The Riots
The typical Algerian who demonstrated in the country’s major cities, now a decade ago, was compelled more by immediate economic concerns than long-term political goals like democracy. For years, Algerians suffered the consequences of failed economic policies and had finally grown frustrated with chronic unemployment, inflation and substandard housing. Those who took to the streets in October 1988 protested for basic necessities, hoping to gain the government’s attention if not economic reform.

Political pluralism was not on their agenda: the FLN’s (National Liberation Front) one-party system had maintained such firm control of opposition activities inside the country that it became too difficult to engage in politics against the State. As such, opposition leaders like Ait Ahmed of the Socialist Front Forces (FFS) and former President Ahmed Ben Bella concentrated their activities outside Europe, trying to mobilize Algerians living abroad, not locally, against the FLN’s political monopoly. Furthermore, Algerians were divided over the political system, as the opposition groups were widely perceived as weak and “out of touch” with the population.

In this way, the religious Islamist opposition was somewhat an exception. Though active, the Islamist movement was too divided to effectively challenge the state authorities when they needed it. The Islamists, however, were succeeding in relating to Algeria’s disheartened society and capturing the failure of the FLN’s secular approach to development. More importantly, they channeled the population’s mounting anger against the government’s failure to enhance collective welfare, huge sums of money from donors, they promoted themselves by constructing privately-run mosques and responding to social needs by providing literature and tapes about radical Islam and Belhaj, the struggle in Algeria was not for respectability in society, something it clearly owed to the Islamist movement and no one else.

At the same time, the FLN’s (National Liberation Front) one-party system was expanding, and the Islamist movement was growing rapidly and evolving into the most potent political force in the country.

 Rise of the Islamist Movement

Undoubtedly, the Islamists’ greatest success was the mass support they garnered in connection with Algeria’s (Algeria News) Islamic Salvation Front’s (FIS) call as a threat to its national supremacy. The FIS went so far as to solicit voters to join its ranks, as a result, the FIS’s second-in-command, Ali Bennabi, had written, “I am alone today...I say to you, the God, the abandoned youth quickly regained its former independence and its strength, and its mode of life. The FIS has been called a sect, a terrorist group, a religious sect, or a cult. The FIS was not a sect, an extremist group, nor a terrorist organization. The FIS was a political party that opposed the FLN’s one-party system. The FIS was a political party that opposed the FLN’s one-party system.

The Riots
Following the ‘bread riots’ of October 1988, the Islamist movement was the biggest beneficiary of the introduction of democracy in Algeria, quickly amassing huge political support and becoming a viable political force and legislative elections. But instead of using its newly acquired power to install democratic principles throughout Algeria, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) focused its efforts on Islam and its own goals. Today, as Algeria observes the tenth anniversary of the October riots, certain conclusions are self-evident. Overall, Algeria’s Islamist leadership has proven ill equipped to handle its success or its own agenda.

Regional Issues

Algeria’s Islamist Movement: Victims of Success

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