

What Have the Amazigh Achieved in Algeria?

by [Yacine Boudhane \(/experts/yacine-boudhane-0\)](/experts/yacine-boudhane-0)

Oct 27, 2017

Also available in

[العربية \(/ar/policy-analysis/bd-sb-wthlathwn-ama-mn-alndal-madha-hqq-amazygh-aljzayr\)](/ar/policy-analysis/bd-sb-wthlathwn-ama-mn-alndal-madha-hqq-amazygh-aljzayr)


ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Yacine Boudhane \(/experts/yacine-boudhane-0\)](/experts/yacine-boudhane-0)

Yacine Boudhane is an Algerian journalist.



Brief Analysis

 October 27, 2017

The Berber Spring, known in Berber as “Tafsut Imaziyen,” was a period of clashes that erupted between Algerian security forces and Berber students and activists on March 10, 1980.

Algerian authorities had banned a lecture by writer Mouloud Mammeri on ancient Berber poetry in the city of Tizi Ouzou. After protests on campus, dozens took to the streets, marching across the city and raising banners to demand respect for the Berber language as popular heritage. The authorities responded with force, raiding the university and violently arresting many of the protesters to end the demonstrations.

An integral part of the country’s social fabric, Berbers had long expressed discontent with the marginalization of their language and culture, particularly after the Algerian government adopted Arabization measures following independence from France in 1962. As part of this Arabization process, the government actively discouraged and repressed various aspects of Berber identity, including the Berber language.

This policy of exclusion pushed many Berber writers, journalists, academics, and scholars to found the Berber Academy in 1966, later renamed the Berber Assembly. The cultural association aimed to protect Berber heritage, prompting local and international debates about the contemporary role of Berber language and identity. The efforts of the Berber Assembly transformed the Berber question from an elitist issue into a popular one.

This movement helped break the barrier of fear the authorities had imposed on Algerian citizens, and indirectly led to extraordinarily bloody protests in October 1988, when protesters demanded economic reforms in response to a growing economic crisis.

In response to popular outrage against the government’s harsh crackdown on the protesters, most of whom were young men, President Chadli Bendjedid announced a program of political reform, allowing political pluralism for the first time since 1962.

Nonetheless, state repression of the Berber community continued. In 1990, Berbers in Kabylie staged a strike that included a boycott of classes by schoolchildren, leading to the cancellation of the school year and forcing authorities to approve the teaching of Berber language in Berber-majority areas. This achievement was considered the first victory for the Berber movement in Algeria.

The Black Spring erupted in April 2001, when a student was killed by the Gendarmerie Nationale. Violent clashes between protesters and security forces lasted for months in Tizi Ouzou, resulting in thousands injured and over 120 dead.

This tragedy led to the emergence of the Arouch Movement, which forced the authorities to start a dialogue by drafting the Kseur Platform—a list of demands that included the recognition of Berber as a national language and the withdrawal of gendarmerie forces from Kabylie. President Abdelaziz Bouteflika issued a presidential decree in March 2003, incorporating Berber as a national language in the constitution. However, the most important achievement of the Berber movement to date came on February 7, 2016, when Parliament passed a constitutional amendment recognizing the Berber language as an official language.

Today, after thirty-seven years of struggle, some wonder whether the incorporation of the Berber language into the country's constitution constitutes an end to the protests, or is just a new beginning.

The authorities responded to Berber demands, for the most part, without holding a popular referendum. However, incorporating the Berber language into the fabric of society requires implementation mechanisms for any real change to take effect, and no such mechanisms or laws have yet been issued. For example, authorities previously promised to establish an academy specializing in the Berber language—but such a development has not yet occurred.

Berber culture and identity involve not only language, but also customs, traditions, and ancient heritage. It will be critical to preserve this heritage and find ways to incorporate it into society in order to give the Berbers a sense of identity and belonging and avoid further clashes.

It should also be noted that Berber heritage and language are not limited to the Kabylie region, which includes the cities of Tizi Ouzou and Bejaia. There are other Berbers in the depths of the Algerian desert who constitute a genuine and deep part of the country's social fabric. They, too, should receive attention and care for their rich cultural and linguistic heritage. ❖

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Iran Takes Next Steps on Rocket Technology](#)

Feb 11, 2022

◆
Farzin Nadimi

(/policy-analysis/iran-takes-next-steps-rocket-technology)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

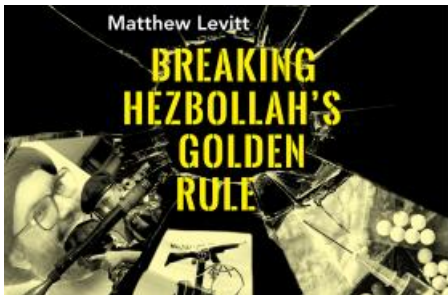
Saudi Arabia Adjusts Its History, Diminishing the Role of Wahhabism

Feb 11, 2022



Simon Henderson

[\(/policy-analysis/saudi-arabia-adjusts-its-history-diminishing-role-wahhabism\)](/policy-analysis/saudi-arabia-adjusts-its-history-diminishing-role-wahhabism)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

Podcast: Breaking Hezbollah's Golden Rule

Feb 9, 2022



Matthew Levitt

[\(/policy-analysis/podcast-breaking-hezbollahs-golden-rule\)](/policy-analysis/podcast-breaking-hezbollahs-golden-rule)