

The Role of Civil Society in Strengthening the Soft Power of the Algerian State – The Tedjania Order as a Model

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Received : 14/10/2025 Accepted : 20/01/2026 Published : 22/02/2026

Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of civil society in strengthening Algeria's soft power by analyzing the model of the Tedjania order, as one of the most significant institutions of Algerian civil society. The Tedjania order possesses the capacity for internal and external adaptation and influence. The study also assesses the extent to which the Algerian state has successfully utilized it as a soft power resource contributing, domestically, to the preservation of national identity security and, externally, to the promotion of values of love, peace, and moderation.

The research adopts Samuel Huntington's framework to measure the institutional indicators of the Tedjania order—Algerian in origin and headquarters, yet global in its spread and influence—while also evaluating the degree of success achieved by the Algerian state in employing it as a source of soft power.

The study concludes that Algeria has indeed begun adopting the strategic option of wisely employing the concept of soft power, particularly within African relations, by leveraging the Tedjania order as one of its resources. However, in terms of governance, development, and the structured management of soft power instruments, efforts remain relative and require improvement in the mechanisms employed.

Keywords: Tedjania order, soft power, civil society, cosmopolitanism.

Introduction

Postmodern normative approaches are grounded in the participation of non-state actors in public policymaking, within the framework of the interactive logic between states' internal environments (historical, civilizational, cultural, religious, and even psychological). This dynamic is commonly conceptualized as the tension—or attraction—between the local and the global. Within this context, civil society emerges as a crucial actor in shaping national identity and safeguarding national security across political, social, and cultural domains.

The foundational premises of neoliberal philosophy are based on cosmopolitanism and new institutionalism. The former seeks to reconcile normativity and positivism, emphasizing the

necessity of adapting relative realities through the construction of “typologies” or “models” to achieve universal human rights. It aims at the globalization of human rights and does not focus on spatial differences or contextual circumstances, but rather seeks to adjust reality to normative standards. The latter, by contrast, emphasizes the role of institutions. Whereas the state was previously the central axis, the focus has now shifted toward the individual.

In this context, the Algerian state is committed to preserving national identity against external cultural and social threats by empowering civil society institutions rooted in Algerian society and reflective of its authentic identity and culture. Simultaneously, it adopts a soft power approach to diversify its instruments and enhance its regional and international standing through peaceful and interactive means, away from coercion and military force, while promoting the noble civilizational values of the Algerian nation abroad.

The Tedjania order represents a transnational model of Algerian civil society, possessing the capacity to strengthen Algeria’s soft power, exert positive influence both domestically and internationally, contribute to the preservation of national identity security at home, and promote values of love, peace, and moderation abroad.

Based on the foregoing, the following research question is proposed:

How can the Algerian state rely on the Tedjania order, as a model of cosmopolitan civil society, to enhance its soft power in preserving identity security and promoting the values of love, benevolence, and moderation?

First: A Conceptual and Theoretical Approach to Civil Society and Soft Power

1–1 Civil Society

1–1–1 The Concept of Civil Society

Civil society is one of the concepts that has received extensive study and analysis by researchers, sociologists, economists, and political scientists, as it constitutes a central component of both society and the state. The importance of this concept has grown significantly in recent years, as it has become widely used at the global level and now exerts both direct and indirect influence on state decision-making processes (1).

Most scholars of political sociology agree that civil society consists of voluntary, free, and independent organizations separate from the state. Membership in these organizations is voluntary, and they aim to serve the public interest. This aligns with the perspective of Larry Diamond, who argues that civil society encompasses a sphere of organized social life based on principles of self-governance, self-support, and autonomy from the state apparatus (2).

Civil society performs a range of functions that support democratic structures and contribute practically to shaping the rules governing political and social life, as well as the exercise and distribution of power. After presenting historical analyses, Larry Diamond identifies both familiar and less familiar functions attributed to civil society by theorists. Broadly speaking, seven fundamental functions can be identified:

- Protective function
- Monitoring function
- Participatory function
- Supportive function
- Mediating function
- Conflict-management function
- Democratizing function (3)

1–1–2 Characteristics of Civil Society Institutions

Samuel Huntington identified four main characteristics of civil society institutions:

A) Adaptability:

This refers to an institution's capacity to adjust to developments within its environment, as rigidity leads to declining relevance and possibly extinction. Adaptability must occur at three levels:

- **Functional adaptability:** The ability of the institution or association to modify its activities and functions.
- **Temporal adaptability:** The continuity of the association over an extended period. Longevity is a key element of effectiveness and an indicator of resilience and organizational capacity.
- **Generational adaptability:** Continuity that allows successive generations of leaders to assume leadership, which requires a sufficiently long timeframe to assess this criterion.

B) Autonomy:

An institution should not be subordinate to other institutions, authorities, or individuals in ways that allow its activities to be controlled or directed. Financial independence is a fundamental prerequisite for decision-making autonomy.

C) Complexity:

This refers to the multiplicity of organizational bodies within the institution, the existence of structured internal organization, and broad geographic expansion across society.

D) Coherence:

This implies the absence of internal conflicts that could undermine the institution's activities. When divisions among factions and leadership stem from intellectual differences and are resolved peacefully through dialogue and debate, this indicates organizational maturity. Conversely, divisions rooted in personal disputes and resolved violently signal institutional weakness or backwardness (4).

1–1–3 Cosmopolitanism of Civil Society

A) The Foundational Logic of the Cosmopolitan Idea:

B) The Cosmopolitan Model of Civil Society:

Discussions related to cosmopolitan theory are fundamentally linked to the debate over the existence of global politics and the possible forms such global governance might take. Since the 1990s, leading scholars concerned with this issue have sought to articulate the core hypotheses upon which cosmopolitanism rests, presenting arguments and assumptions in favor of expanding democracy at both the local and global levels.

This perspective is based on extending democracy as a form of global governance and establishing the concept of global democracy, which refers to a phenomenon influencing the internal systems of states and laying the foundation for a new way of understanding and organizing international political relations and collective participation in global affairs. It seeks to develop normative and value-based frameworks and to rationalize governance within sovereign states. This approach is grounded in justifications asserting that state sovereignty itself is a historical construct rather than a permanent feature of the human condition.

The liberal cosmopolitan approach to global civil society builds upon the arguments of theorists who emphasize the importance of linking civil society to emerging global norms, values, attitudes, and forms of consciousness. This transnational perspective assumes the possibility of global activities capable of resisting the outcomes of neoliberal globalization and challenging the forces of global markets and the activities of dominant states.

There are deliberate attempts to secure a greater role in supranational governance in order to counter mechanisms of global decision-making dominance. According to this model, civil society is defined as the aggregate of active networks operating within the public sphere, independent of both the administrative or governmental apparatus and the market system. Within this framework, civil society functions through a global networked system characterized by interdependence, where actions and reactions emerge in complex and interconnected ways. These networked systems interact within a global space marked by rapid interdependence and fast-evolving relational networks that transcend national borders, often intersecting—intentionally or unintentionally—with various elements and structures of the international system.

2–2 Soft Power

1–2–1 The Concept of Soft Power

In general terms, power can be defined as the ability to influence the behavior of others in order to obtain desired outcomes. There are several primary ways of influencing others' behavior: coercing them through threats, inducing them through incentives, manipulating them, or shaping their preferences so that they voluntarily desire what you want (5).

Soft power, as a central concept in contemporary international relations, has been emphasized as a counterbalance to hard power, which has historically shaped patterns of interstate relations.

Joseph S. Nye Jr. defines soft power as the ability of a nation to influence other nations and shape their public choices based on the attractiveness of its social and cultural system, its values, and its institutions—achieving this without reliance on coercion or threats.

According to this definition, understanding soft power requires focusing on the dynamics of attraction and persuasion, as well as the capacity to formulate a model or approach worthy of emulation and imitation (6).

1–2–2 Sources of Soft Power

Joseph Nye identifies three principal sources of soft power:

1. **Culture**, in places where it is attractive to others;
2. **Political values**, when they are applied sincerely at home and abroad;
3. **Foreign policy**, when it is perceived as legitimate and morally authoritative.

Nye further explains that, in international politics, the resources that generate soft power largely stem from the values expressed by an organization or country—through its culture, the example set by its domestic political practices, and the manner in which it conducts its relations with others (7).

Culture refers to the complex whole encompassing the set of values and practices that create meaning within a society. It manifests in multiple forms and increases the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes through relations of attraction and moral obligation toward others. Numerous instruments may intersect with the cultural dimension and express it—such as industry in certain contexts, distinctive customs and traditions specific to a particular country, or even food and beverages—ultimately reflecting that country's broader lifestyle pattern.

1–2–3 Levels of Soft Power

The use of soft power requires considerable skill, substantial investment, and patience, as results are not immediate and may take a long time to materialize. In this regard, Nye states:

“The skillful use of soft power is more difficult than hard power because many of its resources are not entirely under government control, and its effectiveness depends heavily on the acceptance of the receiving audience. Moreover, soft power resources often operate indirectly by shaping the political environment, and sometimes take years to produce the desired outcomes.”

Soft power may also operate directly through what are referred to as soft power instruments, which provide governments with the ability to direct and mobilize soft power toward a specific objective, state, or target group. In this respect, the production of soft power involves two fundamental levels: the level of resources (or sources) and the level of mechanisms (or instruments).

A) The Level of Producing Soft Power Resources:

At the first level, a state works to build its own soft power resources in cultural, economic, or political domains—for example, by implementing an economic development plan, proposing a political initiative, or introducing a new diplomatic model. If successful and yielding impressive results, such efforts—although not initially directed outward or aimed at influencing others—may generate positive perceptions among external observers or create attraction once the success draws their attention. This level may be described as indirect or unintended influence, since State (B) is not directly exposed to the soft power tools of State (A). Typically, this occurs in the early stages of constructing soft power (8).

B) The Level of Using Soft Power Mechanisms:

At this level, State (A) can consciously and deliberately deploy soft power instruments to direct its influence toward a targeted State (B), specific segments within it, or broader communities and societies. This constitutes a deliberate, intentional, and direct action carried out through a strategic plan tailored to the state's capabilities and the characteristics of the target. It generally produces stronger and more immediate effects compared to the first level (9).

This level often involves the use of three types of diplomacy—either collectively or selectively depending on available resources:

- Official diplomacy
- Economic diplomacy
- Public diplomacy

Second: An Analytical Approach to Adopting the Tedjania Order as a Cosmopolitan Civil Society Model in Strengthening Algeria's Soft Power

2-1 The Tedjania Order as a Model of Cosmopolitan Civil Society

2-1-1 The Institutional Capacities of the Tedjania Order

When analyzing the institutional and organizational capacities of the Tedjania order according to Samuel Huntington's modern institutional approach, the following findings emerge:

A) Adaptability:

Adaptability refers to the institution's ability to adjust to developments within its environment, as rigidity leads to diminished relevance or even disappearance. This adaptability operates at three levels:

- **Temporal and Spatial Adaptability:**

The Tedjania order has demonstrated long-term continuity and geographical expansion since its founding in 1782 in Ksar Abi Samghoun by its founder (may God be pleased with him). It subsequently spread to Ain Madhi and neighboring villages, eventually gaining prominence throughout much of the Sahara. The Grand Shaykh appointed representatives (muqaddams), granted them authorization, and sent them to various regions. Notable examples include Sidi Muhammad al-Hafiz al-Shinqiti and Sidi Ibrahim al-Riyahi of Tunisia.

Through this expansion, the order has served Islam and its methodology across different parts of the world, contributing to the growth of Islam in Africa and confronting paganism and disbelief through persuasion, tolerance, and, when historically required, jihad. It continues to expand in

Europe, America, and Asia, carrying the banner of Islam and peace with its noble principles. Longevity thus constitutes a crucial indicator of its effectiveness, resilience, and organizational capacity across time and space.

- **Functional Adaptability:**

The primary function of the Tedjania order is spiritual and religious, focusing on the station of *ihsan* (spiritual excellence) through moral purification and self-discipline via specific invocations and litanies. Sidi al-Hajj Ali al-Tamassini emphasized knowledge, action, and worship (10).

Beyond its spiritual role, the order fulfills important social functions, including reconciliation, assistance to the needy, fostering social visits, and promoting values of love and tolerance. In the educational and intellectual sphere, Tedjania *zawiyas* (lodges) have been centers of scholarship and cultural advancement in Algeria and across Africa. The *shaykhs* of the order demonstrated particular concern for scholars, jurists, and intellectuals—especially in Tamassine, Ain Madhi, and Gomar—encouraging teaching, intellectual engagement, and supervision of study circles. A clear illustration of its functional adaptability is reflected in the historian Abu al-Qasim Saadallah’s inquiry into the differing approaches of Shaykh Umar al-Futi toward French colonialism compared to the stance of the Tedjania *zawiya* in Algeria (11).

- **Generational Adaptability:**

The Tedjania order has spanned multiple generations and political regimes while maintaining continuity despite shifting conditions. Initially, it faced confrontation due to Ottoman authorities’ rejection, prompting the Shaykh’s migration to Fez in 1758. Later, as the Maghreb fell under French colonial rule, the order participated in popular resistance movements. In the post-World War II period, it contributed—alongside other national forces—to the liberation revolution.

A pivotal role was played by Shaykh Sidi Ahmad bin Hamma in preserving the Algerian character of the Sahara. After independence, the order maintained its continuity across successive political leaderships and varying socio-political contexts.

B) Autonomy:

The wisdom and foresight of the Tedjania *shaykhs* across generations ensured the fulfillment of this essential condition. The order does not submit to external institutions, authorities, or individuals, but is governed by its spiritual principles and adherence to Islamic law in religious matters. The Grand Shaykh’s guiding principle was: “Weigh my words against the scale of the Sharia; if they conform, accept them; if they contradict, reject them.” In worldly matters, his motto was: “Live in accordance with your time.”

Financial independence was secured through initiatives such as those undertaken by Sidi al-Hajj Ali al-Tamassini, who relied on date palm cultivation and encouraged its continuation to provide sustainable funding for the *zawiya*’s needs.

C) Complexity:

As a globally dispersed social organization, the Tedjania order demonstrates multiplicity in its organizational bodies across different regions. French colonial authorities attempted to uncover its organizational structure to influence and manipulate decision-making processes but failed due to the absence of a clearly defined hierarchical structure.

Despite maintaining internal order, its wide geographic spread across African and global Islamic societies underscores a high degree of structural complexity at both spiritual and social levels.

D) Coherence:

Despite the cultural and ethnic diversity of its members and leaders, the order exhibits cohesion, solidarity, and mutual affection. Notably, it does not bind its followers to a single jurisprudential

school; Tedjanis may adhere to Maliki, Hanbali, Hanafi, or Shafi'i schools depending on their national context.

While differences of opinion may arise—particularly among leadership figures due to intellectual disagreements or succession matters—such disputes are resolved peacefully. The absence of destructive internal conflict serves as an indicator of the organization's maturity and institutional development.

2–1–2 The Cosmopolitan Character of the Tedjania Order

The spread of the Tedjania order began in Ksar Abi Samghoun in 1782 under its founder (may God be pleased with him). Among the earliest to receive from him were his close companions, including Sidi Ibn al-Mishri, Sidi Ali Harazim, Sidi Muhammad ibn al-Arabi al-Damrawi, and members of his household. The order then expanded to Ain Madhi and neighboring villages, eventually gaining renown across much of the Sahara.

The Grand Shaykh appointed representatives (muqaddams), granted them authorization (ijaza), and dispatched them to various regions. Notable examples include Sidi Muhammad al-Hafiz al-Shinqiti and Sidi Ibrahim al-Riyahi of Tunisia. Through this expansion, the order served Islam and its spiritual methodology across different parts of the world, contributing to the growth of Islam in Africa and confronting paganism and disbelief through persuasion, tolerance, and—when historically warranted—jihad.

The number of followers and disciples has continued to grow steadily, accompanied by the establishment of zawiyas and institutes throughout Africa, Europe, America, and Asia, where the order has played a leading role in spreading Islam, peace, and elevated moral principles.

The presence of the Tedjania order in numerous countries—particularly in Africa, where Tedjanis constitute a significant social and political majority within the societal fabric—is especially noteworthy. In some African countries such as Senegal, Chad, and Nigeria, many political leaders and members of the elite are followers of the Tedjania order. This affiliation is reflected in their convictions, choices, and political behavior—whether as a result of socialization and accumulated collective culture or through transnational interaction and consultation with religious leadership. This non-state network of mutual influence, combined with its institutional foundations, grants the Tedjania order the characteristics of a cosmopolitan civil society actor.

2–2 The Reality of Algeria's Reliance on the Tedjania Order as Soft Power

2–2–1 The Level of Producing Tedjania Soft Power Resources in Algeria

Algeria possesses multiple sources of soft power, whether political—related to the nature of its political system, its doctrine, and the humanitarian values stemming from its orientations, which resonate particularly within Africa given the shared legacy of colonialism and racial discrimination—or diplomatic, reflected in Algeria's active role in regional organizations, especially the African Union, as well as its leadership in conflict resolution, support for African stability, and counterterrorism efforts. Cultural and spiritual resources also constitute important components.

However, the state must work deliberately to develop, cultivate, and institutionalize its soft power resources across cultural, diplomatic, and political domains.

With regard to the Tedjania order, observation indicates that efforts largely remain at the level of the natural growth of soft power resources. In many cases, there is an absence of deliberate production and strategic development of diversified soft power resources. Instead, limited preparation precedes their use, reflecting a lack of long-term strategic vision and confusion between the mere existence of soft power resources and their systematic construction and development—particularly in the cultural and spiritual dimensions.

The study identifies several key Tedjania-related soft power resources capable of playing a significant role:

1. **The General Caliphate Headquarters in Ain Madhi (Laghouat Province):**

Ain Madhi hosts the global headquarters of the Tedjania order and is considered its cradle. It is also the residence of the descendants of the Grand Shaykh and serves as a major pilgrimage destination for Tedjanis worldwide.

2. **Ksar Boussemgoun (El Bayadh Province):**

This site holds major significance as the location of the founder's "Great Spiritual Opening" and the point from which the order spread globally. It is an important destination for disciples from Africa and beyond.

3. **The Zawiya of Gomar (El Oued Province):**

Located in southeastern Algeria, it is regarded as the first zawiya in the history of the Tedjania order, founded in 1789 (1204 AH) by Sidi Muhammad al-Sassi al-Qamari under the direction of Shaykh Sidi Ahmad al-Tijani. It is both a major pilgrimage site and a distinctive architectural and cultural landmark.

The current Caliph, Shaykh Dr. Sidi Muhammad al-Eid al-Tedjani, has overseen its renovation, including the inauguration of a new cultural complex in 2008 and a scientific library in 2009 containing approximately 8,000 titles across religious, scientific, humanistic, historical, economic, and linguistic disciplines. With support from the Ministry of Culture, the complex has been equipped with information technology facilities. Additional initiatives include a kindergarten (2013), a section for children with autism to promote social integration, and a Red Crescent office assisting orphans and the needy in cooperation with the Tamassine Zawiya.

4. **The Zawiya of Tamassine (Touggourt Province):**

One of the major Tedjania zawiyas globally, founded in 1803 (1217 AH) by the first Caliph, Sidi al-Hajj Ali al-Tamassini, under the instruction of Shaykh Sidi Ahmad al-Tijani. Since then, it has fulfilled spiritual, civilizational, cultural, and social roles (12).

The current Caliph, Shaykh Dr. Sidi Muhammad al-Eid al-Tedjani, has pursued organized efforts based on the triad "knowledge – action – worship," encompassing religious, social, economic, cultural, and scientific domains. His initiatives include organizing national and international conferences, sponsoring the digital platform "Messengers of Love, Peace, and Benevolence," and founding the SIRR Academy for Leadership Development (established March 24, 2018).

The academy trains university students over three years, graduating its first cohort (120 leaders) in December 2021 with over 40 individual and collective projects in fields such as media, sports training, artistic innovation, information technology, languages, and Sharia studies. Training includes disciplines such as neuro-linguistic programming, effective communication, strategic planning, and crisis management (13).

2–2–2 The Level of Using Tedjania Soft Power Mechanisms in Algeria

At this level, Algeria does not rely on hard power in its foreign relations but rather emphasizes diplomacy and the promotion of peace and security. To enhance its attractiveness in Africa, Algeria has also invested in the cultural dimension, highlighting historical ties and creative heritage in its relationship with African peoples. This is evident in the sustained organization of African cultural and sporting events in Algeria.

Growing attention is also given to spiritual diplomacy, particularly through repeated visits by the General Caliph of the Tedjania order to African countries and his reception by high-level political and religious leaders (14). A prominent example occurred in Nigeria, where the Caliph was hosted by the President at the presidential palace and addressed large gatherings during

celebrations of the Prophet's birthday in Lagos, where the Algerian flag was prominently displayed.

These recurring scenes suggest that Algeria is advancing in its use of spiritual diplomacy as a key cultural soft power instrument to generate favorable positions among African states. However, reliance on the Tedjania order appears primarily based on its naturally existing influence in African public opinion and decision-making, without corresponding strategic investment in the development or renewal of this resource to ensure sustainability and prevent depletion—aside from limited facilitation and support.

This approach seems aimed at reinforcing Algeria's identity components—Ash'arite creed, Maliki jurisprudence, and Sufism—without establishing a comprehensive long-term strategy for developing soft power resources and crafting their instruments in a manner that guarantees continuity and sustainability.

While the Caliph's visits and their media coverage are significant, they tend to resemble short-term, direct campaigns focused on immediate objectives. Soft power influence, however, is most effective when it results from sustained, long-term efforts combining both direct and indirect mechanisms.

Accordingly, there remains a need to formulate a comprehensive, long-term strategy for aggregating, preparing, producing, and developing soft power resources and instruments to ensure their rational use, sustainability, and protection from exhaustion.

Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis, it can be concluded that cosmopolitan theory embodies ideas that no longer regard the state as the sole actor in the international system. It emphasizes the participation of civil society organizations—particularly those possessing organizational capacity and transnational reach—in positively influencing the dissemination of human values and shaping the behavior of individuals and groups. This perspective underscores the necessity of thinking globally while acting locally.

Algeria, aware of the importance of soft power in enhancing its regional and international standing through peaceful and interactive means, and in safeguarding its national security—particularly against cultural and social threats—has recognized the institutional and organizational capacities of the Tedjania order to exert positive influence through the values of love, tolerance, fraternity, and moderation that it promotes nationally and globally. Consequently, Algeria has sought to rely on the Tedjania order in promoting the noble values of the Algerian nation and preserving the foundations of national identity against foreign cultural influences. At the level of employing soft power mechanisms, Algeria has indeed begun adopting a prudent use of the soft power concept, particularly within African relations, by utilizing the Tedjania order as a source of cultural and religious soft power. However, in terms of governance, production, and development of soft power instruments, efforts remain relatively limited—especially at the level of soft power resources, which require greater attention and development to meet intended aspirations and ensure sustainability.

To achieve this objective, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Establish a research center dedicated to promoting the global role of the Tedjania order, in partnership with the Tedjania zawiya, the Ministry of Higher Education, the National Observatory of Civil Society, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
2. Create cultural centers within diplomatic missions abroad specializing in the promotion of the Tedjania order, coordinating with Tedjani communities in host countries, and guiding cultural and religious outreach as well as religious tourism.

3. Invest in human capital by integrating graduates of the SIRR Academy for Leadership Development into diplomatic missions abroad, thereby contributing to the development of the cultural and doctrinal dimension, strengthening ties among Tedjanis worldwide, and reinforcing their connection to the Tedjania order in Algeria.

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