



## Study of Internal Conflict (SOIC) Case Studies

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### Algeria 1992–2002

#### Executive Summary

Algeria experienced an internal conflict between the ruling party, the National Liberation Front (FLN), and numerous Islamist factions from January 1992 to February 2002. One of the attributed triggers of the conflict was the flawed transition to multiparty democracy and the integration of opposing factions into the political system between 1988 and 1991.<sup>1</sup> In 1991, parliamentary elections were held, where the opposition Islamic Opposition Front (FIS) was projected for an electoral victory in the second round of voting. Fearing an Islamist victory, however, the military stepped in and canceled the second round of the elections, launching a coup that forced President Chadli Bendjedid to resign, and it assumed control of the government. FIS leaders were arrested, and resistance was generally repressed. Three major armed groups emerged—the Islamic Armed Movement (MIA, based largely in the mountains), the hard-line Armed Islamic Group (GIA, primarily urban), and the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS).<sup>2</sup>

Attempts to unite the rebel groups as an armed wing of the FIS were made but ultimately failed when the Algerian military uncovered their plans and launched an attack to stop these efforts.<sup>3</sup> The motivation to engage in the conflict differed for each Islamist faction. The MIA and AIS were driven by political issues, hoping to force the regime to reinstate political pluralism. Their attacks were almost exclusively targeted towards security forces and government officials. The GIA wished to unleash a “total war” driven by religious and ideological motives, and it targeted civilians and all those who opposed their *jihad*.<sup>4</sup>

In the early to mid-1990s, the scale of violence peaked with widespread violence targeting civilians, scholars, journalists, and foreign nationals.<sup>5</sup> Elections held in 1995 were won by General Liamine Zéroual, the army’s candidate, and a gradual decline in violence occurred in the following years. Negotiations were held between the military and the FIS, which led to a 1997 truce under which some militants laid down arms. However, lasting peace negotiations came after the 1999 election of Abdelaziz Bouteflika as president. The Civil Harmony Law delineated terms of conditional amnesty for Islamists involved in the conflict if they were willing to stop fighting by January of 2000 and comply with the terms of the surrender.<sup>6</sup>

#### Assessing the Five Factors

##### 1. Was the country at the time of the conflict a nation?

**Yes.** Following the struggle for independence from French colonial rule, building a national cultural identity was fundamental to the country’s unification. In this case, Algerian nationalism was centered around being Arab and Muslim. In the early 1990s, approximately 99 percent of the population were ethnically Arab-Berbers and Sunni-Muslim.<sup>7</sup>

**2. Was the government perceived as legitimate by 85 percent of the population?**

**No.** A combination of elite politics and authoritarian governments excluded the population from formal political participation in Algeria until attempts at democratization began in 1988. Even so, civic participation was low in the first free and fair elections in 1990–91.<sup>8</sup> The projected FIS victory led to the military canceling the second round of elections, overthrowing the government, and becoming the de facto government of Algeria.<sup>9</sup> During the first stage of the conflict, the population generally supported the groups and the Islamic cause. The expansion of the conflict into a terror campaign of indiscriminate killings, however, decreased public support for the insurgent groups. Moreover, the 1999 presidential election witnessed a withdrawal of six of the seven candidates due to claims of electoral fraud.<sup>10</sup>

**3. Did the government maintain or achieve security control over roughly 85 percent of the country's overall population?**

**No → Yes.** Part of the government's strategy to dismantle and contain the insurgent groups involved indiscriminate violence toward the factions, often resulting in civilian casualties. Nonetheless, the counterinsurgency efforts were less brutal than the insurgents themselves. By the mid-to-late 1990s, levels of violence had declined, and the government had weakened the insurgents to the point where attacks were isolated and on a lower scale. Estimates show that more than 100,000 people were killed, and more than one million Algerians were displaced as a result of the conflict.<sup>11</sup>

**4. Did the rebel movement have persistent access to external sanctuary in a neighboring country to a militarily significant degree?**

**No.** Although some insurgent groups had support from Algerians in Europe and brief assistance from Libya at the beginning of the conflict, these efforts were not to a significant degree to be considered external sanctuary. Most Arab countries supported the regime against the insurgency.<sup>12</sup>

**5. Was there a government army or armed constabulary force in existence at the start of the conflict?**

**Yes.** The Algerian military has always played a significant role in the country's politics, and by 1989, the country's defense forces comprised the army, navy, air force, and national gendarmerie. In addition, approximately 18 percent of the country's GDP was allocated to sustain these forces.<sup>13</sup>

## **Outcome**

Technically a government defeat. The war began when the military canceled an election which an Islamist group, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was poised to win. The political party in power before the coup eventually returned to lead the government, but the military government in power when the civil war began was not in power when it ended. A round of elections held in 1995 was won by General Liamine Zéroual, the army's candidate. During the conflict, the insurgent groups were splintered and frequently fought each other. In a tactical sense, most of the various insurgent groups were destroyed or surrendered during the conflict, and the insurgents were not successful in seizing power in the country. They did, however, force political negotiations which led to the removal of the military government and a return to democracy. The Algerian War was a complex internal conflict between multiple Islamist factions and the government. After almost a decade of violence, support for the insurgent cause decreased, boosting government efforts at a national reconciliation plan. The new government that emerged from peace talks granted conditional

amnesty to those who participated in the conflict. Within the definition used by the SOIC research program of government victory, an argument could be made for both “government victory” and “government defeat.” The government in power when the fighting started, the military junta, and later its leader General Liamine Zérroual, however, were not in power when it ended, so under the standing rubric, this case is classified as a government defeat. This case supports the Five Factors model.

ALGERIA 1992–2002	
NATIONAL IDENTITY	YES
GOVERNMENT LEGITIMACY	NO
POPULATION SECURITY	NO → YES
EXTERNAL SANCTUARY	NO
EXISTING SECURITY FORCES	YES

## Endnotes

1. Max Junbo Tao, “Reflections on Failed Democratization and Civil War in Algeria,” *Oxford Political Review*, December 31, 2022, <https://oxfordpoliticalreview.com/2022/11/19/reflections-on-failed-democratization-and-civil-war-in-algeria/>; and Robert Mortimer, “Islamists, Soldiers, and Democrats: The Second Algerian War,” *Middle East Journal* 50, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4328894>.
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3. Mohammed M. Hafez, “Armed Islamist Movements and Political Violence in Algeria,” *Middle East Journal* 54, no. 4 (Autumn 2000): 574–75, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4329544>.
4. Schulhofer-Wohl, “Algeria,” 110; and Luis Martínez, *The Algerian Civil War: 1990–1998*, trans. Jonathan Derrick (Columbia University Press, 2000), 198–202.
5. Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, trans. Anthony F. Roberts (Harvard University Press, 2002), 255; and Rachid Tlemçani, *Algeria under Bouteflika: Civil Strife and National Reconciliation*, Carnegie Papers, no. 7 (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008): 4, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12738>.
6. Tlemçani, “Algeria under Bouteflika,” 5–7.
7. Jessica A. Northey, “Algerian Heritage Associations: National Identity and Rediscovering the Past,” in *Algeria Nation, Culture and Transnationalism: 1988–2015*, vol. 8 (Liverpool University Press, 2017), 100–11; and CIA, “Algeria,” *World Factbook* (CIA, 1990), 4.
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9. Benjamin Stora, “The History of Algeria since Independence,” in *Algeria, 1830–2000: A Short History*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Cornell University Press, 2001), 117–19; and CIA, “Algeria.”

10. Christopher Paul et al., “Detailed Overviews of 30 Counterinsurgency Cases,” in *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers: Detailed Counterinsurgency Case Studies* (RAND Corporation, 2010), 168–78, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mg964-1osd.8>; Tlemçani, *Algeria under Bouteflika*, 4; and US Department of State (DOS), “Algeria,” in *1999 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (DOS, 2000), [https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/human\\_rights/1999\\_hrp\\_report/algeria.html](https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/human_rights/1999_hrp_report/algeria.html).
11. Hafez, “Armed Islamist Movements,” 591; Kepel, “Jihad,” 254; Tlemçani, *Algeria under Bouteflika*, 4; and Paul et al., “Counterinsurgency Cases,” 169–74.
12. Miguel Hernando De Larramendi, “Intra-Maghrebi Relations: Unitary Myth and National Interests,” in *North Africa: Politics, Region, and the Limits of Transformation*, ed. Yahia H. Zoubir and Haizam Amirah-Fernández (Routledge, 2008), 183–84; Riadh Siadoui, “Islamic Politics and the Military: Algeria 1962–2008,” in *Religion and Politics: Islam and Muslim Civilization*, ed. Jan-Erik Lane and Hamadi Redissi (Routledge, 2017), 243; and Paul, “Counterinsurgency Cases,” 169–74.
13. CIA, “Algeria”; DOS, “Algeria”; Mortimer, “Second Algerian War,” 20; and John P. Entelis and Lisa Arone, “Government and Politics,” in *Algeria: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz (Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, 1993), 204, [https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/master/frd/frdcstdy/al/algeriacountryst00metz\\_0/algeriacountryst00metz\\_0.pdf](https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/master/frd/frdcstdy/al/algeriacountryst00metz_0/algeriacountryst00metz_0.pdf).



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