

# A Political Process Explanation of Algerian AAV's Fiasco in the Legislative Election of 2012

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## Abstract

“Islamist vote” has been an area of interest in the academia for quite a long time and has attracted particular attention of scholars following the Arab Spring, as Islamist parties witnessed an increase of popularity at the ballot boxes in 2011-2012 in North African countries such as Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. Whereas much of the recent academic literature on Islamist parties is oriented around the cases of Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, limited attention has been paid to a puzzle that deserves profound analysis: given the many similarities between Algeria and its neighbors in the 2010s, why did Algerian Islamist parties failed to enlarge its supporting base as their counterparts in other North African countries did? This research attempts to examine the phenomenon of “Algerian exceptionalism” from a political process perspective by analyzing the political opportunities, organizational structure and framing of AAV, and how these factors affected the alliance’s mobilization. The approach presented in this article is not limited to the case of Algerian AAV but can be leveraged to study Islamist parties and Islamic activism in general.

**Keywords:** Islamist parties; Mobilization; Algeria

## 1. Introduction

As the Arab Spring brought to power the Islamist parties<sup>1</sup> at polls in a number of North African countries, the legend of the “Islamist vote” seems to rise again after collapsing by degrees in the late 1990s when most Islamist groups in the Muslim world witnessed “modest changes” (Schwedler, 1998) in their vote share and some even saw a decline.

Benefiting from the functionalist model in social movement theories which attribute mass mobilization to the systematic disequilibrium and the mass psychological discontent brought by the institutional incapability of lessening structural strains (Broom, 1959); (Lanski, 1954); (Turner and Killian, 1972); (Yassine, 2012), much of the Islamic activism scholarship finds a causal relation between grievances and the rise of Islamist parties. According this framework, citizens’ socio-economic grievances caused by external factors (i.e. globalization) or domestic factors (i.e. economic, political and religious policies), in tandem with political elites’ inability to cope with such grievances are the determinants that urge people to consider an alternative.

The case of Algeria challenges this assumption. In the 2010s, Algeria shares with neighboring countries similar problems including massive youth unemployment, rocketing prices and corruption with its (See Table 1). Nonetheless, unlike their counterparts in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco, Islamist parties in Algeria failed to broaden its supporting base in the elections of 2012, even though an effort was made by three major Algerian Islamist parties to build an electoral alliance. Such an exception raised important questions: Why do some Islamist parties demonstrate strong electoral mobilization capacity while the others do not? What variables seem to promote or impede Islamist parties’ electoral mobilization capacity?

By conducting a case study of AAV’s mobilization practices and their environment before and during the legislative election of Algeria in 2012, this article attempts to throw light on these questions. The explanation proposed here is not limited to the case of Algeria. The interactions of political opportunities, organizational structures and framing process with AAV’s mobilization effect can be leveraged to Islamist parties in MENA (Middle East and North Africa) in general.

## 2. Existing Explanations for “Algerian Exceptionalism”

Quite a few attempts have been made to interpret the “Algerian exceptionalism” (Yassine, 2012, Lazar, 2013, McAllister, 2013, Boubekeur, 2009, Khemissi et al., 2012). Above all, the credibility of the electoral outcomes in the recent two decades has been questioned. Allegations from opposition parties including Movement for a Peaceful Society (Mouvement de la Société pour la Paix, MSP), Islamic Renaissance Movement (Mouvement de la Renaissance Islamique, MRI), Republican Patriotic Rally (Rassemblement Patriotique Republicain, RPR), Workers’ Party (Parti des Travailleurs, PT) and Socialist Forces Front (Front des Forces Socialistes, FFS) about irregularities and rigging were flooding during each electoral cycle. Such complaints have been expressed in the forms of street protests, boycott of elections and public condemnation. The official outcome of the legislative election in 2012 was particularly suspected by AAV member parties. MSP’s president, Aboudjerra Soltani, claimed that the electoral results were “neither acceptable, logical or reasonable” (Yassine, 2012). According to the AAV’s campaign manager, Abederrazzak Mukri, Islamist parties should be closely behind National

Liberation Front (Front de Libération Nationale, FLN) in the initial tabulations (Schemm, 2012).

However, claims of election results manipulation in 2012 lacked solid proofs. And it is worth noticing that the Algerian APN election in 2012, compared with the previous legislative elections, did show some efforts to improve its transparency. For example, this was the first time that the electoral administration substituted transparent ballot boxes for cardboard boxes so as to offer observers and voters a chance of finding out whether the ballot boxes already contained “votes” before the polling started. Another example is the establishment of two supervision institutions, namely the CNSEL (National Commission for the Supervision of Legislative Elections) and CNISEL (Independent National Commission for Surveillance of the Legislative Elections) (Bustos, 2012).

The vote share gained by AAV appeared plausible, if not exactly accurate. According to an opinion poll carried out by El Watan and ECOtechnics two months before the election towards citizens from different age, sex and profession groups in 28 *wilayas* showed that the average supporting rate of AAV was 2%, much less than that of FLN (25%) and Democratic National Rally (Rassemblement National Démocratique, RND (5%), two ruling parties founded “from the top down” by regional or national government leaders to consolidate their control (Ighilahriz, 2012). According to another opinion poll conducted by the Rassemblement Actions Jeunesse and ECOtechnics immediately after the election towards the youths in the 18-35 demographic, among those who claimed to have casted a vote, merely 4.7% voted for AAV (ECOtechnics, 2012). Hence, it seems that the Islamist parties might not be as popular as they expected in 2012.

Moreover, a counterexample is Boubekeur’s observation that of the *da’wa salafiyya*’s increasing popularity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially among young Algerians between the ages of 15-35, which shows that the vacuum left by FIS on the ground in terms of Islamist mobilization has been “increasingly filled by the exponential development of the *da’wa salafiyya*” (Bustos, 2012) rather than by legal parties such as MSP, MRI, and Movement for National Reform (Mouvement pour la Réforme Nationale, MRN).

In general, scholars who acknowledged Islamist parties’ loss of thunder in Algeria expound the phenomenon from two perspectives.

One perspective attributes the absence of Islamist victory to “the trauma of war”. The rise of FIS in the elections of 1990 and 1991 led to a *coup d’état*, which suspended the second round of the legislative election of 1991 as well as the democratic reforms started by Chadli. The following “black decade” witnessed a cruel civil war which claimed over 150, 000 lives (Ashour, 2009). According to the “trauma of war” model, this memory not only damaged the image of Islamists as a whole, but demobilized the Algerians to support Islamist movements of any kind at the beginning of 2010s for fear of a repeat of history. (Lazar, 2013); (McAllister, 2013)

Another explanation believes that due to the regime’s co-optation strategy, Islamist parties such as MSP, MRI and MRN underwent a process of moderation and professionalization. As “they compromise to stay in Parliament” (Brown, 2011) and join the governing coalition, voters regard these Islamist parties as the government’s running dogs and do not believe that they could bring any change if they are elected to power. (Boubekeur, 2009); (Khemissi et al., 2012)

Both perspectives, though offers partial answers, are not fully satisfactory. For instance, it might be hard for McAllister, Lazar and Nehad to explain why the younger generation who were children and adolescents when the civil war took place are even less motivated to vote for IPP than their parents who have a stronger memory of the “black decade”. Such a phenomenon is indicated in the outcomes of opinion polls carried out by RAJ and ECOtechnics which showed that the supporting rate of the youths at the age of 18-35 was around 4.7% for AAV (ECOtechnics, 2012) with the official electoral outcome in which AAV obtained 6.2% (2012c) of the valid votes, we can assume that the elder generation did not appear to be less motivated to cast a ballot for Islamist parties.

The moderation and professionalization structure is also problematic as it could not explicate why Djaballah’s parties rarely preponderated over (except in 2002) their more pro-regime counterpart, MSP. In addition, scholars holding this perspective might find it equally hard to interpret the rise in 2011 of Moroccan PJD which had worked with the *makhzen* for over a decade.

### 3. Theorizing the Islamist Parties’ Electoral Mobilization Capacity: A Political Process Model

In order to make a more comprehensive sense of the “Algerian exceptionalism” puzzle, this research presents a political process explanation and contends that AAV’s failure to broaden its appeal in the legislative election of 2012 resulted from absence of political vacuum left by elite fragmentation, AAV’s weak organizational structure, and its unsuccessful framing efforts to build an image of a legitimized reformer.

Widely applied by sociologists such as McAdam, Tarrow and McCarthy, the political process framework paid special attention to the dynamic interactions between political environments, mobilizing structures and framing tactics (McAdam et al., 1996, McAdam, 1982, Tarrow, 1994). This model argues that in the contexts where grievances spread and demands for changes exist, successful mobilization is only possible to occur in the presence of exogenous political opportunities including an increase of the institutional openness to

oppositional forces or fierce elite schism (McAdam, 1982, Tarrow and Tollefson, 1994, Tarrow, 1998). In addition to favorable political environments, the model asserts that organizations' endogenous structures and framing processes are key elements that determine to which extent a potential for social mobilization could be realized (Jenkins and Perrow, 1977, McAdam, 1982, Tarrow, 1994)

Drawing on this approach, this article considers Islamist parties' electoral mobilization as a process determined by political opportunities, organizational structures and framing. Specifically, I argue that successful electoral mobilization of Islamist parties is more likely to appear when three conditions are in place: (1) political vacuum left by elite fragmentation; (2) tolerant organizational structures maintained through consensus within the party; and (3) the building of a legitimized reformer image.

Perhaps one of the most important alterations in the structure of political opportunities take place when there is a change in the unity of the ruling class. This is particularly the case in authoritarian regimes such as Algeria, as in these systems, electoral laws, party code, and other rules which determine to which extent opponents could participate in politics through formal institutions largely reflect the will of the ruling class.

Power relations of ruling elites could be classified into two categories: elite fragmentation—little common ground is reached for different factions without any of them overwhelm the others, and controlled divisions—ruling elites manage to reduce divisions either by fining a common ground for all factions or in the manner of suppressing the weaker factions by the stronger one. In the case of elite fragmentation, certain factions of the ruling elites are very likely to offer opposition forces incentives (i.e. minor posts in the cabinet) in exchange for the latter's support, or allow some opposition parties to function more freely, therefore utilizing them to hamper the elites of other factions. By contrast, in the case of controlled divisions, ruling elites are less motivated to co-opt with opposition forces.

Islamist parties' organizational structure is the second key factor that influences their mobilization. Unlike most of the secular opposition parties that lack wide, national networks with social organizations due to strict controls of the civil society by the regimes in the post-independent eras, Islamist parties' connections with religious facilities and organizations become an important strength. Nonetheless, not all Islamist parties managed to maximize such resources. A common characteristic of the most populist Islamist parties is their inclusive organizational structure, or rather, their formation of what Joffé called an "umbrella organization" (Joffé, 2012) when he analyzed the FIS's appeal, referring to the party's capability of "bringing together three very disparate elements", namely the Djazara'a group, the Salafiyists and the Afghanists. Conversely, the more exclusive Islamist parties which lack charismatic leaders or other mechanisms to handle inner disputes, would witness a dispersion of the party's resources, and a decrease of their advantages over secular opposition parties.

Parties' framing process is the third dimension with a critical bearing on their electoral mobilization. According to Snow and Benford, the most important framing missions include: (1) identification of social problems; (2) indication of solutions; and (3) motivational frames that encourage the public to become active participants (Snow and Benford, 1988) by using means such as identity issues or cultural symbols to arouse sympathy (Benford and Snow, 2000, Snow and Benford, 1988).

Yet, in authoritarian regimes without a consolidated party system, lots of parties are established "from the top down" (Lucardie, 2000) by government officials or their closest allies and thus lacked a real motivation to change the *status quo* whatever slogans they put forward. Thus, whereas almost all of the opposition parties of Algeria point out problems such as corruption, housing shortages and unemployment, and propose alternative plans which are often "sterile" and "theoretic" (Adel, 2012, Parks, 2013) during electoral campaigns, voters in such systems are inclined to be suspicious of whether opposition parties would mean what they say. For voters, whether a party itself has the most likelihood to bring alternative change becomes a concern prior to what the nature of that change is. Hence, motivational frames including identity or cultural issues, in particular how such issues make the parties more trustworthy as an eligible and suitable reformer to the existing order, outweigh the other two framing tasks for opposition parties in authoritarian regimes.

#### **4. An Overview of AAV Member Parties — MSP, MRI and MRN**

The Algerian AAV did not appear on Algerian political stage in 2012 without foundation. Member parties of AAV, namely MSP, MRI and Movement for National Reform (Mouvement pour la Réforme Nationale, MRN), had already been active in Algerian politics for over one or two decades. By the time the three parties formed an alliance in early 2012, all three of them had undergone profound shifts in terms of their political opportunities, resources and framing efforts. In order to understand how such changes took place and in what manner the changes affect the parties' mobilization capacity, one has to track the three parties' developmental trajectories.

##### *MSP*

MSP, AAV's initiating party, was founded in 1991 under the name of HAMAS. Its title was changed into MSP in 1997 given the implementation of a new party code which prohibited the formation of parties on the grounds of religion, language, region or race (Tahi, 1997) earlier in the year. The founder of the party, Mahfoud Nahnah, was a scholar of Islamic religion and Arabic, and throughout his political life, benefited from exposure

to outside influences and ideas. Born in 1942 in Blida, a city located around 50 km southwest of the capital city, Algiers, Nahnah pursued a degree of Arabic literature in the University of Algiers in which he got involved with the religious activities on campus led by Sheikh Ahmed Sahnoun and Abdellatif Soltani, two cadres of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama (Association des Uléma Musulmans Algériens, AUMA), the most influential Islamist association in Algeria under colonial rule. Meanwhile, university life offered Nahnah opportunities to get acquaintance with a few Egyptian professors who brought him into contact with outlooks of Muslim Brotherhood. He later joined its transnational organization and belonged to a moderate section of the Muslim Brotherhood which rejected Sayyid Qutb's jihadist discourse (Barka, 2012). In 1976, Nahnah was sentenced to 15 years in prison as he opposed to the Houari Boumediène's regime by damaging telephone wires. He was only released four years later by Boumediène's successor, Chadli Bendjedid.

Nahnah's profound knowledge of Arabic and Islam as well as his active engagement in the religious activities in Algeria's early independent era won him charismatic leadership within MSP and high position in the Algerian Islamist movement. This was shown by his ability to call on over 300 Islamic organizations in September 1990 to attend his meeting aiming to unify the Islamist movement (Roberts, 2003).

Nahnah's cloudy imprisonment experience in his earlier years reduced his enthusiasm in "subversive activities" in the 1980s as demonstrated in his absence in the Islamists' protests and petitions in November 1982, as well as his opposition in 1990 to the demonstrations organized by the largest and most hard-line Islamist party at the time on Algerian electoral spectrum, Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique du Salut, FIS)<sup>2</sup> (Al-Ahnaf et al., 1991).

In December 1991, FIS won landslide victory in the first round of Algeria's first multi-party legislative election. For many of the secularist senior officials in the military and government, the scenario that FIS would become the country's ruling party as long as it won the second round of election was unacceptable. In January, 191 officials in the military signed a petition to oust President Chadli, attributing the rise of Islamists to his reform of political liberalization. The following months witnessed the banning and harsh crackdown of FIS. This event stirred Nahnah deeply. The tragedy of FIS made him realize that under authoritarian systems, "to reject participation would lead to the marginalization of the Islamist movement" (Barka, 2012).

Meanwhile, the military *coup* of 1992 gave rise to huge divisions in the elite class with "reformists", supporters of Chadli and his liberalization efforts in FLN and the government, on the one side, and on the other side, the "old guards", referring to the senior officers of People's National Army (Armée Nationale Populaire, ANP) and Department of Intelligence and Security (Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité, DRS)<sup>3</sup> who played the key role in the coup d'état of 1992, and their supporters in FLN. With an attempt to suppress rivals within ruling elites, the old guards showed a co-optive sign to MSP by inviting the party to join the National Consultative Council established in April 1992 to substitute the parliament and offering Sassi Lamouri, a cadre of MSP, the position of Minister of Religious Affairs.

It was against this backdrop that Nahnah adopted the "*moucharaka*" strategy, which he interpreted as the "third way between regime and opposition" (Willis, 2012). Self-labeling as an "opponent that collaborate with the regime" (Hamladji, 2002), MSP framed its cooperative tactic as a makeshift, and reinforced that to make compromise to the ruling elites will allow the party to maintain its status as a legal party as well as influencing the country's decision-making by sending party cadres to take ministerial posts and parliamentary seats (Barka, 2012).

MSP's application of its "*moucharaka*" strategy was most remarkable in its absence from signing with the other major Algerian opposition political forces (i.e. the Socialist Forces Front (Front des Forces Socialistes, FFS), MRI and representatives from FIS) the "Platform for a Political and Peaceful Solution of the Algerian Crisis" in Saint Egidio in 1995. The act clarified MSP's position to side with the old guards.

Although reformists were largely excluded from the political scene by 1996 when the old guards replaced Mehri with Boualem Benhamouda, a veteran of the military during the Algerian War of Independent, as FLN's secretary-general, a new round of power struggle among state elites broke out between the military and the then President, Zeroual. Reluctant to act as the former's "puppet", Zeroual tried hard to increase his political outreach. One of the most remarkable efforts he made was the creation of a party "loyal" to him, that is, the RND.

The increasing demands for the old guard incumbents to find allies to crash their rivals in the ruling group in the 1990s created a great opportunity for MSP to expand its supporting base. Not only was MSP allowed to propagate their views to a wider audience as it gained direct access to media outlets under the control of the military (Hamladji, 2002), but it was offered more portfolios in the cabinet. In 1997-1999, the party kept seven ministerial positions, including Minister of Industry and Restructuration, Minister of Small and Medium Firms and Industries, etc. (Hamladji, 2002) Holding these portfolios that have strong impact on the country's economic policy-making, the party becomes more competent to provide services to new social strata emerging along with the development of industrialization since Algeria's independence. Among them are the small and middle private-sector entrepreneurs, which constituted a significant supporting base of MSP in the 1990s (Kapil,

1994, Martinez, 2000).

Correspondingly, MSP witnessed a rapid increase of its popularity in the late 1990s, compared to the supporting rate of mere 5.3% (368, 697 ballots out of 6, 897, 719 valid votes, see (1992)), it gained in the first round of the legislative election in 1991. In the presidential election of 1995, Nahnah won a vote share of 25.6% (2, 971, 974 votes out of 11, 619, 532 valid votes, see (1995)), ranking second to the Zeroual who was appointed by the military. In the legislative election of 1997, MSP acquired 14.8% of the valid votes (1, 553, 154 votes out of 10, 496, 352 valid votes, see (1997)) and became the second largest party in the parliament.

MSP's appeal reflected in its performance in the elections of 1995 and 1997 was beyond the old guards' expectation. For fear of MSP's overexpansion and threat to their dominance, the old guards started to tighten the restrictions on MSP, which was epitomized in the prohibition of Nahnah to run for the presidential election of 1999.

Yet, it did not take long for MSP to find a new "ally" from the elite group to work with. Like Zeroual, to rid of the old guards' control was the *leit motif* in the early reign of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the elected President in 1999. Thus, shortly after ascending power, he started to cast olive branch to the "semi-opposition" (Hamadji, 2002) forces such as MSP and MRI. A case in point was his allocation to MSP several portfolios in "more important ministries" including the Minister of Labor and Social Protection (Driessen, 2012), shortly after he ascended power. The alliance between Bouteflika and MSP was culminated in the formation of the Presidential Alliance in 2002 by FLN, RND and MSP, aimed at supporting Bouteflika's re-election in 2004.

Following the death of Nahnah in 2003, disputes over MSP's hegemony broke out. Though elected as Nahnah's successor, Soltani continued to face fierce challenges from his rivals who questioned both his eligibility and capacity to lead the party in the following years. Although Soltani's insist on a collaborative strategy was largely inherited from Nahnah, as he lacked Nahnah's high prestige among party members, he received much criticisms from his deputy focusing on his autocratic style and pro-regime strategy, which was claimed to undermine the party's independence. (Parks, 2013). Even though Soltani took a compromising gesture at the 2008 Party Congress by promising to keep away from the authority in exchange for Menasra's resignation to run for party president and even gave up his position of Minister of State without a portfolio to show his sincerity, it did not take long before Soltani was reported to support President Bouteflika's bid for re-election in 2009. And that event finally led to Menasra's breakaway on April 16 2009. Along with him left 28 out of 51 Shura Council and thousands of partisans, (Parks, 2013, Ghanem-Yazbeck, 2014), most of whom joined Menasra's newly formed party, Movement for Preaching and Change (Mouvement pour la Prédication et le Changement, MPC), which was renamed Front for Change (Front pour le Changement) in 2011.

#### *MRI and MRN*

Another legal Islamist party that played an active role in Algerian political scene over the past two and a half decades was MRI. This party was founded by Abdallah Djaballah. Born in 1956 in Zermana, a town of Skikda, (Willis, 1998) he was an Islamist *ulama* of the younger generation based in Ain El Bey University in Constantine. By the time he created MRI in 1989, he had already attracted plenty of followers in several towns of eastern Algeria such as Skikda and Constantine (Roberts, 1994, Willis, 1998). The party did not gain legal recognition until the late 1990.

Varying little in the doctrinal sense, MSP and MRI's principal difference lied in their political stance in the early 1990s (Willis, 2012), as MRI favored a confrontational strategy and did not signal much possibility for collaborating with the government under the leadership of Djaballah. Self-labeling as a party "on the left wing of the Islamist movement", MRI had been criticizing Chadli's privatization reforms since its creation (Roberts, 2003). Following the military coup of 1992, Djaballah considered the High Council of State as usurpers who interrupted the country's first experiment of multiparty legislative elections and fiercely condemned the military's crackdown of FIS, as was demonstrated in the party's participation in two rounds of the Saint Egidio meetings convened by Algeria's major opposition forces in the mid-1990s.

Such a hard-line, uncooperative attitude soon gave rise to the government's frequent harassment to MRI and arbitrary imprisonment of its senior members before the party witnessed severe divisions (Joffé, 2012) in late 1996. On the eve of the referendum on constitutional referendum in November 1996, Djaballah intended to call on the party's sympathizers to cast negative votes during the referendum, on the grounds that the draft of the amendment prohibited the use of Islamic identity to form political parties. However, core membership of the Shura Council (MRI's legislative institution) represented by Lahbib Adami Proposed to simply adopt a non-endorsement attitude so as not to infuriate the regime, given that hard-line positions held by MRI in the past did nothing but brought harm to the party. The contention was ended by Djaballah's compromise as he allowed the Shura Council to send disparate messages to the public (Willis, 1998). From then on, Djaballah gradually lost control of the party he created. He was finally marginalized to leave MRI by Adami's soft-liner faction in 1998 and established a new party, MRN.

Whereas many of Djaballah's supporters followed his step and turned to back his newly created party, leading to a remarkable performance of MRN in the legislative election of 2002<sup>4</sup>, the scenario of MRI's internal

strife repeated in MRN. On MRN's convention in March 2007, Djaballah was once again expelled by his partners of the more pro-regime Shura Council which elected Mohamed Boulahia as the party's President, Mohamed Jaheed Yunsi as Secretary-general and Djamal Swalah as President of Shura Council, leaving Djaballah a post without decision-making power. In the following year, Djaballah officially broke away from MRN after failing his lawsuit against his rivals on the allegation that there were fraudulence in MRN's previous inner-party election.

It was not until the summer of 2011 did Djaballah establish his third party, the Justice and Development Front (Front pour la Justice et le Développement, FJD). Moreover, MRI and MRN experienced further splits following Djaballah's departure. For instance, Djamal Benabdesselam left MRI and created Front of the New Algeria (Front de l'Algérie Nouvelle, FAN) (Bsikri, 2012).

### **5. Algerian Political Landscape in the Early 2010s: Absence of Elite Divisions**

Since mid-2000s, along with the escalation of the power struggle between President Bouteflika and the old guards, the political landscape of Algeria witnessed a dramatic shift. The political balance gradually leaned to the side of the latter whose dominant position was established by early 2010s, leading to a shrinkage of opportunity for opposition parties such as MSP, MRI and MRN.

Shortly after Bouteflika ascended to power in 1999, lots of efforts were taken to consolidate the presidential authority. In February 2000, for instance, four out of six regional military commanders were reshuffled. Four years later, Bouteflika dismissed Mohamed Lamari, a figure that remained to be the Chief of Staff for over a decade, in the short aftermath of his reelection (Roberts, 2007) and replaced him with the self-effacing Major General Ahmed Gaïd Salah.

The moves, however, did not fully affirm the President's authority over the old guards, as the intelligence service was still under the control of several influential Algerian Generals epitomized by Muhammad Mediène, head of DRS, and his intimate, Smain Lamari, head of the Department of Counter-Espionage (Département du Contre-Espionage, DCE).

Moreover, President Bouteflika's health condition deteriorated since the mid-2000s. In November 2005, Bouteflika undertook a surgery operation in a hospital of Paris (Ouali, 2005) and was reported to have suffered from stomach cancer by late 2008, according to a leaked diplomatic document (Arous, 2011). Although Bouteflika's infirmity shortened his odds in the power struggle, it did not prevent him from the attempt to extend his control over the intelligence service. His plan was to strengthen the General Director for National Security (Directeur Général de la Sécurité Nationale, DGSN)<sup>5</sup> to counterbalance DRS. This action was the last straw before Mediène launched his most vigorous counteract.

According to some sources, Mediène was linked to the assassination of Ali Tounsi, the national police chief in 2010. Tounsi was succeeded by Maj.-Gen. Abdelghani Hamel, former commander of the Republican Guard of the *Gendarmerie Nationale*. The event was interpreted by some as an act of the military and intelligence to capture control of the national police system from the President. (Del Panta, 2014, 2010)

Another important step in the old guards' attempt to affirm their dominance in the country's political scene was to conduct an investigation around the corruption of Sonatrach, Algerian state-owned oil company. According to the investigation findings, the corruption scandal involved Mohammed Meziane, head of the enterprise, and three vice-presidents. All of them had close relationship with President Bouteflika and were dismissed following the scandal. Moreover, the corruption scandal gave rise to a power crisis for the President who was forced to initiate a government reshuffle, and sacked a number of his entourages including Minister of Energy, Chakib Khelil as well as Minister of Investment Promotion, Abdelhamid Temmar (Del Panta, 2014).

Moreover, the old guards tried to undermine Bouteflika's influence on Algeria's largest ruling party, FLN, by forming a faction within the party to obstruct the dominance of Bouteflika-backed Party Secretary-general, Abdelaziz Belkhadem. By the legislative election in 2012, though Belkhadem remained his title as party leader for electoral needs, he was a mere figurehead, as 250 out of 351 members of FLN's central committee were out of his command (Moussaoui et al., 2012, Amir, 2012).

Thus, in the early 2010s, Algeria basically witnessed an end of the power struggle at the highest level between president Bouteflika and DRS with the victory of the latter (Del Panta, 2014, Entelis, 2013). The much weakened President incapable of maintaining his entourages' posts in the cabinet could hardly provide his semi-ally, MSP with more benefits. The old guards, on the other hand, lacked the intention to reconcile with MSP which had once "betrayed" them. Particularly given that the old guards who had already gained the upper hand in their power competition against Bouteflika, they were no longer keen on gaining support from MSP, let alone the more fragmented and impotent MRI and MRN. It was in this context that MSP gradually lost its most important ministerial portfolios such as Minister of Industry and Minister of Labor and Social Protection.

### **6. AAV: Exclusive Organizational Structure and Self-contradictory Framing**

The reducing benefits acquired by MSP, MRI and MRN from Bouteflika along with the latter's decrease of

political influence discouraged the parties to collaborate with political elites. Additionally, the landslide victory for the *Ennahda* in Tunisian Constituent Assembly (Assemblée Constituante Tunisienne, ACT) in October 2011, together with the nation-wide popularity enjoyed by Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) in Egypt in the late 2011 and early 2012, further strengthened Soltani's determination to change his party's image from "semi-opposition" (Hamladji, 2002) forces to "full opponents".

In January 2012, Soltani declared the departure of MSP from the Presidential Alliance in early 2012 and stated that this was "the year of competition" rather than that of alliances (2012b). Meanwhile, Soltani called on the formation of an electoral alliance with other Islamist parties on Algerian political landscape, with an attempt to unite Islamist resources in Algeria and enhance the electoral mobilization capacity of Islamists as a whole. Yet, such an expectation was barely reached. For one thing, the lack of charismatic leaders within Islamist parties and the exclusive structure of the Algerian Islamist party politics impeded Soltani's efforts to optimize the use of Islamist resources in the country. For another, AAV's contradictory discourses during its campaign for the APN election aggravated voters' doubts to the alliance's slogans and platforms.

To begin with, Soltani's advocacy to unite Islamist resources merely failed to receive extensive responses. As is above mentioned, by 2012, Algerian legal Islamist parties have already undergone profound fragmentations. Whereas MRI and MRN agreed to ally with MSP, breakaway parties of MRN such as Djaballah's FJD and Benabdesselam's FAN, and Menasra's FC, breakaway party of MSP, did not signal their willingness to join the coalition composed of their adversaries. Djaballah even publicly expressed his unconfidence of AAV, while the latter called Djaballah "a failed person blam[ing] others for his mistakes" (2012d). By the time when the legislative election was held in May 2012, Islamist electoral forces still scattered on the electoral spectrum.

Secondly, Soltani's leadership was hardly firm in MSP, neither in AAV. The centrifugal tendency within MSP did not end with the departure of Menasra and his followers. A case in point was that Soltani encountered great obstacle from within MSP when he demanded in early 2012 that the four ministers of MSP in the cabinet, namely Minister of Public Works, Minister of Commerce, Minister of Fisheries and Minister of Tourism (2012d) resign their ministerial posts so as to correspond with the party's transformation of position from "semi-opposition" (Hamladji, 2002) forces to "full opponents". Amar Ghoul, Minister of Public Works, in particular, strongly refused to give up his post in the government and even put his photo with the background of the East-West highway on his campaign poster so as to highlight his contribution as a minister to the country's infrastructure (Berkouk, 2012). Furthermore, the relations between the three member parties of AAV remained to be loose. Nominally, the alliance was dominated by MSP. Yet, MRI and MRN went their own way during the electoral campaigns and barely followed the instructions of Soltani who failed to build an authority within his own party.

The AAV's exclusive orientation went hand-in-hand with its ambivalent frames. Although the AAV portrayed itself as an "Islamist bloc" and claimed its aim to establish a sovereign state "with respect for Islamic values" (Bahri, 2012), the alliance did not capitalize much on religious issues in its frames during the electoral campaigns on the eve of the election in May 2012. Unlike the Tunisian *Ennahda* or Morocco's Justice and Development Party (Parti de La Justice et du Développement, PJD) which advanced the idea of "social justice" – an ideal social status advocated in Islam – in their platforms in 2011 (Rogler, 2012), the AAV failed to build its justification by making it clear why the alliance's Islamic identity might be important to promote the reforms of Algeria's political system to solve socio-economic problems. On the other hand, secular parties such as FLN emphasized that the 1 November 1954 Declaration "speaks of a democratic and social state within the framework of the principles of Islam" (2012a). Similarly, another secular party MPA (Mouvement pour l'Algérie) claimed that "the people do not have any problem with Islam, which is a national constant and all of us are good Muslims" (Abdelkrim, 2012). In this sense, the so-called "Islamist coalition" of AAV did not make distinctions among secular opposition parties in Algeria.

Additionally, in view of the fact that MSP had took a collaborative position towards the regime from 1992 to 2011, and that MRI and MRN became increasingly pro-regime in succession after the soft-line sect in both parties ousted Djaballah, to maintain their voting bloc, it was important for the three parties to find "reasonable grounds" for their dramatic shift in the parties' strategies. Yet, AAV's framing process turned out to be both oscillatory and self-contradictory. Despite AAV's reinforcement that the political priorities for Algeria was to embark on reforms according to the real principles of the Republican systems, the base of which was to transform the current presidential system into a parliamentary system (Bahri, 2012, 2011), Soltani, the alliance's nominal leader, later argued against himself on another occasion in which he claimed that his party would merely end its relations FLN and RND without influencing its coalition with President Bouteflika himself (Luhayaani, 2012). Certain citizens' confusion of whether AAV worked with or against the government when its delegates launched their electoral campaigns in Annaba (Abdelkrim, 2012) showed that alliance did not frame this "role change" perfectly.

## 7. Conclusion

Despite the wide attention on AAV's fiasco in the Algerian legislative election of 2012, the current research lacks a sustained theoretical treatment of the puzzle. In this article, I argue that the low mobilization capacity of AAV in Algerian legislative election of 2012 was attributed to three factors: (1) absence of political vacuum left by elite fragmentation; (2) AAV's weak organizational structure; and (3) its unsuccessful framing efforts to build an image of a legitimized reformer. The research has implications for the broader study of electoral mobilization, as it indicates that the political process approach based upon the synthesis of political environment, organizational structures and ideas can offer a more comprehensive and panoramic interpretation on the mobilization capacity of Islamist parties than explanations such as the "trauma of war" model or the framework of moderation and professionalization. Moreover, the article aims to contribute theoretically to the approach of political process model, an approach of the social movement theories which has been much applied to the study of mobilization through informal means but remains underdeveloped in the research of mobilization through formal institutions such as party politics and electoral politics (McAdam, D., 1996: 35-36). The dynamic relationship between political opportunities, organizational structures, framing and parties' electoral mobilization capacity has profound implications, and points to the need for more theoretical attention to formal political participation by social movement scholars.

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#### Notes

1. In this article, Islamist parties are defined as Islamist parties are defined as organizations which refer to Islamic interpretations and commitments as an ideological base and participate in politics through elections.
2. Formed in 1989, the Islamic party of FIS took a confrontational strategy and organized several protests such as strikes and demonstrations in 1990-1991. The party alarmed the regime after it won overwhelming votes in the local and legislative elections in the period and was banned in 1992.
3. DRS is the Algerian intelligence services. Its predecessor was the Military Security (Sécurité Militaire, SM) founded by Colonel Abdelhafid Boussouf during the Algerian War of Independence. In the post-independent era, SM changed its name to DRS. The organization had much influence on the country's political affairs and expanded rapidly after the coup d'état of 1992 in the name of an increasing exigency to counter Islamist insurgency.
4. Whereas Djaballah's MRN won 9.5% of the valid votes in the legislative election of 2002, MRI merely gained 0.6%.
5. Created in 1962, DGSN is a department affiliated with the ministry of Interior and is in charge of commanding the police in Algeria

**Table 1** Several Economic, Social and Corruption Indicators of Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria in 2009-2012

	Year	Egypt	Tunisia	Morocco	Algeria
GDP (USD Billion)	2009	188.98	43.45	90.91	137.21
	2010	218.89	44.05	90.77	161.21
	2011	236	44.95	99.21	199.1
	2012	262.83	45.24	95.98	204.33
GDP Per Capita (US Dollars)	2009	1499.34	3766.13	2293.3	3091.06
	2010	1550.24	3861.51	2348.59	3143.63
	2011	1551.4	3807.45	2432.82	3171.74
	2012	1599.61	3925.05	2462.17	3215.21
Unem- -ployment	2009	9.40%	13.30%	9.10%	10.02%
	2010	9%	13%	9.10%	10%
	2011	12%	12.90%	8.90%	9.90%
	2012	11.90%	12.80%	9%	9.80%
Youth Unem- -ployment	2009	27%	29.70%	18.10%	21.70%
	2010	26.30%	29.40%	17.70%	22.20%
	2011	35.50%	29.30%	17.80%	22.20%
	2012	35.70%	29.30%	17.40%	21.60%
Inflation In The Consumer Price Index	2009	12%	3.52%	0.99%	5.73%
	2010	11.27%	4.42%	0.92%	3.91%
	2011	10.05%	3.61%	1.28%	4.52%
	2012	7.12%	5.50%	1.89%	8.89%
Corruption Perceptions Index <sup>a</sup>	2009	2.8	4.2	3.3	2.8
	2010	3.1	4.3	3.4	2.9
	2011	2.9	3.8	3.4	2.9
	2012	32	41	37	34

a The Corruption Perception Index scores countries published by Transparency International were on scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (very clean) in 2009-2011. In 2012, the scores were on scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean).

Sources: <http://www.tradingeconomics.com>; <http://www.thegloaleconomy.com>; <http://www.transparency.org>