerian soil. It involved Algerian workers, namely unskilled workers who were most likely uprooted from their rural origins, as well as city dwellers who joined the service sectors, such as rail transportation. This



## Arab Reform Initiative

union experience was regulated by the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), close to the Communist Party.<sup>[ix]</sup> It was also the most relevant for Algerian workers, given their lack of skills as rural individuals who had only recently joined the industrial workforce. They were more focused on material and economic demands, rather than qualitative ones. At the time, connections to holistic socio-political movements and demand action were greatly politicized. This notion had a long-term ideological impact on the Algerian union experience until the 1980s and persisted until the rise of independent unions that changed the focus of demands.

Algerian workers had also joined the French CGT for political reasons. It presented the least hostile stance to calls for independence, which was a top priority for Algerian workers, even in terms of economic and social demands. Algerian workers held important positions in industrial sectors, such as mechanics and mines during the golden age of the French labour movement in the early 1950s. In addition, the national union experience – which used the same socially-diverse vessel – was characterized by its involvement in the service sector, such as railways and healthcare. This experience helped provide the national union movement with union frameworks and was behind the formation of the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA), given the skills of workers in these sectors – namely the hired middle class.

In addition to this ideological legacy – derived from the French union experience on both French and Algerian soil – one must not forget the pivotal role of national political ideology at the time, which was marked by strong labour and union movements in France and around the world. This ideology had a clear impact on union philosophies since the very beginning of the national movement in the 1920s. At the time, workers in the diaspora – especially France – had formed its social base. This gave Algerian nationalism a labour element before the Algerian War of Independence, which led the national movement to draw more on its small peasant and bourgeois nature in creating elites and refining its political doctrine.

This populist political doctrine was re-adopted post-independence by the national state. During that time, society was more familiar with and vulnerable to class discrimination, so the wider public was not accustomed to preserving or defending the economic rights of individuals and groups. Therefore, it was acceptable for the idea of union monism to be enshrined as part of a broader monism in politics as



well.

### Independence: How and when?

The Constitution of 23 February 1989 and laws governing union action had to be enacted in 1990<sup>[x]</sup> at this political juncture to enable the legal establishment of independent unions that recognized workers' rights to strike and form political parties. It was not unusual for most of these unions to exist within public institutions, such as in the education sector, health, and public administration where the state was the employer. However, there were a few unions in the air transport and public industrial sectors that continued to be monopolized by the UGTA as a general rule. The public employment sectors are characterized by the in-house training of the workforce, with working conditions similar to those of the hired middle-level groups. These dynamics will be discussed in detail when considering union and political representation, as well as their strong engagement in framing elections.

Employees and many skilled groups have long suffered in their work throughout the post-independence period, and even before the historical union legacy. This was due to the unions' perception at the time, which focused on a homogenous approach that refused to cater to any sectoral or professional peculiarities. This experience prompted employees – which were growing in number – to leave official unions at the first opportunity when the 1989 Constitution allowed the formation of independent unions that catered to the specificities of their skills and demands.

These employees were convinced that they would be able to gain greater negotiating power and focus on their long-ignored demands if they organized themselves independently. In old unions, which were dominated by industrial and low-skilled workers, collective demands dominated the discourse. They were material demands promoted based on a centralized decision that was difficult to influence on a sectoral level. It was negotiated with the central public authority, the government, or sometimes even the presidency.<sup>[xi]</sup> It happened several times following covert labour strikes in the public sector as well as authorised strikes in the private sector.<sup>[xii]</sup>



## Arab Reform Initiative

Algeria has indeed witnessed a historical union experience. State employees, such as educators and professors assumed important roles more relevant to their skillsets, qualifications, and speech and writing abilities within the political union experience as a part of state bureaucracy that has expanded over time.<sup>[xiii]</sup> These roles also granted state employees more participation in framing and benefiting from municipal and legislative elections under single parties, pluralist parties, and civil society associations. Educators became more recognized and played several roles in the public sphere, including representation and management, at the local, municipal, and national legislative levels. This dynamic lasted for years before more educated, qualified, and socially diverse groups emerged to compete for the roles that the older generations had largely monopolized in the past. This may be one of the reasons why educators leaned towards independent union action after the decline of their financial and symbolic social status. Their traditional roles of union and political representation were outdated and had reached a dead end.

Unions have long suffered from non-recognition, following the enactment of laws by the government of Mouloud Hamrouche on the right to form independent unions and the right to strike in 1990. These laws adopted various reforms in the context of the events of 5 October 1988 and the ratification of the 1989 Constitution. The government had faced a difficult economic, political, and security situation that eventually triggered its resignation. The country then plunged into crisis as a by-product of the poor facilitation of the transition period following the invalidation of the 1992 legislative elections' results. The political and security situation was not conducive to the emergence of an independent union experience, following the precarious security situation in urban areas where these new unions were active.

This had represented the first failed attempt at political transition by the Algerian regime after the country's independence at a time of great uncertainty and conflict among various constituents of political and military elites. It ended with a political stalemate that turned into civil war once new political players entered the scene, causing a reshuffle of official political elites. The regime was used to resolving political conflicts internally among a small number of groups who had monopolized power. The government was far disconnected from the public, who mobilized during this radical political moment when the regime had little



legitimacy.

The economic situation was also not conducive to developing a new union experience. The economy was in a state of disarray following the adoption of options in favour of the market economy and private initiatives with all their negative implications for the public economic sector. This was new for the state, which was the first investor and employer in the country. These decisions were implemented at a time of economic crisis that later resulted in mass layoffs and the privatization of public enterprises. This benefited, however, both Algerian and foreign private investors. These measures were enacted with uncertainty and lack of transparency amid a political crisis that only grew more complex in a new media environment, alien to Algerians. Rumours, misinformation, and poor professionalism were on the rise as independent media platforms emerged in a country with a nascent media and journalism sector. This juncture strongly reflected the political turmoil that was characterized by deep conflict between political and military elites within and outside regime institutions. The Kasdi Merbah government, which ushered in the post-October period, was forced to resign after one year in office – from 9 November 1988 to 9 September 1989. It was then succeeded by the Hamrouche government, which was marred by upheaval and political instability. The government resigned on 4 June 1991 in the wake of a general strike by the Islamic Salvation Front protesting the project to divide electoral districts, which was accused of favouring the National Liberation Front. At the time, the regime relied heavily on elections as a mechanism to achieve a political transition that failed to secure any real consensus.<sup>[xiv]</sup>

Adding on to political disorder, unions were now faced with a backlash and crackdown by the state even after they were legally recognized. Unions were denied access to halls for meetings and prevented from distributing memos and leaflets. Some union members were threatened and bribed, as part of the state's various crackdown methods. This was due to the bureaucratic mindsets of officials and political elites who had long been created under the umbrella of one single party. Political elites had also been struggling with internal rivalry with the new elites who were created after the emergence of political and media pluralism. These official elites struggled to shed the by-products of their political upkeep. They refused to deal with new union figures in the workplace, whether in



hospitals, schools, or public administration roles. As a result, work relations had been reshuffled in an environment managed directly by the state as an employer at a time of political and security crisis.

It took a long time for state bureaucrats to accept the idea of engaging directly with independent unions, even as unions have become key mobilizers of social and political life following Algeria's re-established political stability at the start of the new millennium in 2012. Between 1992 and 2002, unions played a minimal role for almost a decade after their legal recognition. This was due to the political crisis in Algeria that had made it very difficult for individuals to engage in advocacy and union action. As a result, unions were stuck in a grey area for a very long time.

## Independent Unions: From Legal Recognition to Negotiations

Independent unions have been able to cement their presence in many sectors, including health, education, and public administration. Unions had managed to organize and include large numbers of their staff members across national and local institutions in the country. Employees had distanced themselves from the UGTA structures, which were present but became ineffective in these sectors. The UGTA focused on fulfilling the political roles associated with the strategies of the official regime as usual, despite the unprecedented union internal struggle that resulted from splintering ranks. These divisions led to the establishment of new independent unions that were off to a strong start.

These unions showed a strong capacity to recruit by resorting to prolonged and frequent sectoral strikes over categorical demands at a time of financial growth for the employer, i.e., the national state. They helped professional groups obtain reasonable wage increases and therefore contributed to the improvement of their lives. This achievement helped unions regain credibility and distance themselves from the negative reputation associated with the old experience. It also gave union action greater legitimacy among new groups and attracted the attention of the local and international press.

The recurrence of such strikes across critical sectors – such as education, health,



transportation, and public administration – forced officials to negotiate with unions. The legal deterrence method – the state’s basic strategy – had failed, as did its stalling to legally recognize unions. Indeed, the state had stalled and refused to recognize unions in various ways, such as denying union members official cards, even after all legal conditions had been met. The state’s procrastination went on for years, forcing new unions into a state of unknown legal status. The report of the Federal Commission of Inquiry of the International League for Human Rights noted that after 10 years of constitutional and legal recognition of independent unions, they remained subject to violations and discriminations by the state. These violations were not limited to finances. In this same context, the justice system had been used to declare strikes illegal, before or even after they had occurred. It put into question the people’s right to strike. However, this did not prevent unions from organizing regular strikes<sup>[xv]</sup> to force the state to negotiate. This was not an easy task under a regime that vehemently refused the independent representation of its citizens. The old guard in Algeria always believed itself to be the only qualified representative of the people, especially the middle class which it has always kept close.

The bureaucratic state could not continue refusing to negotiate with unions for much longer. This is because independent unions had often succeeded in crippling economic activity through recurrent strikes that sometimes lasted for several days in critical sectors, such as education, health, and public administration.<sup>[xvi]</sup>

Negotiations would not have been possible if the bureaucratic state and its elites did not change their minds. This was thanks to consistent engagement and contact between official actors and unionists concerning the strikes and other protest movements. Negotiations, however, would have been futile if ministers enjoyed long tenure, as was the case of the Minister of Education, Boubekeur Benbouzid.<sup>[xvii]</sup> Similarly, independent unions had clashed with Minister of Education Nouria Benghabrit on issues of union action, culture, and values.<sup>[xviii]</sup> These conflicts were further aggravated by media coverage, which focused on some of the minister’s real and fictitious characteristics, as well as family and educational trajectory.<sup>[xix]</sup> The media fuelled social tensions by asserting that the state’s financial situation was strong enough to meet some of the demands expressed by the strikes, such as better wages and other demands related to



working conditions.

The state's comfortable financial situation helped facilitate the launch of some sectoral negotiations between the concerned minister and sector unions, mostly supported by the Prime Minister. However, these talks did not amount to formal negotiations at the level of the government, which refused to involve independent unions. As such, the UGTA maintained its monopoly on the representation of workers in Algeria under the pretext that it is a "pluralistic" professional union – a strong confederation with the status independent unions cannot obtain as they represent only one professional group, such as the health sector, education, or administration.

The government's flexibility in negotiating with these unions would not have been possible had it not been for their success in winning the battle for public opinion. Unions still won over the public even after resorting to recurrent strikes across key sectors that had negatively impacted the daily lives of Algerians. Unions succeeded, partly thanks to the support of the independent media. Union groups, however, did not have the support of official media, which was private but still aligned with the government, nor that of rival political forces that were against union protests.<sup>[xx]</sup>

The authorities had rejected all requests to establish an independent labour confederation that had been developed since the start of the millennium. However, unions could have participated in formal negotiations organized regularly by governments, with employer unions in attendance<sup>[xxi]</sup> as well as the UGTA, which still maintained its monopoly over official labour representation, despite the weak and chaotic performance. This confirmed the government's concern with the emergence of an independent labour confederation to rival the UGTA. Unlike the early 1990s that shook the regime in the wake of October 1988 and forced it into political openness, this period was not marked by the same reformist will. (The Constitution of 1989 had recognized unions, parties, and their right to strike.)

The confederation project was aimed at reducing class divisions in the independent union experience and expanding its limited demands, which focused on wage concerns within the public employment sector. It could have created a



## Arab Reform Initiative

new power balance, not only within the labour force but also in the political arena. The government was aware of this possibility and thus refused to accredit the confederation (which was then made up of 13 unions) even after it was officially established in November 2018. However, this refusal did little to prevent these unions from turning to joint protests and strikes under the name of the Education or Health Union Coordination Committee, as was the case in May 2021. This resulted in a strike led by Civil Protection Forces who sought to escalate their actions by organizing a march to the Presidency of the Republic on 2 May 2021. Police confronted the protesters using CS gas near the Presidential Residence.

This strike had raised regular professional demands, but it was prohibited by the judiciary based on an analysis that focused on the peculiarity of the Civil Protection agency, which was technically not entitled to strike. Penalties and legal action were imposed on 230 members who were suspended from active duty. At the time, two different official approaches were discernible. The first one focused on pointing accusations against the protest movement, as per usual during the last period. The second approach saw the President of the Republic calling for dialogue with social partners on the occasion of the Council of Ministers meeting. It coincided with the march of the Civil Protection Forces towards the Presidential Residence, thus repeating what police had done in October 2014. This gave labour strikes a clear political dimension. They were carried out amidst an intense political and social environment driven by imminent legislative elections to be organized following the demands of Hirak. The movement had returned in full swing after halting activities due to COVID-19 but was now faced with a new approach from officials. The state's new approach was to ban marches and use force to disperse protestors, as was the case during demonstrations in Ramadan.[xxii] The political space was tense, as confirmed by an editorial in an army magazine, which pointed accusations towards protest movements: "Under the cover of protest movements and social demands, subversive parties continue their destructive and provocative operations by inciting workers and employees of certain sectors to organize strikes that may appear to be claiming rights on the surface, but that seek to thwart the upcoming legislative elections, thereby dragging the country into unnecessary chaos. These parties and those who had prepared for bombings against citizens are two sides of the same coin. Their purpose is to bring Algeria to its knees. They will spare no effort to implement



subversive plans aimed at galvanizing the masses and spreading chaos, using shortages in goods, rising prices, and incitement to strikes.”

The President of the Republic and the Prime Minister adopted a similar tone in various official media outlets.<sup>[xxiii]</sup> They launched a full blow anti-union campaign, claiming that the economic situation was negatively impacting the healthcare sector: “some ill-willed movements have been trying to add fuel to the fire and sow discord”, as per the statement of the Prime Minister on 6 May 2021.

## The Role of Independent Unions in the Hirak and Democratic Transition

By calling for action and raising demands, independent unions have objectively become political opposition even though they did not have specific political demands. This focus on professional demands did not prevent some union activists from participating in the Muzfran Conference for Democratic Transition that provided a space for consultations and deliberations for political groups and unions for several years between 2014 and 2017 and called for a political transition. The conference was marked by the participation of unions,<sup>[xxiv]</sup> in the second meeting on 30 March 2016, to assert the outcomes of the first meeting held on 10 June 2014.<sup>[xxv]</sup> Several issues had been raised at the time regarding the democratic transition agreed upon by various political movements, including the national, democratic, and Islamist currents as well as national<sup>[xxvi]</sup> and union figures. Political roles were assumed given the unrest and warning signs of a regime in crisis as it prepared for presidential elections, constitutional amendments, and 2017 legislative elections. These were just some of the reasons that sparked the first-of-its-kind conference in political life. Participating parties had failed to coordinate their positions on legislative elections, which they entered as divided forces – except for the political alliance that enabled the Islamist parties to engage in elections,<sup>[xxvii]</sup> between the Justice and Development Front and the Movement of Society for Peace, which consisted of offshoot parties from main movements. Some unionists affiliated with these political parties submitted their applications for these elections. Around 10 unionists won during the reduced term of parliament (2017-2021) under different party tickets. Among them were the



## Arab Reform Initiative

Liberation Front, National Democratic Coalition, the Workers' Party, the Nahda Party, and the Future Party, representing the UGTA and independent unions mostly affiliated with the education sector from many states, including Southern Tamanrasset. These unionists were more loyal to party affiliations than any other union affiliation, so nothing prevented them from understanding social concerns and issues that were debated in Parliament.

In parallel with these political roles, unions have prioritized their recognition on the ground<sup>[xxviii]</sup> and certain categorical demands, such as raising wages,<sup>[xxix]</sup> and their right to strike<sup>[xxx]</sup> and negotiate as a representative labour party. Unions have resorted to long sectoral strikes to assert their presence. They compete among themselves as new unions that were established at about the same time as the UGTA, with which they coexist in the same sectors and workplaces, among groups that lack previous union advocacy experience and have joined union action in the same period.

These skilled hired groups joined union advocacy action rather late, after having felt a decline in their social status and prestige. The Algerian society had experienced changes that gave rise to more educated groups who competed with the older skilled generations. These new groups began to take the old guard's place in the national state, which was also starting to experience profound changes. As a result, the social base turned to the groups reaping higher economic or educational benefits from these changes, thus creating distance between lower-middle-income groups such as teachers and small state employees and the more well-off groups, such as private-sector entrepreneurs and better-educated groups. This shift was also reflected in the political stance and roles associated with governmental representation. It put these now outdated groups at a distance, despite being once used as the state's political weapon for so long within the unilateral political and union experience. As such, the unionists associated with the "old guard" turned to raising demands and union action to offset their loss of social status.

Not all skilled groups that were impacted by the economic liberalization and the new market economy joined independent union action, which was launched in the early 1990s by middle-income employees. This was also the case with state employees; technocrats from the public industrial sector also preferred to build a



## Arab Reform Initiative

professional association that did not necessarily focus on demands, but on defending the public sector. These segments felt threatened by the country's new and more formal economic choices made available by the private sector.

This strategy made industrial public-sector elites – who were an intrinsic part of the state's technocracy – feel threatened. They also moved closer to state institutions. These attempts were illustrated by their engagement in tripartite meetings as representatives of public industry structures. Their position was very much aligned with the UGTA and was utilized to broker a strategic deal between industrial workers, the historic “old guard” union, and public-sector frameworks. However, it ultimately failed to address an efficient process of dismantling the public sector.

In practice, these options created greater heterogeneity within this technocratic occupational group. This group is mainly comprised of engineers and industrial sector leaders who were a by-product of the economic and social transformations that followed after widespread higher education in Algeria. The heterogeneity of this group of middle level hired workers, which could be their reason for not joining union action like employees, has further increased. This was the case of teachers, professors, and doctors who had strong participation in union action after this group's decline in economic and symbolic standing following the transformation of the industrial public sector.<sup>[xxxii]</sup>

Public sector senior officials have employed various strategies that confirmed the understanding of labour groups and continued to be a part of the UGTA and refused to move towards independent unions, as was the case with employees. It can only be explained by the various paths that characterized this professional group. Some components benefited from the economic transition and privatization. This transition is geared towards working in the national and international private sector. Some professional groups had benefited by taking advantage of the unbundling of sectors, just as those who had built their institutions to move from an employee to an employer position in sectors they used to manage in the public sphere. Other groups remained in their positions in the public sector without substantial change. The variety of strategies could explain why there was no move towards union action that did not have a strong presence in this occupational group historically before these economic



transformations. It acted as a manager but not owner or employer in the public sector, with all the privileges attached to this position. Therefore, this specific professional group entered into many conflicts with workers and their unions, especially in economic sectors with management issues and a precarious financial situation.

The strategy now relied on taking advantage of pluralism in unions and parties among these central groups in all their positions. It allowed some unionists to join Parliament as representatives of different party movements.<sup>[xxxii]</sup> On the other hand, these unions used the pluralist media scene, including numerous television stations, to highlight leading figures, who became part of the social elites that emerged after pluralism. It opened up the audio-visual space that allowed private television to emerge after 2012. This was in addition to the coverage provided by pluralistic print media platforms, which remarkably covered the protest movements of independent unions. The media reflected the positive image that Algerian society had of unions and demand action, although independent unions organized protests and strikes that had a direct impact on family life. Union activities would often disrupt collective services provided in a society that was already plagued with poor and deteriorating services in terms of healthcare, transportation, or education.<sup>[xxxiii]</sup>

Independent unions became a central collective actor during this period, as parties also tried to reinvigorate their activities. It was set apart by engaging in elections, as was the case in 2017. Many citizens are no longer motivated to partake in elections marred by financial corruption. They felt elections could not serve as a tool for political change and that mass protests proved to be the best way to express their demands to create profound regime change. Political parties were not present, even though some party bases and leaders were involved sporadically. They were subject to political considerations that kept these leaders from becoming key actors within the movement; except in a few cases, to be discussed in detail below when examining political parties and calls for democratic transition.

## Independent Unions: Strengths and



## Weaknesses

By identifying the inherent strengths and weaknesses of independent unions, or those that later surfaced as institutions in social and political spaces, it is possible to identify the roles in which they failed or succeeded while functioning as organized entities actively calling for democratic transition.

Since their inception, one clear weakness of independent unions is their restricted access to public employment, given their employees' lack of union experience. This is due to having failed in expanding to the private and public industrial sectors. In fact, the public employment sector was faced with an unprecedented crisis of transformation as it tried to maintain some semblance of stability at the start of the independent union experience. The private sector continues to suffer from a massive union vacuum that has expanded over time, unlike the public sector where the UGTA has maintained a presence – namely in strategic sectors such as oil and electricity. New unions could have used this weakness to expand due to the lack of union competition. The failure of independent unions to expand came to light when calling for a democratic transition during the Arab Spring, and especially after the start of Hirak in 2019. These unions failed to recruit groups to organize the strikes that they had called for in order to support the Hirak movement. Independent unions are present in several workplaces, but small numbers. This hinders their recruitment at major sectors or institutions, such as hospitals, schools, or public administration.

Another weakness is their emphasis on categorical unions with the same public employment sector,<sup>[xxxiv]</sup> such as health, education, and public administration. This has made joint action more difficult, even though independent unions launched the Confederation project in response to the regime's attempts to increase the number of unions. In early 2021, new categorical unions were accredited<sup>[xxxv]</sup> thus cementing the State's strategy of splintering. Their strategy to emphasize categorical unions manifested negative results during the May 2021 strikes during the negotiation process with the Minister of Education, who saw that the unions were divided into several sessions.

Furthermore, the unions are also unable to renew their ideologies and doctrines to be able to adapt to national and international realities. As yet another weakness,



this limits them to the outdated concept inherited from original union structures, which were active at a time when little effort was made to form their unique frameworks. Their weakness also showed when they focused heavily on financial and economic demands – i.e., wages, at the expense of qualitative demands, which were raised only in a reserved manner.

Since their inception, independent unions and their permanent management institutions also had a poor representation of women. This could be cited as a central weakness, particularly in sectors dominated by women employees and workers, namely the health and education sectors as per the National Statistical Office. The weak presence of women certainly hinders the recruitment process for unions in the future, especially since all projections confirmed the increasing trend of female involvement in the Algerian workforce. Women were also very active in all protest movements and strikes organized by unions in recent years.

The inter and intra-divisions, as well as elite conflicts among independent unions, are also weak points, given the personal frictions among dissidents. These shortcomings harmed collective action and the formation of blocs, which remains ineffectual in the independent union experience. Furthermore, these rifts have been exacerbated by conflicts between central elites who have assumed national leadership positions and those who remained at the local level. Conflicts usually arise when decisions are set to be made within unions. National leaders are accused of failing to consult with bases and local structure representatives, as reflected in some academic studies. General studies<sup>[xxxvi]</sup> or case studies were conducted on several union experiences and could be reviewed in detail,<sup>[xxxvii]</sup> or even through international comparisons, as noted in this study on Algeria.

Similarly, the lack of openness to the international union experience is also a flaw. This lack of communication is underpinned by Algeria's political isolation, paired with all the difficulties that unions already face when organizing international meetings or participating in foreign delegations. It is also worth noting that even strong international unions are undergoing many shifts as they have to cope with poor standing and diminished roles.

## Strengths



## Arab Reform Initiative

In contrast to these weaknesses, it is important to note the strengths of Algeria's new union experience, such as strong categorical representation within the sectors where they operate – i.e. health and education sectors. This is obvious in the protests and strikes organized by new unions in recent years. Demonstrations were covered by national media, despite the ongoing distrust of relevant ministries<sup>[xxxviii]</sup> which has reduced these unions' efforts of recruitment. This sentiment has created a battle of statements between unions and relevant ministries. Unions have also been successful in reaching demands, such as an increase in wages and improved working conditions when the financial situation of the employer-State improved. This has elevated the credibility of unions and promoted strikes as a means of protest among groups that historically were not used to voicing demands in any form, let alone radical forms like prolonged recurrent strikes. Until recently, these groups were more familiar with the regime's rhetoric and had never engaged in protest.

The ability to negotiate<sup>[xxxix]</sup> could be counted as a strength. Union leaderships have quickly gained experience in the complex and new negotiating process. This came despite being kept from engaging in key negotiations with the government's oligarchist troika – the UGTA as the official representative of all workers.

Another strength is the institutional management within unions, coupled with power-sharing among various union elites who have different intellectual, political, and democratic capabilities. It has often led to changes in leadership for conferences organized regularly by unions, out of respect for their laws and concern for the administration's interference. These elites had suffered in the past. They had to deal with official political interference and poor power-sharing, especially with regard to leadership positions.

The emergence of union elite who were quickly accepted by Algerian society is yet another strength. Unionists had a successful national media presence and engaged well with the press, where they were able to announce protests and participate in official negotiations. Their presence in the media brought employment back as a public debate topic – sometimes at the expense of political debate, which was long dominated by ideological and constitutional themes in Algeria. This was due to the strong presence of religious political movements at the beginning of the failed political transition process in the early 1990s, which



provided for the legal recognition of parties and unions, and the right to strike after the ratification of the 1989 Constitution.

### Political Unions and Political Parties

The relationship between unions and political parties continued for a long-time during union monism until the early 1990s, despite the resistance of union leaders in the first few years after independence. At the time, unions were calling for the separation of union activities from official politics.<sup>[x]</sup> In a climate where this relationship was cemented in many third world countries, the calls for independent union activities did not gain much traction until the constitutional and legal reforms of 1989 – the year that saw union pluralism and the start of independent unions. Algerian laws that forbade any organizational association between a political party and a union does not necessarily prohibit the affiliation of union members with political parties as individuals.<sup>[xli]</sup>

That was the case of union leaders who ran for legislative elections on partisan tickets in several cycles. The partisan-political and union relationship can only be understood through an analysis of the political roles of middle groups during the monism and post-pluralism periods. They were described as a “political weapon” in the regime arsenal, especially in the monism period, during which the regime had used them to advance political projects, such as elections. A good example is that of teachers who were known for their remarkable involvement within the structures of the Liberation Front, after their numbers had increased and became heavily Arabized, bringing them intellectually closer to conservative political movements. Pluralism eliminated this distinction of teachers, once other more qualified groups engaged in independent union activities, such as university professors and doctors.

As part of state bureaucracy, teachers and administration officials were among the top beneficiaries of pluralism as they engaged in political parties, particularly Islamic parties. As a result, connections were made later between these Islamist movements – led by the Islamist and independent unions. The unions were “accused” of being close to this Islamist political movement, which was not historically known for union action in Algeria, but more for its interest in charitable



and philanthropic activities. On the other hand, the left-wing movement showed great weakness during this period. It was no longer able to compete in the world of employment, where it had long played important roles in Algeria and also around the world. However, the National Movement maintained its presence in the world of employment and in union leadership even when it experienced an intellectual setback that cost it its modern spark. It also benefited from its openness to the labour movement in Western countries. The movement, however, paid a price for doing the bidding of the state since independence. The setbacks accumulated over time were further exacerbated by its intellectual-political self-isolation and its distance from modern groups. Its social base was thus dominated by rural, modestly educated, elderly groups, as reflected in its continued victory in local and legislative elections<sup>[xlii]</sup>.

## Prospects of Independent Unions

The success of independent unions in the short- and medium-term hinges on the potential success of the currently stalled democratic transition in Algeria. It is essential to break old regime processes and move towards greater transparency and civic participation. More legitimate institutions and political elites must be produced and emerge based on a transparent regular election process with high citizen participation. This would bring Algerians closer to accepting a democratic transition, a notion that is still rejected by official ruling elites. This resistance is still present in political and media discourse and has happened time and time again when crises take their toll, even as the media and public recognize the regime's faults.

The idea of a democratic transition was rejected by official elites, after being settled by anarchy and instability in the State institutions, as experienced more than once in Algeria. The October events that led to the announcement of political and legal reforms to the 1989 Constitution are a modern example. This period coincided with political violence and a civil war that lasted more than 10 years. It only finished after the collective political sphere suffered a great deal, followed by a failed political transition, from monism to pluralism. Official elites say they resist the democratic transition because they fear possible foreign interference. This took place with the initiative of Sant'Egidio supported by the political opposition



in the mid-1990s in cooperation with the Italian Church. Other examples that they point to are the experiences of Syria and Libya, which are presented in Algerian media as failed models of political transition marred by violence and foreign interference. Former President Bouteflika exhibited similar resistance to democratic transition in the final phase of his rule when he rejected the proposal of the opposition within the Coordination Committee for Democratic Transition in Zeralda between 2014 and 2016.

In Algeria, even if some proposals are “adopted,” they are emptied of their political content, such as the establishment of an independent national electoral body and the promulgation of a new legal and constitutional framework. However, it would occur without consulting with the participants who drafted the proposal. This was the case of the Arab Spring. The regime dealt with its repercussions through partial openness. New parties that had previously applied for registration were recognized. There were promises to change legal and constitutional framework in 2016 without affecting the essence of regime administration, mechanisms, and power relations – which indeed continued unchanged.

While democratic transition remains the demand of many political actors within Hirak since its inception in 2019, the top priority is a greater guarantee of individual and collective freedoms of Algerians. This includes union freedoms, which cannot evolve for the better without the effective independence of union action. This is not only a concern for independent unions but also the UGTA. In fact, independence would keep the UGTA away from mobilizing political and ideological roles in which they dominated for decades under the regime. As a result, it lost its ability to recruit and distorted the image of union action among workers, employees, and many societal factions.

This positive scenario of evolution in union action does not solely depend on this change in the overall political and institutional framework. It also depends on greater transparency and capacity to create legitimate institutions with relevant individual freedoms.<sup>[xliiii]</sup> Favourable economic and social circumstances are also key for this positive scenario to materialize, although it varies from sector to sector.

Based on various socioeconomic indicators, the situation is more likely to



## Arab Reform Initiative

deteriorate – mainly due to Algeria’s shrinking fiscal revenues, declining exchange reserves, and its reliance almost entirely on fuel. The country’s failure to diversify the economy will have a tangible impact on the short-term across all sectors, even those that have seemed relatively unaffected by the crisis in the past. For instance, this applies to public employment sectors where independent unions are active. This could potentially escalate tensions in the work environment in a sector run exclusively by the state as an employer.

These strains may prevent unions from achieving their usual demands, in terms of raising wages in this difficult economic situation. All workers are facing a significant deterioration in their purchasing power, which could also harm the ability of unions to recruit, especially since the union experience is still young and exists in a hostile institutional environment. Their existence could be called into question in different ways, as some indicators in 2021 have already begun to suggest.<sup>[xliv]</sup> The union movement is finding itself in a defensive position in the public industrial sector and the private sector, where it’s on the verge of going extinct. Independent unions and leaderships have failed to strategically deal with these power balances. They focus solely on the sectoral analysis so far, based on their only experience within the public employment sector, which is still in a relatively protected economic and social position, compared to other economic sectors. As such, they resorted to protest movements and radical strikes, characterized by their length and recurrence. When these actions are announced, only the power balance with the public employment sector is taken into account – not the total national forces present during the timing of the announcement.

Therefore, the successful establishment of a union confederation in the future has gained greater importance to expand the prospects of the modern union experience. Public authorities continue to take a hostile position, fearing that the UGTA’s monopoly as an official union close to power is compromised. The confederation project also could contribute to pulling the union experience out of this classification, which prevents wide-scale recruitment outside the public sector. This was illustrated in the unions’ attempts to carry out a general strike in line with HIRAK, before the presidential election on 29 October 2019.

## Summary and Conclusions



## Arab Reform Initiative

The results of legislative elections held on 12 June 2019; the Constitutional referendum on 1 November 2020; and the presidential elections held after the start of the Hirak on 12 November 2019 all illustrated the difficulties of political change in Algeria. This assertion was confirmed when old political parties took back the majority of Parliament seats in a near-total absence of citizen participation. Election boycotting rates rose to an unprecedented level – only a 23.02% participation rate. Algerians had also boycotted the presidential election that led to Tebboune’s win, with a 39.8% citizen participation rate, as well as the Constitutional referendum, with 23.03% participation. Several opposition groups had previously announced<sup>[xlv]</sup> that they were boycotting these events. They also called for a consensual democratic transition, a proposal repeatedly rejected by the regime, which has always opted for elections instead. Consequently, citizens<sup>[xlvi]</sup> were not represented and as always found themselves before a political crisis that required qualitative political change. Instead, citizens resorted to legislative elections, which took place during a reinforced crackdown on all kinds of freedoms. Hirak activists, journalists, and jurists were also targeted by a wave of arrests. The media and political environment became more closed off and several signs warned of a socioeconomic crisis.<sup>[xlvii]</sup> Then came the COVID-19 pandemic which further exacerbated the consequences.<sup>[xlviii]</sup> In this climate, elections could not offer the necessary political reform, particularly since the regime once again reiterated its resistance to change.

Despite the many strengths of independent unions, their future will be more complex in a political and economic context that is now more prone to further deterioration. In fact, unions could have been utilized to contribute to a democratic transition, a constant demand among popular Algerian movements. Yet, unions continue to face inherent weaknesses, such as their failure to produce nuanced narratives to adapt to social and cultural change in Algerian society and the poor representation of women in leadership positions. In parallel, union movements are undergoing profound transformations at the international level that have negatively affected their overall performance. The Algerian union experience no longer has a positive example to follow internationally or regionally.

The crisis of the national state has also had an adverse effect on Algerian unions.



## Arab Reform Initiative

Their social base is undergoing immense transformation and is growing close to new owner groups that quickly accumulated sources of wealth and prestige. Thus, they relied on their proximity to the national state based on diverse connections to fulfil new tasks with new means, such as television channels that turned into a fanfare for regime rhetoric. They not only competed with public channels, but also with the historic efforts of the educated middle class defending and monopolizing the dissemination of regime projects propaganda among the masses. This foretold of the regime's abandonment of political services provided by the middle-income groups. They always acted as a "social sponsor" and later as an employer, with regard to the independent unions present in the public sector. Therefore, these middle groups will turn more towards demanding union action that they can link to political demands, as evidenced by their multifaceted participation in the Hirak movement, which at least in its first phase raised political demands that focused on conducive conditions for a political transition. Middle groups can thus succeed in collating the Hiraks's political and social demands under an economic and social scenario likely to deteriorate further in the short-term among masses, including the middle classes, workers, and owners alike. As a result, middle-class unions can be given a greater role in influencing the development of events if they recognize how to build a successful popular alliance to lead the call for change. A democratic transition in Algeria is still possible, despite all the pitfalls and the regime's rejections.

[i] One million jobs have been eliminated, according to official data, affecting vulnerable jobs. See *Liberté* newspaper, 28 March 2021, available at <http://www.algerieinfo.com/>

[ii] See our study on the roles of the political opposition, available at <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/node/4002>

[iii] It was the first conference that gathered political parties and national figures in Algeria, as opposed to the 1995 Rome platform sponsored by the Sant'Egidio Foundation and held outside Algeria to find solutions to the security and political crisis. The regime also rejected the recommendations of this platform during that period of unrest. Check the link for more details on the agreement.

[iv] See the legal text.



## Arab Reform Initiative

[v] Zaamouche, Fawziya. PhD thesis in common law. *Relationship between Union Action with Political Action in Algeria*, Constantine 1 University 2012. Available at <https://bu.umc.edu.dz/theses/droit/AZEA3945.pdf>

[vi] The radical Islamic movement proposed implementing Shariah Law and the Islamic state in an environment of growing divisions among elites over linguistic and cultural issues further deepening rifts between the elites and many of its social base.

[vii] A study published in *Insaniyat* magazine tried this by examining the independent union experience of teachers in the western region of Algeria to introduce recruitment through teachers, available at <https://journals.openedition.org/insaniyat/15041>

[viii] Development projects were launched as part of the first 3-year plan 1967-69, the first and second 4-year plans 1970-74 and 1974-77, see more details: Dr. Amer Hani, *Reading of Development Plans in Algeria (1967-2014)*, available at <http://dspace.univ-msila.dz:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle>

[ix] Nacer Djabi and Kaidi Lakhdar, *Une histoire du syndicalisme algérien, (History of Algerian Unionism)*. Chihab Publishing, 2005.

[x] This study will not discuss the short experience of the Islamic Work Syndicate that was associated with the Islamic Salvation Front, as a political organization. The Syndicate was closer to the Confederation because it assembled several categories of workers under the same union organization. Activities were suspended simultaneously with the dissolution of the Islamic Salvation Front after the failure of the general strike it had called for after the results of the legislative elections in 1992. It will not talk about the Ahsan Syndicate of the Hams Islamic Movement - the Muslim Brotherhood - which quickly disappeared.

[xi] Labor strikes in some critical sectors such as shipping and railways used to reach Boumédiène personally, who would decide on their demands.

[xii] The Labor Law recognized the right of workers in the private sector to organize a strike and but stayed silent on the issue in the public sector without overtly authorizing it until 1990, when the right was recognized for all workers, including



state employees, except for a few groups such as the police and prison guards.

See Koriche Nasr-eddine, *Justice and Conflict Management at Work*, available at <https://journals.openedition.org/anneemaghreb/351?lang=en>

[xiii] Nazih N . Ayubi, *Over-Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*, translated by Amjad Hussein, Centre for Arab Unity Studies Beirut 2010.

[xiv] The project to divide electoral districts was accused of favoring the parties in power in rural and desert areas, such as the Liberation Front - the party of the Prime Minister - at the expense of the Islamic Front whose presence was more prominent in urban areas in the north of the country.

[xv] See Al-Shorouk's daily coverage of teachers' strike initiated by independent unions on 8 November 2009, available at <https://www.echoroukonline.com%>

[xvi] As what happened in mid-Ramadan, when the education unions announced their intention to strike on 9-11 May 2021. At the same time, Civil Protection Forces were on national strike and marched to the Presidency of the Republic, they were confronted by the police on the 2 May 2021. This situation led the President of the Republic to call for dialogue with social partners in sectors that showed discontent, such as health and education. And before that, the postal sector was also on strike. See: <https://www.france24.com/ar>

[xvii] Boubekour Benbouzid served as Minister of Higher Education between 1994-1997 and Minister of Civic Education until 2012, when the pluralist union experience was launched in the education sector and before that the higher education sector, with the experience of the National Council of Professors of Higher Education, which mobilized union action during this period.

[xviii] Nouria Benghabrit's poor command of the Arabic language and some of the reported allegations about her family and political background have led some unions to take hostile stances towards her. This affected the social environment in the sector during her mandate as Minister of Education between 2014-2019, which was marked by many strikes.

[xix] The appointment of Nouria Benghabrit as the Head of the Ministry of Education did not respect the sector that characterized the division of ministerial



posts between the francized and arabized elites that the Ministry of Education had traditionally held. See our study on the subject of political elites and their relations with linguistic and value divisions. Nacer Djabi. *Algeria: The State and the Elites*, Dar Al-Shehab Publishing house, Algeria 2008.

[xx] Most TV stations that were established after 2012 are owned by businessmen. They were later accused of corruption and imprisoned after the 2020 Hirak. Ali Haddad, for instance, had owned the *Waqt El Djazair* newspaper, and two television stations until he was imprisoned and his two stations closed. This is also the case of Mahieddine Tahkout, owner of Numidia TV.

[xxi] Consecutive governments accepted the plurality of employers' unions. However, they insisted on rejecting pluralism from the part of workers whose representation was monopolized by the UGTA.

[xxii] It was also the case during the 114th and 155th marches that took place in the month of Ramadan 2021 on 14 and 21 May. They suffered the same fate of the student marches organized during the same period.

[xxiii] See the statement of the Prime Minister on 6 May regarding the labor strikes that took place during this last period -Ramadan 2021, available at <https://www.elbilad.net/Article/>

[xxiv] See the constituent declaration of the National Opposition Consultation and Monitoring Body, available at

<https://www.facebook.com/HmsDz/posts/976496609100288/>

[xxv] See the outline of the draft of the first Conference for Freedoms and Democratic Transition, which was presented by the Coordination Committee for Democratic Transition after the first Muzfran meeting on 10 June 2014, available at <https://hoggar.org/2014/06/01>

[xxvi] Five former heads of government, such as Ahmed Benbitour, Ali Benflis, Miqdad Saifi, Sid Ahmed Ghozali and Mouloud Hamrouche Ziada, participated in the conference, whose sessions were chaired by a former minister, Abdelziz Rahabi. Former ministers and political officials were also in attendance.



## Arab Reform Initiative

[xxvii] The alliance - the Renaissance, Justice and Building - took place among parties that were originally one party before splintering at intervals from the main movement, the Nahda Movement (Rnaissance), which was led by Sheikh Abdullah Jaballah. In addition to the New Building party which split from the Movement of Society for Peace. It won 15 seats, while the Hams led coalition won 33 seats in alliance with the Front for Change, a splinter that came to exist under former leader Abdul Majid Manasreh.

[xxviii] According to a statement by the Ministry of Labor issued in April 2018, only 17 unions operating within the framework of the law were recognized. See: <https://www.ennaharonline.com>

[xxix] In the statement announcing its establishment under the Temporary Coordination Committee of Secondary and Vocational Education on 6 March 2003, the Independent National Autonomous Council of Teaching Staff in the Ternary Education Sector CNAPESTE raised several demands including a 100% increase in wages of secondary and vocational educators, the enactment of the Law on Secondary and Vocational Educators, and the right to retire after 25 years of active service.

[xxx] In order to escalate the impact of protest movements, unions organized marches in the streets and public squares on 26 May in several Algerian cities. Marches were led by union leaders and headed to the Ministry of Education.

[xxxi] Cadres of public companies in Algeria, Privileges of Downgrading, *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, p. 105-106, 2012, available at <http://journals.openedition.org/remmm/2729>

[xxxii] More than a dozen unionists have joined Parliament as deputies with the parties Political Islam, Liberation Front, and the National Democratic Coalition in the last parliamentary term 2017-2021. An interview with A.M., a unionist MP, compared to a larger number in previous parliamentary terms.

[xxxiii] See the details of the strikes in terms of their causes and consequences in the education sector in particular in the study conducted by Mounir Sawalha from the University of Tebessa on unionization and strikes in Algeria, available at <https://platform.almanhal.com/Files/2/50506>



## Arab Reform Initiative

[xxxiv] Several new unions were formed within each sector for some professional paths which raised the concerns of accredited unions. This was the case of the education sector, where 23 unions were recognized across a short period during 2021, see: <https://ultraalgeria.ultrasawt.com/>

[xxxv] For more details about the development of the education sector in terms of the number of teachers and professors, see

[xxxvi] See Laila Tamin. *Bureaucratic Transformation Process in Union Organization*. Master's degree from Annaba University 1998, available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/insaniyat/8888>

[xxxvii] See the Master's Thesis by student Abdel Wahed Hosni from the University of Oran about the CNAPESTE of Ain Temouchent, which was presented in 2016, available at

[http://www.univ-oran2.dz/images/these\\_memoires/FSS/Magister/TMSS-39/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9%20%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A9%20PDF.pdf](http://www.univ-oran2.dz/images/these_memoires/FSS/Magister/TMSS-39/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9%20%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A9%20PDF.pdf)

[xxxviii] All strikes organized by unions are targeted by distrust as reflected in the national media and conflicting statements about the actual participation rates, like all strikes around the world.

[xxxix] Samir Sghir, *Negotiations and Strikes in Algeria after 1988. Case study of the Independent National Council Union*, Doctoral Thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Algiers 2, 2021.

[xl] Among the leaders who defended the independence of union action from politics, one must note the famous unionist, known for his writing on this subject:

Boualem Bourouiba. *The Algerian Union Movement Against Power Struggles -1962-63*, Naqd Magazine, No.4, 1993.

Or his book published posthumously:

Boualem Bourouiba, *UGTA in the first years of the 62-65 independence*.

[xli] Article 5 of the Electoral Code states the following: Union organizations are



distinguished in their goal, nomenclature, and administration from any political association. They cannot be linked in structure or in membership to any association of a political nature, or receive subsidies, gifts or bequests in any way from these associations. They cannot participate in their funding. However, members of the union organization are entitled to join in an individual capacity in associations of a political nature.

[xlii] Nacer Djabi, *Algeria: The State and the Elites*, Dar Al-Shehab publishing house, 2008.

[xliii] The legislative elections held on 12 June once again confirmed the inability of this type of election to become a means of political change that would contribute to a successful democratic transition, after being boycotted by large groups of citizens and many political parties. The result was the return of the same traditional conservative political forces rejecting political change.

[xliv] The editorial of the army mentioned in this study as a reference.

[xlv] All democratic parties consisting of left-wing parties and the Rally for Culture and Democracy boycotted these elections in addition to the Socialist Forces Front.

[xlvi] The Liberation Front only secured the lead in Parliament with 828,287 votes out of a total of 23 million registered voters in the election. The Front won 98 seats, compared to 208,000 votes for the Hams Movement, which in turn won 65 seats. The National Democratic Rally secured 58 seats based on 190,000 votes. 153,987 votes won the Future Front 48 seats, and finally, 106,000 votes allowed the National Construction Movement to win 39 seats out of a total of 23 million voters, of whom only 23% participated in these elections. The canceled ballot papers exceeded the one million mark.

For more details see the Announcement of the Constitutional Council issued in the Official Gazette, available at

<https://www.joradp.dz/FTP/jo-part123/A2021051.pdf>

[xlvii] This period was marked by a drought that forced authorities to reduce the distribution of water to major cities such as the capital, where residents of some



neighborhoods resorted to blocking public roads and taking to the streets. This phenomenon is likely to worsen in light of the delayed rainfall until autumn.

[xlvi] Hafida Ameyar.( direction) Algeria in the COVID pandemic, crises, Hirak, and decantation. Published by friends of Abdelhamid Benzine. Algiers. 2020



# Arab Reform Initiative

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## About Arab Reform Initiative

The Arab Reform Initiative is the leading independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality and social justice.

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