



ALGERIA: ANALYZING THE 2015 POWER STRUGGLE AT THE HEART OF THE 2019 UNREST

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INTRODUCTION

Algeria has come under the spotlight in 2019 with the onset of the 22nd February protest movement, following the announcement of former president Bouteflika to run for a fifth mandate¹ despite his critical health condition and his long-time absence from the public scene. Bouteflika's intention to run for office sparked a chain of reactions that culminated in the largest, most enduring anti-system protest movement the country has known in recent years. What came to be known as the 22nd February movement recently celebrated its first year with Algerians still marching every Friday, calling for changes in the system.²

However, Algeria's political turmoil did not start in 2019. Although the 2011 protests were mediatized being in the framework of the Arab Spring³, a less internationally analyzed power overturning happened a few years later. However, Algeria's political turmoil did not start in 2019. Although the 2011 protests were mediatized being in the framework of the Arab Spring⁴, a less

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Algeria's current social unrest did not start in 2019. It is deeply rooted in old power struggles within the regime as well as a popular dissatisfaction with governance in the country.
- These dynamics did stop neither with the dismissal of former president Bouteflika nor with the death of the army's former Chief of Staff Gaid Salah.
- *Le Pouvoir* has been adapting its narrative according to its priorities and interests, emphasizing notably on statehood, security or history.

internationally analyzed power overturning happened a few years later. What observers⁵ qualified as a political quake was marked by the dismissal or the forced retirement – depending on interpretations – of the

¹ <https://www.france24.com/en/20190223-algeria-protest-bouteflika-election-bid>

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/02/22/algerians-have-been-protesting-year-heres-what-you-need-know/>

³ Chena, S. (2011). L'Algérie dans le « Printemps arabe » entre espoirs,

initiatives et blocages. *Confluences Méditerranée*, N° 77(2), p.105.

⁴ Chena, S. (2011). L'Algérie dans le « Printemps arabe » entre espoirs, initiatives et blocages. *Confluences Méditerranée*, N° 77(2), p.105.

⁵ Dris, C. (2016). Algérie politique 2015 : Mise à la retraite du général Médiène et restructuration du DRS. *L'Année du Maghreb*, (15), pp.185-202. 1

army's Lieutenant-General Mohamed Lamine Mediene, alias Toufik, from his position as the head of the Intelligence and Security Department (DRS) in 2015.⁶

Mediene headed this crucial department for twenty-five years, earning himself the nickname of "Algeria's God".⁷ While some wanted to market this restructuring as the onset of a civil tradition within a State that has been firmly controlled by the military since its independence in 1962, it should rather be analyzed in the framework of Bouteflika's decision to run for a fourth mandate in the 2014 presidential elections⁸.

This paper's initial aim was to evaluate the change in discourse of the Algerian regime regarding the media with the onset of the Hirak in 2019. For this purpose, we chose to analyze the vocabulary used by the Algerian Head of State on the national press day, an annual speech tradition that started in 2013⁹. This specific date was chosen for its historical significance as the 22nd of October 1955 marked the day of the first edition of the newspaper "El-Mouqawama El-Djazairia"¹⁰, the media outlet of the National Liberation Front (FLN) and of the national liberation army (ALN).¹¹ Surprisingly, an analysis of the categories of vocabulary used in the speeches across the years did not reveal a significant change in 2019, the first post-Bouteflika era discourse. New trends rather emerged in 2016, shifting our focus to the internal power struggle that started a couple of years prior.

2. METHODOLOGY

In order to analyze the relationship between the Algerian State and media, this research used a method of discourse analysis called "text mining". This is where unstructured data, such as social media posts, speeches or other discourse, is analyzed through identifying words, and/or phrases, which are then categorized and measured accordingly. This secondary step is often called natural language processing (NLP), as it requires a specific level of insight into the intricacies of

language in order to overcome ambiguities and other language-specific problems. Once NLP has been applied to the data, the data is then presented in such a way as to express the results in a clear and useful manner. The benefits of the text mining process for this analysis are that it allows us to plot trends over time, spot patterns from otherwise unstructured data, and test hypotheses.

For the case of the Algerian State and its media, we wanted to look at the relationship between State and media from the mid-2010s to the present day to spot if there were changes in tone and approach, as well as changes to who were being mentioned in an either positive or negative manner. We consequently identified the annual "Journée nationale de la presse", day presidential speech on 22 October, a tradition in honor of the media's role during the liberation war. We discovered the complete discourse of the speech, in French, every year from 2014¹² to 2019. This speech was made by the head of state at the time; former President Bouteflika from 2014 to 2018, and interim head of state Abdelkader Bensalah in 2019 following Bouteflika's resignation earlier that year.

To begin the analytical process, we applied the text of each individual speech to the French variant of the web program TextFixer. This then displayed the number of utterances of a particular word within that speech and categorized each word in order of frequency. TextFixer was useful in this step as it also allowed us to separate common words, such as *de*, *la* or *le*, from those relevant to the analysis.

At this step, with the data summarized into categories of word frequency, we then applied our process of NLP. This was undertaken by the researcher who would link certain words to designated categories, based on interpretation and contextual understanding. This process required some cross-referencing against the original text to ensure correct interpretation.

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34268565>

⁷ https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/09/14/en-algerie-depart-force-pour-le-general-toufik-puissant-chef-du-renseignement_4755488_3212.html

⁸ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2013/11/16/97001-20131116FILWWW00372-algerie-bouteflika-candidat-a-la-presidence.php>

⁹ The 2013 speech transcription is not available online.

¹⁰ The Algerian Resistance

¹¹ https://www.reflexiondz.net/JOURNEE-NATIONALE-DE-LA-PRESSE-Un-precieux-acquis-a-consolider_a31618.html

¹² The tradition began in 2013, however we could not find an accurate extract of the speech for 2013, and thus we excluded it from our analysis.

Regarding the designation of categories, this was agreed upon by the BIC's North Africa research team. We analyzed the texts in their complete form to spot unifying features of that text, and prioritized categorization that would be useful for our analytical analysis, specifically testing the hypothesis that there were changes in the relationship between the Algerian state and its media during the time period 2014-2019.

The final specified categories we decided upon were as follows:

- Patriotism & Statehood (nationale, l'état etc) Government, including the system of the state (président, république etc)
- Laws & Obligations, including regulations (loi, juridique etc)
- Freedoms & Rights (droits, liberté etc)
- History & Liberation War, including references to colonialism (60e, colonialisme etc)
- Security (défense, bataille etc)
- Media (presse, journalistes etc)
- Civic Activism (revendications, hirak etc)
- Elections (l'échéance, scrutiny etc)

3. BACKGROUND CONTEXT

3.1. THE PROTESTS IN GHARDAIA AND IN SALAH

Prior to the 2015 internal crisis the system witnessed, there were two noticeable protest movements that might have precipitated the redistribution of prerogatives amongst the three powers, namely the DRS, the army and the presidency.

The social unrest that started in 2014 in the *wilaya*¹³ of Ghardaia, following the death of three Mozabite merchants in January after clashes between young Ibadites and police forces, continued in 2015, as attempts to appease tensions from both sides failed.¹⁴ Explanations differ on the reasons behind the clashes. Some believe it was a result of a sectarian, inter-community struggle.¹⁵ Others argued it is an outcome of liberalism, economic deprivation and the State's privatization policy¹⁶. However, one could argue indisputably the conflict in the Mزاب valley revealed the deep desynchronization between the central government and its peripheries, particularly its southern wilayas.¹⁷



Protests in the oasis town of In Salah in 2015
(AFP/2015)

¹³ Province.

¹⁴ https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2014/02/19/en-algerie-ghar-daia-enflammee-par-les-violences-communautaires_4369303_3212.html

¹⁵ Tlemçani, R. (2015) « La crise de l'État-nation au Maghreb : Défis et

enjeux », *Recherches Internationales*, N° 105, p. 170-183.

¹⁶ Dris, C. (2016).

¹⁷ Ibid.

A year following the start of the events in Ghardaia, around 25.000 people took to the streets on the 25th of January 2015 to protest the State's exploitation of shale gas in In Salah.¹⁸ Officially, their demands were driven by ecological considerations as the pollution of water tables is a major concern in a region where fresh water is scarce.

Additionally, the exploitation of shale gas is a traumatic reminder of the 1960 nuclear testing by France, notably in the region of Reggan. The symbolism of the protests is significant as it was the first account of a protest movement in Algeria's far south, a region strategic for the richness of its soil with oil and gas. This is especially relevant considering that since the deadly terrorist attack on the Tiguentourine site in 2013¹⁹, security presence has been reinforced in the region. Similar to the protests of unemployed youths in Ouargla in 2011 and 2013²⁰, the anti-shale gas movement sparked fears of the creation of a southern social movement, a region long known for being politically inactive²¹.

However, the protest movement lost its significance as the number of participants dropped to around three thousand in March of the same year. The mediation approach adopted by Algerian authorities, under international pressure, managed to contain the movement geographically as protests did not "spill" beyond In Salah.²² Unsurprisingly, no significant political reform has resulted from the protests. Apart from the replacement of the then-minister of energy Youcef Yousfi, by the pro-shell gas and oil exploitation Salah Khobri²³, the State's orientation did not change.

3.2. THE DISMANTLEMENT OF THE DRS AND THE RESTRUCTURATION OF SECURITY SERVICES

Starting from 2014 until 2016, Algeria undertook a process that fundamentally changed the power balance within le pouvoir in favor of the military: the dissolution

of the DRS in the summer of 2015. Although partisans of a civil State might have interpreted the process as a transition to non-military ruling, the main stake was a reclamation of power from the president and the army. Its climax was the enforced retirement of General Mediene, the mythical former head of the DRS.

Until his dismissal, General Toufik was the army high-ranking officer who remained at his post the longest, having served under five presidents. Heading the DRS since 1990, "Algeria's God" was reputed for his large network and extended influence on numerous sectors in the country. When the former army's Chief of Staff – Mohamed Lamari – supported Ali Benflis in the 2004 presidential elections, Mediene used his network to ensure Bouteflika's reelection both that year and in 2009. However, Toufik was also in favor of the 2008 constitutional amendment limiting the presidential term to two mandates. Hence, although 2004 marked the onset of a stable partnership between the president and the head of the DRS, Bouteflika's decision to run for a fourth mandate in 2014 announced a fracture between the country's two influential figures.

It is then believed that Said Bouteflika – the president's brother and one of his closest advisors – cut a deal with the freshly appointed Chief of Staff Gaid Salah to dismantle the DRS. For the first time in the country's post-independence history, a "clan warfare" opposing the DRS to the National Liberation Front (FNL), led by the president's close circle and the army Chief of Staff, was brought before public eyes.

The dismantlement process started in 2013 with the enforced retirement of key military generals in the DRS: Mhena Djebbar, head of the Central Directorate of Security of the Army (DCSA), Ahmed Kherfi, director of the counter-intelligence branch, Rachid Lalali alias Attafi, head of the Directorate of External Security and Colonel Fawzi, head of the DRS's communications services.²⁴ Out of all of them, General Lalali was the only actor in the age of retirement.

¹⁸ https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/01/06/mobilisation-contre-le-gaz-de-schiste-dans-le-sud-algerien_4550120_3212.html

¹⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/25/in-amenas-timeline-siege-algeria>

²⁰ <https://www.ieuineafrique.com/171770/societe/alg-rie-manifestation-pacifique-de-ch-meurs-ouargla/>

²¹ Belakhdar, N. (2015). « L'éveil du Sud » ou quand la contestation vient de la marge. *Politique africaine*, 137(1), p.27.

²² Dris, C. (2016).

²³ <https://algeria-watch.org/?p=25053>

²⁴ <https://www.ieuineafrique.com/mag/307555/politique/algerie-habits-neufs-services-secrets/>

General Mhena Djebar was a key operator within the security services in two main aspects: he held close ties to General Mediene, vocally opposing Bouteflika's fourth mandate, and was in charge of a strategic strike force within the DRS, particularly during the 1990s when counter-terrorism necessitated significant intelligence effort, conducted through the information treatment facilities (CTRI). With these crucial prerogatives, the DRS was able to counter-balance the weight of the military by conducting the fight against terrorism under its own terms. The dismissal of Djebar was a synonymous of a new chapter, as the DCSA – renamed Central Directorate for Prevention and the Security of the Army (DCPSA) – was attached to the army staff college since 2013, as well as given larger prerogatives.

Later, the army absorbed the Center for Communication and Diffusion (CCD). It additionally replaced the Central Directorate for Judiciary Police (DCPJ) in 2014. To further weaken the DRS, the army staff college reinforced the prerogatives of the DCPSC and transferred the accreditation of foreign journalists to the military, a former monopoly of the DRS. The special intervention group (GIS), the armed wing of the DRS, as well as the economic intelligence service have been dissolved and GIS members have been affected to different army sections.²⁵ Bouteflika signed a non-published presidential decree finalizing the dissolution of the DRS in 2016.²⁶ As previously mentioned, this utter upheaval in the power balance between the military and security services at the expense of the latter has been accelerated by Bouteflika's fourth mandate, especially considering that Ahmed Gaid Salah, Colonel General of the army, was deeply in favor of the presidential mandate and of the restructuration of security services.

In 2013, the president suffered a stroke, in addition to a cancer he has been treating since 2005. His public appearances were rare and his effective control, quasi-inexistent. Mediene thus opposed a fourth mandate for Bouteflika while the latter's close circle insisted on him running for presidency for another term. The president's brother, Said Bouteflika, whose influence significantly increased after Bouteflika's 2013 stroke, is then believed to be the main engineer behind Mediene's dismissal.

Surprisingly, Bouteflika himself agreed with General Toufik, before changing his mind regarding his incapacity to head the country. In his infamous speech in Setif on the 8th May 2012, considered by many as his "good-bye speech"²⁷, the president considered his time was over and it was up to the country's younger generations to lead. This announcement took place a few months prior to his stroke.

Apart from the DCSA, three additional structures have been reattached to the army: the DCPJ, the CCD and the GIS. Before the 2015 restructuration, the DCPJ played a crucial role in the corruption investigations for embezzlement against multiple civil and military figures. Working closely with public prosecutors, officers of the DCPJ enjoyed large investigative prerogatives, supported by the work of the economic intelligence service of the DRS, a unit that was also dismantled. The CCD's dissolution also evokes the importance of controlling the media. The CCD monopolized the sector through allocating authorizations for founding newspapers, accessing information and most importantly, securing advertisement. The National Agency for Edition and Advertisement (ANEP) held a monopoly over institutional advertisement, distributed according to each media's political orientations. The forced retirement of colonel Fawzi and the dismantlement of the agency transferred the control of the media sector to the army.

The GIS was an elite group within the DRS which played a crucial role in the State's counter-terrorism strategy, especially in the Algerian south where they were tasked with hunting elements of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The group notably intervened to end the hostage situation in Tiguentourine in January 2013. Since its creation in the nineties, the GIS has been a crucial asset to the DRS whether it be for tracking down terrorist groups, liberating hostages or close-knit guard. Dissolving the group was clearly aimed at transferring the monopoly on the war on terror from the security services to the army.

The army Chief of Staff did not limit itself to reattaching

²⁵ <https://www.algeriepatiotique.com/fr/article/l%E2%80%99ancien-colonel-du-drs-mohamed-khalifaoui>

²⁶ [https://www.lematindz.net/news/19722-abdelaziz-bouteflika-a-signe-la-](https://www.lematindz.net/news/19722-abdelaziz-bouteflika-a-signe-la-dissolution-du-drs.html)

[dissolution-du-drs.html](https://www.algerie-focus.com/2012/05/le-discours-dadieu-de-bouteflika-a-setif/)

²⁷ <https://www.algerie-focus.com/2012/05/le-discours-dadieu-de-bouteflika-a-setif/>

Fig. 1 – Table showing the changes between the DRS and army structures in Algeria 2014-16

Former structure within the DRS	New structure attached to the army
Central Directorate of Security of the Army (DCSA)	Central Directorate for Prevention and the Security of the Army (DCPSA)
Central Directorate for Judiciary Police (DCPJ)	Service of Judiciary Investigation
Special intervention group (GIS)	Dissolved
Economic intelligence service	Dissolved
Center for Communication and Diffusion (CCD)	Center for Communication and Diffusion (CCD)

the different DRS units to the army, but also pushed some of its high-ranking officers to retirement: Ali Bendaoud, director of interior security at the DRS; General Djamel Lakhel Madjoub, director of the general directorate for security and presidential protection (DGSP); Ahmed Moulay Meliani, head of the republican guard. Gaid Salah later led the transition period after Bouteflika’s dismissal in 2019, until his recent death. He was the initiator of the anti-corruption campaign, notably against Said Bouteflika and Mediène. Both were recently sentenced to fifteen years in prison for involvement in a plot against the army’s authority and the State.²⁸ In March and May 2015, the reopening of the gigantic corruption cases of Sonatrach²⁹, El Khalifa bank³⁰ or the East-West highway³¹ was part of the acceleration of the dismantlement of the DRS.

exerting pressure on private advisers not to support independent newspapers anymore, notably *El Khabar* and *El Watan*³² These unfavorable conditions for the Algerian regime are visible through a high usage of terms both related to the system of governance (12.73% of the overall speech compared to a maximum of 8.6% in other years), referring to the stability of the State, and legal terms and words referring to obligations (21.82% of the speech, a percentage only topped in 2015). The highest percentage of use of vocabulary related to the liberation war, specifically, and to history more generally was registered in 2014. The speech was clearly aiming at reinforcing both the regime’s legitimacy and authority, and its tight control on the media, especially considering the president’s weak health condition and almost utter absence from the public scene.

4. RESULTS & ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL PRESS DAY’S SPEECHES

4.1. 2014

In April 2014, a severely sick Bouteflika was reelected for a fourth mandate, with several opposition parties boycotting the elections once more, and considerable fraud allegations. Additionally, the celebration of the national press day that year occurred under controversies opposing the supervisory minister and a segment of the media corporation, accusing the former of

Fig. 2 Proportional Results for 2014

Category	Proportion of Speech (%)
Patriotism & Statehood	23.64
Government	12.73
Laws & Obligations	21.82
Freedoms & Rights	5.45
History & Liberation War	20
Security	1.82
Media	14.54
Civic Activism	0
Elections	0

²⁸ <https://www.lematinalgerie.com/said-bouteflika-mohamed-mediene-et-tartag-condamnes-15-ans-de-prison>

²⁹ <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/299063/economie/algerie-lancien-pdg-de-sonatrach-condamne-a-cinq-ans-sursis/>

³⁰ <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/239066/societe/rafik-khalifa-condamne->

[a-18-ans-de-prison/](#)

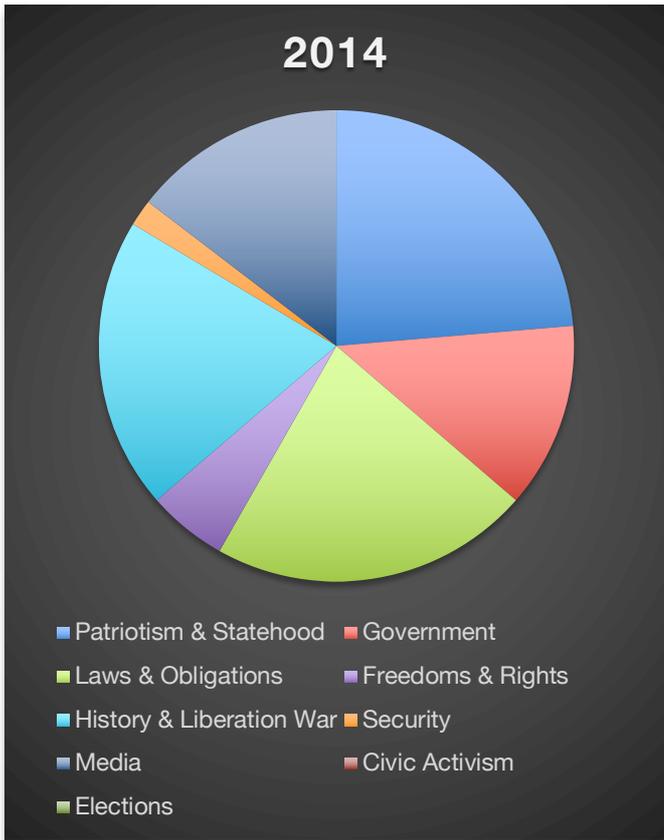
³¹ https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2015/04/20/en-algerie-le-proces-de-l-affaire-de-l-autoroute-est-ouest-une-nouvelle-fois-reporte_1253062

³² <https://www.algerie-focus.com/2014/10/presse-journee-nationale-sous-fond-de-reproches/>

as well as the cooperation of the media in reaching these objectives.

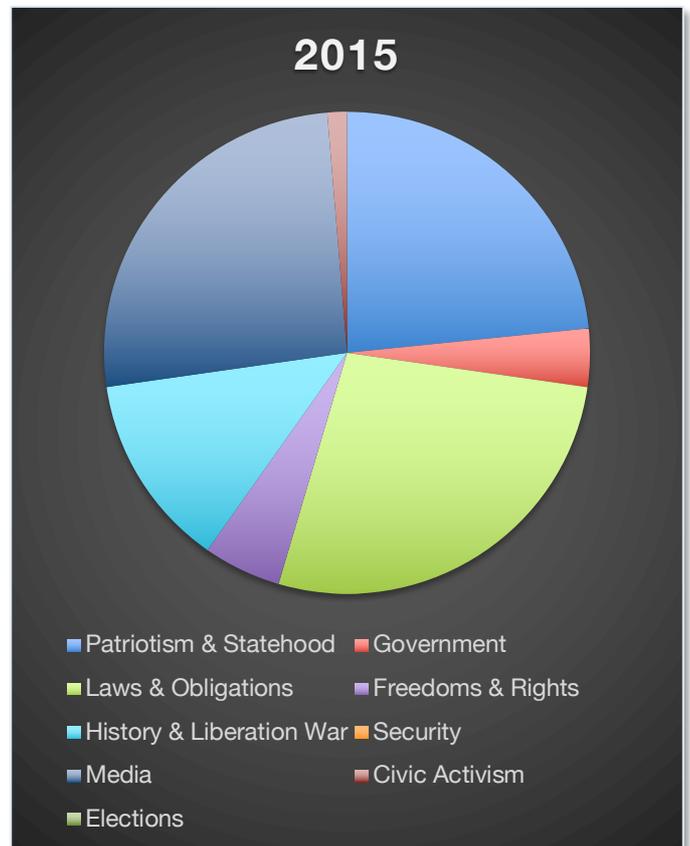
Fig. 3 Proportional Results for 2015

Category	Proportion of Speech (%)
Patriotism & Statehood	23.38
Government	3.9
Laws & Obligations	27.27
Freedoms & Rights	5.19
History & Liberation War	12.99
Security	0
Media	25.97
Civic Activism	1.3
Elections	0



4.2. 2015

2015 was a crucial year in Algeria’s modern history with the previously discussed restructuration of the DRS and the overall redefinition of the power balance amongst *le pouvoir’s* players. An analysis of the national press day’s speech of that year shows the highest use across all years in the use of terms linked to obligations and legal vocabulary, as well as the second highest referencing to terms related to the liberation war. As previously analyzed, 2015 was a tormented year in Algeria. Thus the stakes were high to make sure to control the national discourse, and guarantee people’s loyalty. The media is an important tool for that, especially considering the restructuration that attached the CCD to the army’s chief of staff. On the other hand, the significant decrease in the use of terms referring to the system or the government compared to 2014 (3.9%, the second lowest across all years) conveys an intention to put the weight of the “system” in the back rows. By contrast, a consistent reference to statehood and patriotism coupled with the highest percentage of references to media and press (25.97% compared to a maximum of 19.47% for other years) imply a clear will of strengthening national unity, guaranteeing people’s support to Bouteflika and the army’s newly gained prerogatives,



4.3. 2016

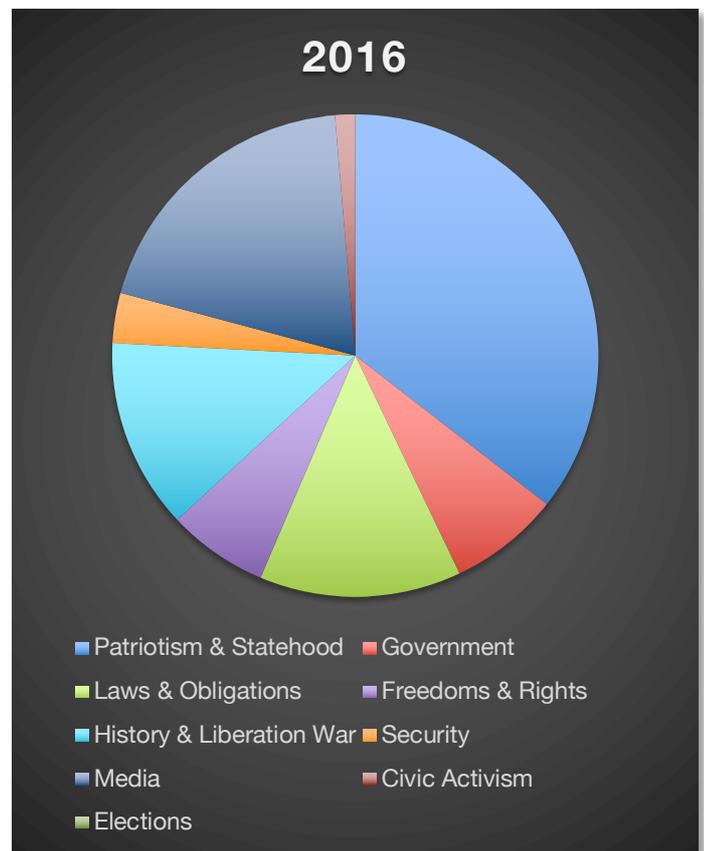
2016 was a pivotal year as the constitutional amendments were adopted through the 7th February 2016 law. The main modifications pertain to the adoption of Tamazigh as an official language, while Arabic remained the State’s official language; the return to a

limit of two presidential mandates although no retro-active effect was provided; a mandatory a priori consultation of the parliament before the designation of a prime minister; and a new article 41ter defining press freedom. Being the longest speech compared to all other years, the 2016 national press day's speech indicates a clear will to market these amendments as a sign of openness and concessions on behalf of the regime, especially considering the fact the amendments was initiated as a response to the 2011 protests, similar to the Moroccan example³³. There were thus explicit references to the constitutional endeavor, notably to the way it offers new guarantees to journalists. In this sense, the 2016 speech saw the highest usage of vocabulary related to rights and freedom. A high use of words referring to statehood and patriotism (23.38%), coupled with frequent references to the national liberation war (12.75%) and the highest second usage of terms referring to the system and government (7.38%). This combination of historical legitimacy, system stability and an emphasis on the unity of Algerians is often used in times of crisis or thorough changes, as was the case of 2019 except historical legitimacy.

Fig. 4 Proportional Results for 2016

Category	Proportion of Speech (%)
Patriotism & Statehood	35.57
Government	7.38
Laws & Obligations	13.42
Freedoms & Rights	6.71
History & Liberation War	12.75
Security	3.36
Media	19.47
Civic Activism	1.34
Elections	0

³³ Bendourou, O. (2012). La nouvelle Constitution marocaine du 29 juillet 2011. *Revue française de droit constitutionnel*, 91(3), p.511.



4.4. 2017

Although no major security event was registered in 2017, there was a significant increase in the use of terms related to security (9.68% as opposed to 3.36% the previous year) contrasting with a drop in vocabulary linked to statehood and patriotism (27.96% compared to 35.57% in 2016 and 42.74% in 2018), which signal a change of focus from the State, marketing itself as a rampart against threats to national security and the safety of Algerians. References to the role of media (19.35%) in shaping a narrative in harmony with the State apparatus's discourse is also an important part of the speech. This securitization phenomenon is consistent with the increase in the use of legal and obligatory vocabulary (16,13% compared to 13.42% in 2016) and a decrease in terms linked to freedoms and rights (4.3% compared to 6.71% in the previous year). 2017 coincides with the year the EU and Algeria adopted their Partnership Priorities under the revised European Neighborhood Policy (ENP)³⁴, which notably focuses on the security cooperation between the two entities.

³⁴ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/24089/st03101-ad01fr17.pdf>

Fig. 5 Proportional Results for 2017

Category	Proportion of Speech (%)
Patriotism & Statehood	27.96
Government	8.6
Laws & Obligations	16.13
Freedoms & Rights	4.3
History & Liberation War	10.75
Security	9.68
Media	19.35
Civic Activism	3.23
Elections	0



4.5. 2018

2018 was an important year for two principal reasons: it was a year prior to Bouteflika’s announcement of his intention to run for a fifth mandate, as well as a year that has known challenges to Algeria’s security. A high percentage of references to security (9.4%, second highest) can be observed. 2018 witnessed a rocket attack in August in Bouira, which resulted in one casualty and five injured³⁵. The zone of Boumerdes, Bouira and Tizi-Ouzou, known as the “death quadrilateral” was the

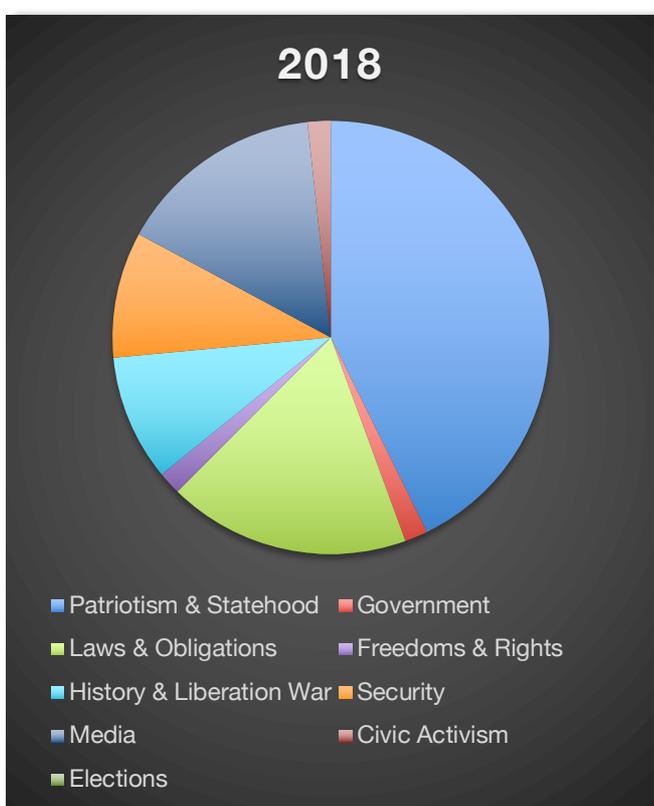
³⁵ <https://www.tsa-algerie.com/mort-dun-enfant-dans-un-attentat-a-bouira-lautoroute-fermee-par-des-manifestants/>

scene of a series of deadly terrorist attacks in 2008 that resulted in dozens of casualties.³⁶

References to patriotism and statehood were at the highest compared to this study’s sampled years, with almost 43% of the whole 2018 speech, which is coherent of vocabulary used by leaders in times of threat for national security. Consistently with these observations, mentions of freedoms and rights were at an all-time low (1.71%) and references to obligations relatively high (17.95%).

Fig. 6 Proportional Results for 2018

Category	Proportion of Speech (%)
Patriotism & Statehood	42.74
Government	1.71
Laws & Obligations	17.95
Freedoms & Rights	1.71
History & Liberation War	9.4
Security	9.4
Media	15.38
Civic Activism	1.71
Elections	0



³⁶ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2008/08/20/01003-20080820ART-FIG00286-deux-nouveaux-attentats-frappent-l-algerie-.php>

4.6. 2019

2019 was the first speech after the 22nd February movement, and the first discourse pronounced by interim Head of State Abdelkader Bensalah following Bouteflika's dismissal. By October 2019, there were already profound changes of positions within the regime. Gaid Salah, a priori a loyal ally of Bouteflika, qualified the *hirakists* as troublemakers in his first speech after the onset of the movement. However his usual ally, Said Bouteflika, started acting on his own, contacting his former enemy, Mediène, to put in place a crisis exit strategy. The initial plan involved a transition period headed by Algeria's former president Ali Benflis, a figure appreciated by most Algerians. Weeks had since passed and the impressive number of Algerians in the streets every Friday remained consistent.

Gaid Salah, who felt he was cast aside, radically modified his discourse towards the *Hirak*. Capitalizing on the army's privileged position in the hearts of Algerians and their hostility towards the Bouteflika clan, the army's chief of staff started siding with the street movement starting from March 2019, the people becoming his ally. Identifying a clear "new" enemy qualified as "the gang" (the DRS and the Bouteflika clan), he secured a strategy that allowed him to maintain his position as the new country's leader and dismiss his rivals. As a counterstrike, Said Bouteflika is then believed to be behind the presidential decree ordering the dismissal of Gaid Salah as the army's chief of Staff, and the nomination of another personality. The decree was to be read on national television on the highly viewed eight o'clock news, yet Gaid Salah sent troops to prevent this from happening.³⁷

These dynamics are visible in the national press day's speech of 2019. Apart from an expected spike in the use of terms related to activism, and a heavy focus on electoral vocabulary, words linked to patriotism and statehood were at their highest percentage across all years, almost 47% of the overall speech. In contrast, legal terms and obligatory terms were at an all-time low: 4,35% of the overall speech compared to a minimum of 13% for the other years included in the sample. Another noticeable trend is the decrease in the usage of

historical terms, specifically those referring to the liberation war (4.35% compared to a minimum of 9.4% across the years and pic of 20% in 2014). This could be explained by the heavy criticism of *hirakists* to the constant reliance of *le pouvoir* on the independence war for legitimacy.

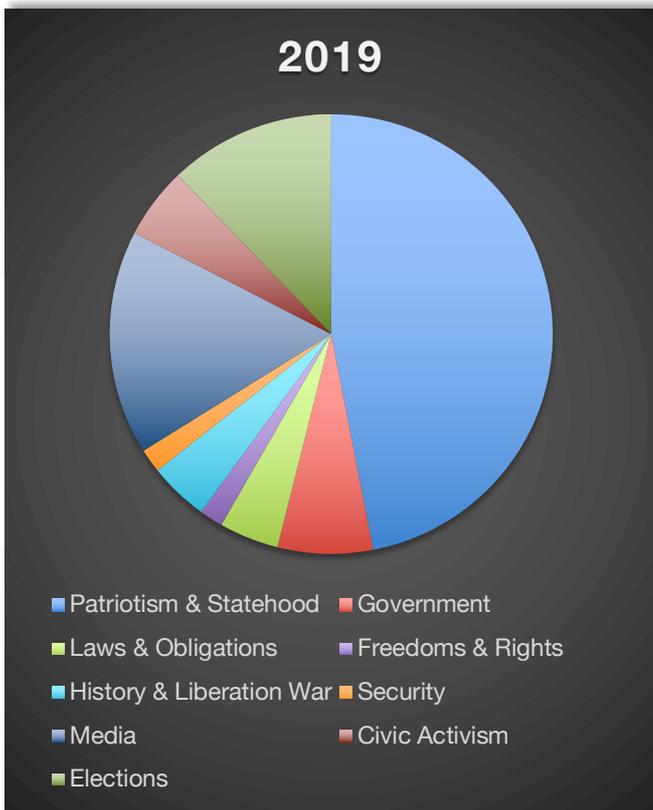
The 2019 protest movement, mainly composed by young Algerians who did not witness the liberation war, expressed their rejection of the regime's historical legitimacy and the need for the renewal of Algerian politics and leadership. The choice of not to appeal to the status of *moujaheed* was a way for the interim power to distance itself from Bouteflika's tendency to instrumentalize that status, to vehiculate this "rupture" with the old governing ways. However, there is a resurgence in evoking vocabulary related to the system of governance to remind of the stability of the system.

The low use of freedom and rights words, coupled with the relatively low presence of vocabulary referencing activism convey a clear intention to take back the control of the national discourse, monopolized since months by the international coverage of the *Hirak* and the possibility for protesters and activists to convey their own slogans and demands through social media. Hence, although in clear desire of unifying the country again, the 2019 national press day speech also testifies of an attempt of the regime to put an end to the protest movement by framing the 2019 presidential elections as its clear endpoint.

Fig. 7 Proportional Results for 2019

Category	Proportion of Speech (%)
Patriotism & Statehood	46.96
Government	6.95
Laws & Obligations	4.35
Freedoms & Rights	1.74
History & Liberation War	4.35
Security	1.74
Media	16.52
Civic Activism	5.22
Elections	12.17

³⁷ <https://algeriepart.com/2019/09/03/confidentiel-le-decret-de-mise-a->



5. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the speeches of Algeria's national press day revealed some interesting trends. The use of patriotism and statehood vocabulary has been in a consistent increase, revealing the constant desire to build and maintain national unity, a concept that has been under heavy attack in the past years³⁸. The recourse to references to history, more specifically the liberation war, is decreasing. This might be due to the popular criticism of the reliance of the country's leaders on drawing their legitimacy from their historical status as mujahedeen³⁹ in the independence war.

Additionally, apart from a brief attempt to securitize the discourse in 2017 and 2018, there is no significant trend showing a desire to use security-related references when addressing the people, which might indicate an awareness of the inefficiency of this narrative compared to the 1990s.

On the other hand, there is a clear resurgence in the recourse to a vocabulary referencing the system of

governance contrasted with a decrease in terms related to freedoms and rights. The regime, clearly considering the recent political and social demands as well as the internal power struggles, remains determined to convey a message of unity, stability and continuity. To conclude, the same power dynamics that emerged starting from 2014 were instrumentalized by the regime's upholders in 2019 to neutralize the 22nd February protest movement and settle political scores internally. In this sense, the anti-corruption crackdown initiated by Gaid Salah starting from 2019 is a continuation of the power struggle that characterized Algeria's political life in the last decade.

These power-positioning dynamics still shape the country's political scene today, especially with the recent death of Gaid Salah and the weak legitimacy the new president, Abdelmajid Tebboune, holds. As Algerians enter their second year of weekly protests, it is still unclear what the future Algeria will be yet, and as this study argued, it is of utter importance to remember the country's unrest did not start with Bouteflika's intention of running for a fifth mandate.

³⁸ <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/l-algerie-sacre-pays-ou-terre-pro-fane,3628?fbclid=IwAR1FWFtvSO->

³⁹ In this context, patriotic freedom fighters

6. APPENDIX

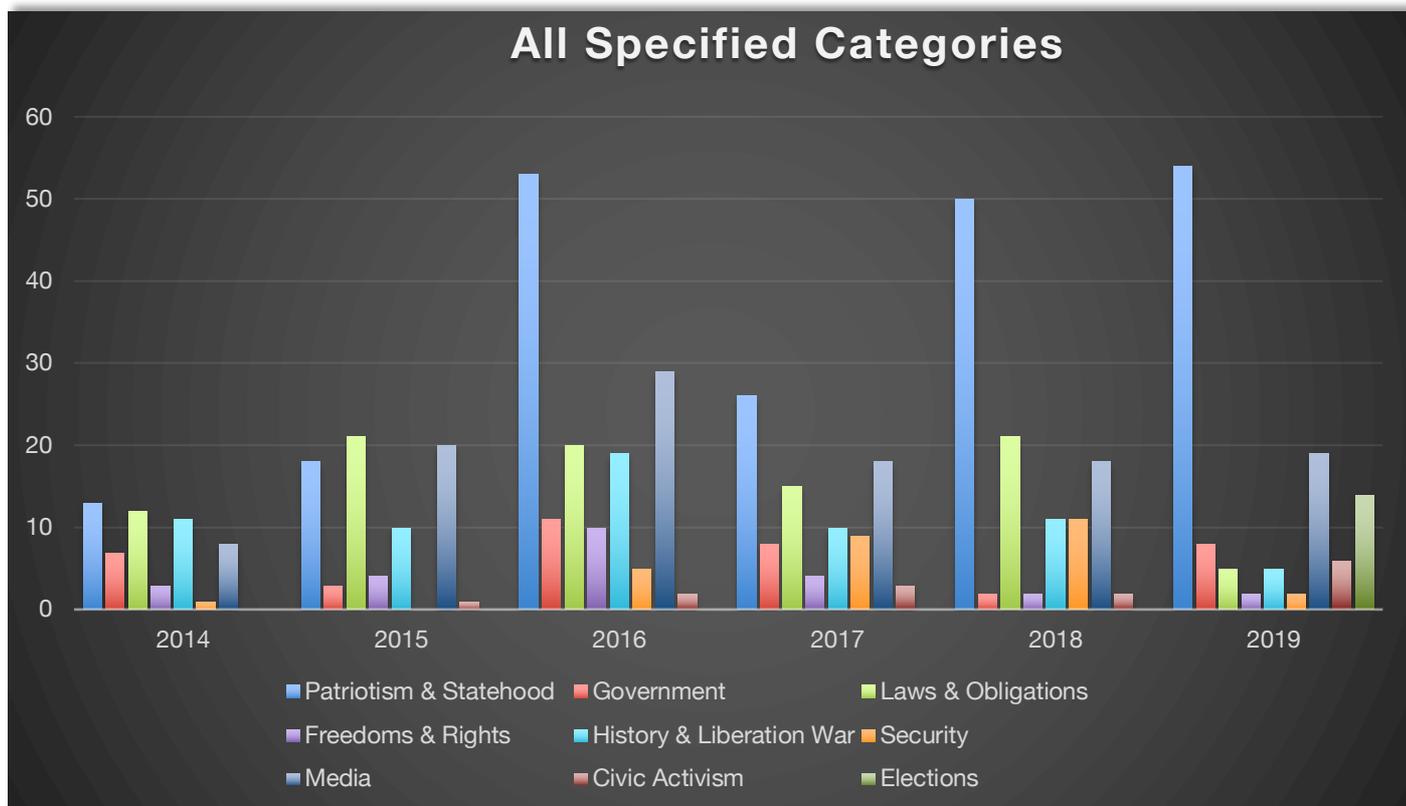


Fig. 8 Chart Showing the Raw Number of Words in Each Category between 2014-19

Year/Category	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Patriotism & Statehood	13	18	53	26	50	54
Government	7	3	11	8	2	8
Laws & Obligations	12	21	20	15	21	5
Freedoms & Rights	3	4	10	4	2	2
History & Liberation War	11	10	19	10	11	5
Security	1	0	5	9	11	2
Media	8	20	29	18	18	19
Civic Activism	0	1	2	3	2	6
Elections	0	0	0	0	0	14

Fig. 9 Table Showing the Number of Words Mentioned per Each Category between 2014-19

The BIC is an independent, non-profit, think-and-do tank based in the capital of Europe that is committed to developing solutions to address the cyclical drivers of insecurity, economic fragility, and conflict the Middle East and North Africa. Our goal is to bring added value to the highest levels of political discourse by bringing systemic issues to the forefront of the conversation.



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