

The Algerian Conundrum: Authoritarian State, Democratic Society

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This essay, the third in a series exploring prospects for political reform throughout the region, considers the strengths and limitations of democratic-style reformers in Algeria today.

The prospects for democratic reform in Algeria are as complex and paradoxical as the country's convoluted history and opaque politics. While civil society has long possessed a democratic spirit rooted in its historic interaction with French republican principles, this orientation is highly disaggregated. For its part, the authoritarian polity maintains its stranglehold on civil society through a military-industrial complex that monopolizes the key coercive, economic, and bureaucratic instruments of the state. No amount of externally derived pressure for democratic reform, whether economic or political, has been able to alter this stalemate in state-society relations.

This essay, the third in a series exploring prospects for political reform throughout the region, considers the strengths and limitations of democratic-style reformers in Algeria today. Following an overview of Algeria's political landscape, the paper examines the historical roots and current contours of Algerian civil society, where prospects for democratic-style reform remain in force, however limited. The chapter closes with a cautionary note for U.S. policymakers eager to engage constructively with Algeria.

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