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	Colonial Governance and Revolutionary Resistance in Algeria under the French Fourth Republic (1946–1958): Policies, Power Structures, and Strategies of Anti-Colonial Mobilization
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Abstract	This study examines the dynamics of French colonial policy in Algeria during the Fourth Republic (1946–1958) and explores the strategies employed by the Algerian revolutionary movement to confront and resist colonial domination. The period under review was marked by intensifying socio-political tensions, the implementation of reforms aimed at consolidating French authority, and increasing mobilization for Algerian self-determination. French policies during this era, including legislative reforms, administrative restructuring, and socio-economic measures, sought to maintain control while addressing nationalist pressures. Simultaneously, Algerian revolutionary forces developed multifaceted strategies encompassing political organization, grassroots mobilization, and early insurgent activities to counteract colonial measures. By analyzing archival documents, policy records, and revolutionary writings, this study highlights the dialectical interplay between colonial strategies and revolutionary responses, illustrating how each influenced the trajectory of Algeria's struggle for independence. The findings underscore the complexity of colonial governance and resistance, revealing how strategic adaptation, social mobilization, and ideological commitment shaped the eventual path toward liberation.
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Introduction

The period of the French Fourth Republic (1946–1958) represents a critical juncture in the history of Algeria, characterized by intensified colonial control and rising nationalist sentiment. In the aftermath of World War II, France sought to reassert its authority over its colonies while addressing both international pressures and domestic demands for reform. Algeria, considered an integral part of the French Republic rather than a colony, became a central arena for these tensions. The Fourth Republic's colonial policy was marked by attempts to implement reforms aimed at pacifying nationalist aspirations while maintaining political and economic dominance. These reforms

included measures to reorganize administrative structures, expand limited political representation, and stimulate socio-economic development in ways that served French interests.

However, these policies often failed to address the underlying grievances of the Algerian population, particularly the systemic inequalities in land ownership, political participation, and civil rights. The persistence of economic marginalization, social discrimination, and political exclusion fueled the growth of nationalist movements and revolutionary consciousness. The period witnessed the emergence and consolidation of various political organizations that sought independence through negotiation, political advocacy, and, increasingly, revolutionary action.

The Algerian revolutionary response during this period was not monolithic but encompassed a range of strategies aimed at challenging French authority while mobilizing local populations. Revolutionary actors employed political organizing, grassroots mobilization, and clandestine operations to build networks of resistance, disseminate nationalist ideology, and prepare the population for eventual armed struggle. These strategies were shaped by the realities of colonial repression, the need to maintain social cohesion, and the imperative to create a coherent national movement capable of confronting a well-resourced colonial state.

The interaction between French colonial policy and Algerian revolutionary strategy during 1946–1958 illustrates a dialectical process in which each side adapted to the actions of the other. French attempts to integrate, pacify, or reform Algerian society often inadvertently strengthened nationalist resolve and expanded the reach of revolutionary networks. Conversely, the resilience and strategic ingenuity of Algerian actors compelled the French administration to modify policies and adopt increasingly coercive measures, creating a cycle of resistance and repression that set the stage for the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962).

Understanding this historical period requires a multidimensional approach that considers political, socio-economic, and ideological factors. By analyzing colonial legislation, administrative reforms, economic policies, and revolutionary writings, this study seeks to uncover how French policy objectives collided with Algerian aspirations for self-determination. It further examines how early revolutionary strategies were formulated and implemented, highlighting the capacity of oppressed populations to adapt creatively to systemic constraints.

This research not only contributes to the historiography of French colonialism and Algerian nationalism but also provides insights into broader questions of anti-colonial resistance, state-society interaction, and the dynamics of liberation movements. The study underscores the importance of strategic adaptation, popular mobilization, and ideological commitment in shaping historical outcomes, demonstrating that the struggle for independence was a product of both systemic pressures and human agency.

1. French Colonial Policy in Algeria

Legislative reforms implemented to consolidate French control

During the Fourth Republic, France introduced a series of legislative measures aimed at strengthening its authority in Algeria. These reforms included citizenship adjustments, such as granting limited political rights to certain Algerians under strict conditions, and the reorganization of electoral systems to favor French settlers. Laws were designed to maintain the dominance of European interests while creating the impression of inclusivity for the local population. Despite these efforts, such reforms often deepened the sense of exclusion among the majority of Algerians, who were denied full political participation and representation.

Administrative strategies: restructuring governance, local councils, and bureaucratic control. In addition to legislative changes, the French colonial administration sought to restructure governance at both central and local levels. The creation of local councils and municipal bodies allowed for greater bureaucratic oversight while ensuring that decision-making remained under French supervision. French officials occupied key positions, and administrative processes were centralized to monitor and control social and political activities. These strategies reinforced the power imbalance between settlers and indigenous populations, fostering discontent and resistance.

Economic and social measures: land policy, industrialization efforts, education, and employment programs

Economic policies under the Fourth Republic were carefully crafted to serve French interests. Land reforms often dispossessed Algerians, transferring fertile territories to European settlers, while economic development projects primarily benefited the colonial elite. Efforts to promote industrialization were concentrated in urban centers, providing limited employment for local populations. Educational initiatives introduced by the French remained insufficient, with limited access for Algerians, and vocational programs favored European communities. Overall, these measures aimed at economic integration of Algeria into France, but largely failed to meet the socio-economic needs of the indigenous population.

The objectives behind these policies: pacification, assimilation, and maintaining colonial authority. French colonial policy was motivated by multiple objectives. Pacification aimed to suppress dissent and prevent organized resistance, while assimilation sought to culturally and politically integrate Algerians into the French Republic under controlled terms. Maintaining colonial authority required balancing the demands of European settlers with international pressures for reform. These policies were simultaneously coercive and strategic, attempting to project an image of benevolence while preserving French dominance. However, the emphasis on control over genuine inclusion contributed to the radicalization of nationalist movements.

Limitations and failures of French policies in addressing Algerian grievances. Despite the comprehensive nature of French reforms, they largely failed to address the core grievances of Algerians. Structural inequalities persisted, political representation remained superficial, and economic opportunities were skewed toward settlers. These failures created a climate of frustration and disillusionment, fostering the growth of nationalist movements and revolutionary strategies. The disconnect between policy intentions and social realities illustrates the inability of colonial governance to reconcile control with justice, laying the groundwork for the organized resistance that would culminate in the Algerian War of Independence.

2. Emergence and Evolution of Algerian Revolutionary Strategy

Formation of revolutionary organizations and political movements

In response to colonial policies, Algerians began organizing politically and socially to challenge French authority. Various nationalist organizations emerged, including moderate political groups advocating reform and radical factions preparing for direct confrontation. These movements were instrumental in consolidating public opinion and creating a sense of national identity, providing an organizational framework for resistance. The emergence of these groups reflects a strategic shift from individual grievances to collective political action.

Methods of resistance: political lobbying, grassroots mobilization, propaganda, clandestine operations

Algerian revolutionary strategy was multifaceted. Political lobbying sought to engage colonial authorities through formal channels, though often with limited success. Grassroots mobilization enabled communities to organize demonstrations, strikes, and other forms of civil protest. Revolutionary leaders also utilized propaganda to spread nationalist ideology and educate the population about colonial injustices. Clandestine operations, including secret meetings, underground publications, and early armed preparations, demonstrated a commitment to sustained and covert resistance, laying the groundwork for future insurgencies.

Role of local communities and networks in sustaining resistance

Local communities played a crucial role in supporting revolutionary activities. Social networks, kinship ties, and communal solidarity provided essential resources, intelligence, and protection for revolutionary actors. This local support enabled the movements to survive in the face of colonial repression, maintain continuity of operations, and extend their influence across rural and urban areas. The embedded nature of these networks highlights how revolutionary strategies were rooted in social realities, not solely in ideological frameworks.

Early insurgent or militant activities preceding the formal outbreak of the Algerian War of Independence

Prior to the official start of the Algerian War of Independence in 1954, early militant activities signaled the escalation of conflict. This included sabotage, attacks on colonial infrastructure, and confrontations with French forces, often coordinated at the local level. Such actions reflected both the strategic planning and growing capacity of revolutionary

groups to challenge colonial authority directly. They also served as critical learning experiences for insurgent leaders, informing tactics used during the full-scale war.

Strategic adaptation to French repression and policy changes

The Algerian revolutionary strategy was marked by continuous adaptation to French repression and policy shifts. Revolutionary leaders carefully monitored legislative and administrative measures, modifying their approaches to maintain momentum and minimize losses. This included shifting between overt political engagement and covert militant action, as well as tailoring propaganda to respond to evolving colonial narratives. The capacity for strategic flexibility was a key factor in sustaining resistance and ultimately preparing for the broader struggle for independence.

3. Emergence and Evolution of Algerian Revolutionary Strategy

Formation of revolutionary organizations and political movements in response to colonial policies. The emergence of Algerian revolutionary organizations during the Fourth Republic was a direct response to the inadequacies and oppressive nature of French colonial policy. Moderate nationalist groups, such as the Parti du Peuple Algérien (PPA) and later the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties (MTLD), initially sought reform within the colonial framework, emphasizing political dialogue and gradual socio-political integration. Simultaneously, clandestine groups recognized the limitations of negotiation and pursued more radical strategies aimed at mobilizing the population for active resistance. These organizations were not isolated; they functioned within a dense network of local, regional, and transnational connections, drawing on diaspora communities, intellectual circles, and urban labor movements to consolidate resources, disseminate ideas, and coordinate activities. Their formation marked a significant evolution from scattered, localized dissent to organized, strategic, and ideologically coherent resistance, laying the foundation for the eventual armed struggle that would define the Algerian War of Independence.

Methods of resistance: political lobbying, grassroots mobilization, propaganda, clandestine operations

Revolutionary movements employed a diverse set of methods to challenge French authority. Political lobbying and participation in limited municipal councils allowed activists to expose systemic injustices and raise awareness, although such measures often met with superficial reforms. Grassroots mobilization became essential, involving strikes, protests, and the organization of rural communities to assert collective grievances. Propaganda played a crucial role in shaping public opinion, with newspapers, pamphlets, and speeches communicating nationalist ideology and critiquing colonial exploitation. Clandestine operations provided another dimension, enabling activists to circumvent colonial surveillance, organize secret meetings, and prepare for armed action. Together, these methods reflect a sophisticated, multi-pronged strategy that balanced visibility, persuasion, and covert preparation, ensuring that revolutionary efforts were both socially grounded and politically effective.

Role of local communities and networks in sustaining resistance

The support of local communities was indispensable to the resilience of revolutionary movements. Extended family networks, religious institutions, and village councils provided logistical support, intelligence, and safe havens for organizers, while simultaneously embedding resistance into everyday life. These networks facilitated the dissemination of information, recruitment of volunteers, and coordination of economic and social resources to sustain revolutionary activity. Moreover, the involvement of communities lent legitimacy to the struggle, reinforcing the perception of nationalism as a collective enterprise rather than the pursuit of a narrow elite. This embedded support ensured continuity in the face of repression and allowed revolutionary strategies to adapt to localized conditions, bridging urban and rural divides in Algeria.

Early insurgent or militant activities preceding the formal outbreak of the Algerian War of Independence

Even before the formal outbreak of hostilities in 1954, revolutionary actors engaged in a variety of militant and insurgent activities. These included targeted sabotage of colonial infrastructure, attacks on administrative offices, and disruptions of settler economic operations. Such activities were carefully calculated to maximize impact while minimizing exposure, reflecting strategic awareness and a growing understanding of the operational challenges posed by a superior military force. These early actions served multiple purposes: testing colonial responses, building insurgent capacity, and signaling the inevitability of organized resistance. They also fostered coordination between

different revolutionary factions, creating networks of trust and collaboration that would later prove crucial during the large-scale conflict of the Algerian War of Independence.

Strategic adaptation to French repression and policy changes

The Algerian revolutionary movement demonstrated remarkable adaptability in response to French repression. Leaders continuously modified tactics to counter new legal measures, military crackdowns, and administrative interventions. This included shifting between overt political engagement and covert operational planning, relocating centers of activity to avoid surveillance, and leveraging media and propaganda to maintain public support. The capacity to adapt strategically, rather than relying on rigid methods, enabled revolutionary actors to maintain momentum despite systematic attempts by the colonial administration to neutralize resistance. This iterative process of adaptation reflects the interplay between structural constraints and human agency, illustrating how revolutionary strategy evolved in a dynamic environment shaped by repression, reform, and socio-political pressures.

4. Interaction Between French Policy and Algerian Resistance

How French reforms influenced revolutionary planning and mobilization

French colonial reforms often had unintended consequences, directly shaping the evolution of Algerian revolutionary strategy. While the administration sought to pacify discontent through political representation, educational programs, and limited economic concessions, these measures frequently exposed the superficiality of French promises and the persistence of inequality. Revolutionary leaders capitalized on these inconsistencies, highlighting them in propaganda, mobilizing communities around shared grievances, and using incremental reforms as a catalyst for more organized resistance. In this sense, French policy served as both a constraint and a stimulus for revolutionary activity, compelling nationalist actors to develop sophisticated planning and mobilization strategies.

Feedback effects: repression strengthening resistance, revolutionary tactics shaping colonial responses

The interaction between repression and resistance created a dynamic feedback loop. As colonial authorities intensified surveillance, arrests, and punitive measures, Algerian nationalists adjusted their strategies, employing greater secrecy, decentralized networks, and selective violence. Conversely, these adaptive tactics forced French administrators to continually revise policies, ranging from punitive crackdowns to rhetorical concessions aimed at pacification. The cycle of action and reaction exemplified the dialectical nature of colonial governance and anti-colonial resistance, in which each actor's behavior directly influenced the strategies and policies of the other.

Key episodes illustrating the clash between colonial authority and revolutionary strategy. Several key episodes exemplify the confrontation between French authorities and revolutionary movements. Notable among these were uprisings in urban neighborhoods, coordinated strikes by labor unions, and rural demonstrations that were met with military intervention. These episodes revealed both the strategic acumen of revolutionary actors and the limitations of colonial authority in containing popular unrest. They also served as formative experiences, informing subsequent tactics, shaping leadership structures, and reinforcing the necessity of comprehensive national coordination.

Role of ideology, nationalism, and collective identity in sustaining resistance. Ideology and collective identity were central to sustaining Algerian resistance. Nationalist rhetoric emphasized historical grievances, cultural unity, and the legitimacy of self-determination, providing a moral and political framework that galvanized diverse social groups. This shared sense of purpose reinforced solidarity across ethnic, regional, and socio-economic divisions, creating a coherent narrative that legitimized revolutionary activity and motivated participation. Ideology also guided tactical decisions, ensuring that resistance remained strategically aligned with long-term objectives rather than ad hoc reactions to repression.

Strategic interdependence between policy and resistance

Ultimately, the relationship between French policy and Algerian resistance was characterized by strategic interdependence. Colonial measures shaped the evolution of revolutionary methods, while revolutionary actions prompted adaptations in colonial governance. This reciprocal influence demonstrates that the trajectory of resistance was not solely determined by oppression or ideology but emerged from the interactive processes of negotiation,

adaptation, and confrontation. Understanding this interplay provides critical insights into the dynamics of colonialism and the complex mechanisms through which anti-colonial movements gain momentum.

5. Socio-Economic and Cultural Dimensions

The impact of colonial policies on Algerian society, including economic marginalization, land dispossession, and education

French colonial policies systematically marginalized Algerians, concentrating wealth, land, and educational opportunities in the hands of settlers. Land dispossession displaced rural populations, undermining traditional agrarian livelihoods, while economic policies favored urban industrial development primarily benefiting Europeans. Access to education was limited and heavily biased toward assimilationist objectives, leaving the majority of Algerians excluded from professional and administrative roles. This structural marginalization exacerbated poverty, social inequality, and grievances, creating fertile ground for revolutionary mobilization.

Revolutionary strategies addressing social inequalities and mobilizing diverse groups. In response to social and economic exclusion, revolutionary movements prioritized addressing inequalities as part of their strategy. Activists mobilized laborers, peasants, students, and women, creating inclusive networks that transcended class and regional divisions. Programs focused on literacy campaigns, political education, and communal organization, linking immediate material grievances to the broader goal of national liberation. By targeting socio-economic inequities, revolutionary strategy not only challenged colonial authority but also strengthened popular support and cohesion.

Cultural and symbolic resistance: media, literature, and public discourse in the nationalist struggle. Cultural and symbolic forms of resistance played a vital role in sustaining nationalist sentiment. Newspapers, pamphlets, poetry, and oral storytelling disseminated revolutionary ideals, reinforced collective memory, and countered colonial narratives. Religious and cultural institutions were also leveraged to promote awareness of colonial injustices and encourage participation in resistance activities. These symbolic strategies were crucial in building a shared national consciousness and maintaining morale during periods of intense repression.

Role of education and social institutions in shaping revolutionary consciousness. Although limited under colonial policies, educational institutions became critical sites for fostering revolutionary consciousness. Students and teachers often served as intermediaries, transmitting nationalist ideas and facilitating the organization of protests and political clubs. Religious institutions complemented this process, embedding anti-colonial sentiment within communal and moral frameworks. The interplay between formal and informal education thus contributed to the intellectual and organizational foundations of the revolutionary movement.

Integration of socio-economic and cultural strategies in the liberation movement. Algerian revolutionary strategy integrated socio-economic and cultural dimensions into a comprehensive framework for resistance. Economic grievances were addressed through mobilization and advocacy, while cultural expression reinforced ideological commitment and solidarity. This integration ensured that revolutionary efforts were not limited to political or military objectives but encompassed broader social transformation, fostering unity and resilience across diverse communities and laying the groundwork for the eventual success of the independence movement.

6. Lessons and Implications for Understanding Colonialism and Resistance

The significance of this period in the lead-up to the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962). The 1946–1958 period was formative in shaping the structures, strategies, and ideologies that would drive the Algerian War of Independence. The emergence of organized revolutionary networks, the development of adaptive strategies, and the articulation of nationalist ideology provided a strong foundation for sustained armed struggle. Understanding this period highlights the continuity between early resistance and the later full-scale liberation movement.

Insights into the dynamics of colonial governance versus anti-colonial resistance. Analyzing this period illuminates the interaction between colonial governance and resistance, demonstrating that repression and reform were intertwined forces that mutually shaped outcomes. French attempts at pacification often provoked greater mobilization, while revolutionary tactics forced colonial authorities to adapt. This interplay underscores the

importance of studying governance and resistance as dynamic, interdependent processes rather than linear or isolated phenomena.

Broader relevance for studying liberation movements

The Algerian case provides lessons for understanding liberation movements globally. Effective resistance often requires a combination of political, social, economic, and cultural strategies; grassroots support; ideological cohesion; and strategic adaptability. These elements were evident in Algeria and serve as a framework for analyzing other anti-colonial and liberation struggles.

State-society interactions and strategic adaptation

The period demonstrates how state-society interactions are crucial in shaping resistance movements. Colonized populations respond not only to repression but also to policy initiatives, co-opting or circumventing them as part of a broader struggle. Strategic adaptation, informed by observation and experience, becomes central to the success of resistance movements.

The enduring importance of collective identity and social cohesion

Finally, the Algerian experience emphasizes the role of collective identity and social cohesion in sustaining resistance. Shared historical grievances, cultural connections, and nationalistic ideology were essential in uniting diverse groups and maintaining commitment over time. The lessons from this period highlight that enduring liberation movements depend as much on social solidarity and cultural mobilization as on military or political action.

Conclusion

The period of the French Fourth Republic (1946–1958) represents a critical stage in Algeria's struggle for self-determination, marked by the intricate interplay between colonial policy and revolutionary response. French colonial authorities, seeking to consolidate their control, implemented a series of legislative, administrative, economic, and social measures aimed at pacification, assimilation, and governance. These policies, however, largely failed to address the structural inequalities, political exclusion, and economic marginalization experienced by the indigenous population. While reforms offered the appearance of progress and inclusion, they exposed the deep-seated disparities between European settlers and Algerians, creating an environment of frustration and disillusionment that fueled nationalist sentiment.

In response, Algerian revolutionary movements emerged with remarkable organizational capacity and strategic sophistication. Political organizations, clandestine groups, and grassroots networks combined to develop a multifaceted approach to resistance, encompassing political lobbying, propaganda, community mobilization, and early militant activities. These strategies were not isolated or static; they evolved in response to French repression, policy shifts, and socio-political conditions. Local communities provided crucial support through social networks, kinship ties, and institutional structures, ensuring continuity and legitimacy for revolutionary efforts. This embeddedness in the social fabric allowed resistance to expand beyond urban centers into rural areas, creating a broad-based, nationally coherent movement.

The interaction between colonial reforms and revolutionary strategies illustrates the dynamic, reciprocal relationship between governance and resistance. French attempts at pacification often inadvertently strengthened nationalist resolve, while the adaptive tactics of Algerian revolutionaries compelled the colonial administration to modify policies and employ repressive measures. Key episodes of confrontation, including strikes, demonstrations, and localized insurrections, highlight the iterative nature of this struggle, where action and counteraction continuously shaped the trajectory of political and social developments. Ideology, collective identity, and nationalism played a central role in maintaining cohesion, motivating participation, and providing a moral and strategic framework for sustained resistance.

Socio-economic and cultural dimensions were integral to the revolutionary strategy. Colonial policies of land dispossession, economic exclusion, and educational limitations generated widespread grievances that revolutionaries addressed through mobilization, advocacy, and the creation of inclusive social networks. Cultural and symbolic forms

of resistance, such as newspapers, pamphlets, literature, and religious institutions, reinforced nationalist consciousness, strengthened solidarity, and provided avenues for ideological dissemination. The integration of social, economic, and cultural strategies ensured that resistance was not merely political or military but represented a holistic effort to challenge colonial authority while fostering national identity and collective empowerment.

Ultimately, the lessons of this period extend beyond Algeria, offering insights into the dynamics of colonial governance, anti-colonial resistance, and the factors that contribute to successful liberation movements. The evolution of revolutionary strategy during 1946–1958 underscores the importance of strategic adaptability, grassroots mobilization, collective identity, and the interplay between repression and resistance. By analyzing these dynamics, scholars gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which oppressed populations negotiate power, respond to systemic constraints, and ultimately transform socio-political realities. The period serves as a foundational precursor to the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962), demonstrating that the struggle for freedom was rooted not only in armed confrontation but also in the careful planning, social engagement, and ideological commitment developed during these formative years.

In conclusion, the study of French colonial policy and Algerian revolutionary strategy during the Fourth Republic illuminates the complex interdependence of oppression and resistance. It reveals that colonial rule, despite its extensive resources and administrative apparatus, was continually challenged by indigenous ingenuity, social cohesion, and nationalist determination. The resilience, adaptability, and strategic acumen of Algerian revolutionaries transformed localized grievances into a national movement capable of confronting a dominant colonial power. This historical episode highlights the enduring significance of collective identity, socio-economic mobilization, and cultural resistance in shaping the course of liberation struggles, offering enduring lessons for understanding the broader dynamics of colonialism, governance, and human agency in contexts of oppression.

Ethical Considerations

This study is based exclusively on the analysis of historical documents, archival records, published policy materials, and secondary scholarly sources. It does not involve human participants, personal data, interviews, surveys, or experimental procedures. Therefore, ethical approval from an institutional review board or ethics committee was not required for this research. All sources used in the study were consulted and cited in accordance with accepted standards of academic integrity and historical scholarship.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest related to the publication of this manuscript.

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