
French citizens and soldiers nonviolently defend against Algerian putsch, 1961

- [included participation by more than one social class](#) [1]

Timing

Time period notes:

Although the coup began the night of April 21, it is not clear if nonviolent resistance began sooner than the morning of April 22

April 22,
1961

to:

April 25,
1961

Location and Goals

Country:

France

Country:

Algeria

Location City/State/Province:

Paris and Algiers

Location Description:

Throughout Algeria and France

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

To prevent the coup in the Algerian colony from remaining in power and to prevent the coup from invading France

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 048. Protest meetings
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support ›Citizens gathered at airports to meet invading troops
- 048. Protest meetings
- 065. Stay-at-home
- 121. Refusal of public support
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 143. Blocking of lines of command and information
- 144. Stalling and obstruction
- 145. General administrative noncooperation
- 147. Deliberate inefficiency and selective noncooperation by enforcement agents

Methods in 4th segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support ›Citizens gathered at airports to meet invading troops
- 048. Protest meetings
- 065. Stay-at-home
- 096. International trade embargo ›Shipping Blockade to the colony
- 118. Hartal ›One-hour, symbolic general strike
- 121. Refusal of public support
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 143. Blocking of lines of command and information
- 144. Stalling and obstruction
- 145. General administrative noncooperation
- 147. Deliberate inefficiency and selective noncooperation by enforcement agents

Methods in 5th segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support ›Citizens gathered at airports to meet invading troops
- 065. Stay-at-home
- 096. International trade embargo ›Shipping Blockade to the colony
- 121. Refusal of public support
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 143. Blocking of lines of command and information
- 144. Stalling and obstruction
- 145. General administrative noncooperation
- 147. Deliberate inefficiency and selective noncooperation by enforcement agents

Methods in 6th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support ›Citizens gathered at airports to meet invading troops
- 065. Stay-at-home
- 096. International trade embargo ›Shipping Blockade to the colony
- 121. Refusal of public support
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 143. Blocking of lines of command and information
- 144. Stalling and obstruction

- 145. General administrative noncooperation
- 147. Deliberate inefficiency and selective noncooperation by enforcement agents

Notes on Methods:

Although the shipping blockade of Algeria may be considered a domestic embargo because Algeria was technically a French colony, here I have noted it as an international trade embargo (96) in segments 4-6 because of the growing independence in Algeria and the specificity of the embargo.

Segment Length:

Approximately 16 hours

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Democracy

Peace

Group characterization:

- Civil Servants
- Pilots
- Soldiers
- workers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

French Trade Unions and Political Parties, French President Charles de Gaulle, French Prime Minister Michel Debré

Partners:

Not Known

External allies:

Not Known

Involvement of social elites:

French President Charles de Gaulle and Prime Minister Debré advocated for resistance. Some Army generals supported the resistance

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- French Political Parties
- French Trade Unions
- workers

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Civil Servants

- Military Pilots
- President de Gaulle
- Prime Minister Debré
- Soldiers in France and Algeria

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

- Algerian Police Forces

Segment Length:

Approximately 16 hours

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Rebel Troops and the four generals leading the coup

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

Campaigner violence:

Although President de Gaulle ordered soldiers to fire on the rebel troops near the end of the campaign there was no known violence against the putschists. However there was some threat of violence and the government arrested possible sympathizers within France.

Repressive Violence:

During the coup, rebel troops killed at least 3 and injured several more people.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Total points:

10 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

The campaigners successfully ended the putsch in Algeria and prevented any possible invasion of France.

The groups and leaders survived throughout the campaign.

The numbers supporting the resistance to the coup grew from the meetings within France to a 10 million person symbolic strike. Furthermore, more and more soldiers joined the disobedience resistance as their resistance became more clear.

At the beginning of April 1961, after nearly seven years of war in Algeria as France tried to maintain its control there, French President Charles de Gaulle announced that he would begin negotiations with the Algerian nationalists and soon relinquish control of the colony. At the time France had approximately 500,000 soldiers stationed in Algeria and very few remaining at home. Several of the generals in Algeria, however, did not want to concede to the Algerian nationalists.

On the night of Friday April 21, 1961, four generals led a single paratroop regiment in a coup in Algeria. These rebel forces took over Algiers, the capital of Algeria, arresting several generals still loyal to the French government. The putschists overtook the legal, civil government in Algeria, as well as all radio stations and newspapers in the colony. They met very little resistance, partly because at first many soldiers remained unsure of whom to support and partly because those troops and generals that remained loyal to France did not want to begin a civil war in the midst of an already long war in Algeria. In addition, as the coup leaders took over the government and communications in Algeria, they announced that they would destroy any attempted resistance against them. It was unclear both to the government in France and to the citizens and soldiers in Algeria how much support the coup had. Furthermore, the French government began to fear that the coup would move to the French mainland and attempt to take over the government there as well.

Over the weekend political parties and trade unions in France held mass meetings and announced a one-hour protest general strike for Monday April 24 in order to demonstrate their power of resistance if the coup did move to France. That Sunday evening, President de Gaulle broadcast a speech to all of France calling on citizens and soldiers to resist the coup by “all means,” which would include violence. Nonetheless, the resistance that followed was almost completely nonviolent. Later that evening French Prime Minister Michel Debré echoed de Gaulle’s request and announced the possibility of an air invasion from Algeria. He shut down all airports and urged citizens to rush to the airfields if they heard the sirens announcing an invasion. He hoped these civilians could persuade the incoming soldiers to remain loyal to the French government.

Hundreds of people went to the airfields and prepared vehicles to block the runways. In Algeria, soldiers and other citizens had heard de Gaulle’s speech for resistance through transistor radios. People also began to duplicate the speech in leaflets and distribute them throughout the colony.

While 10 million workers in France took part in the one-hour symbolic general strike on Monday afternoon, soldiers and civil servants in Algeria were also resisting the coup. Pilots in the military took more than half of the transport and fighter planes out of Algeria so they could not be used for an invasion of France. Other pilots feigned mechanical failures in planes so they could not be flown. While many generals did not openly support either the rebel forces or the French government, most loyal conscripts simply remained in their barracks throughout the attempted coup, disobeying orders from the putschists. Other soldiers purposefully lost orders and documents or deliberately slowed communication and transport systems. Soldiers set up committees to govern their regiments in place of their generals. At least one soldier distributed a petition pledging loyalty to the French government. Civil servants who remained loyal to the civil government in Algeria either stayed away from work to demonstrate their resistance or, if they did go into work, civil servants hid documents and files.

In France, the government set up guards at public buildings (most likely armed) and arrested right-wing supporters—the groups that would have been most likely to favor the putschists. The government also began a blockade of supplies being shipped into Algeria. On the night of the 24th, the government determined that troops who had been stationed in West Germany would remain loyal to France. The next morning the government ordered these troops to return to the country in order to defend against the possible coup. However, by this time the coup in Algeria was already failing due to the resistance effort there.

As the people’s resistance to the coup continued to grow on Tuesday April 25, the police force in Algeria, which

had originally supported the rebels, switched its loyalty back to the civilian government. Although de Gaulle broadcast another speech that evening calling for loyal troops to fire on the rebel troops, none did. Whenever the two groups came close to a clash, the loyal troops would often retreat in order to prevent violence within the French army and a possible civil war. Throughout the entire campaign there was no known violence against the rebel troops despite de Gaulle's request for "all means" of resistance. Throughout the campaign the rebel troops had killed at least 3 people and injured several more.

On the night of April 25 the four generals that had led the coup fled from Algeria and the rebel troops withdrew from their occupation of Algiers. The putsch had failed, largely due to the nonviolent resistance of citizens, soldiers, and civil servants both in Algeria and France.

Research Notes

Influences:

Not Known

Sources:

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Additional Notes:

This campaign was originally researched by Maurice Weeks at the beginning of this project and rewritten by Max Rennebohm (03/04/2011)

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Max Rennebohm 03/04/2011

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