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Freedom in the World 2017 - Algeria

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Freedom Status: Not Free

Aggregate Score: 35/100 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 5.5/7 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Political Rights: 6/7 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Civil Liberties: 5/7 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Quick Facts

Population: 40,800,000

Capital: Algiers

GDP/capita: \$4,206

Press Freedom Status: Not Free

OVERVIEW

Political affairs in Algeria are dominated by a closed elite based in the military and the ruling party, the National Liberation Front (FLN). President Abdelaziz Bouteflika has been in office since 1999, and while there are multiple opposition parties in the parliament, elections are distorted by fraud and other forms of manipulation. Authorities use restrictive laws to curb criticism in the media and suppress street protests. Other concerns include rampant corruption, the threat of terrorist attacks, and occasional violence between Arabs and Berbers as well as between Algerians and migrants from sub-Saharan Africa.

Key Developments in 2016:

- A presidential decree in January dissolved the military's powerful Intelligence and Security Department (DRS) and replaced it with three directorates that would report directly to the presidency and focus on internal security, external security, and technical intelligence, respectively.
- In February, the parliament passed constitutional revisions that reintroduced a two-term limit for the presidency and bolstered the legislature's modest powers, among other changes.
- In March, the terrorist group Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) claimed responsibility for an attack in which rockets were fired at a gas facility near Ain Salah. No casualties were reported.

- In June, the authorities arrested two journalists from the television channel KBC and an official with the Culture Ministry in connection with satirical programming. Two television programs were shut down, and the defendants received suspended prison sentences in July.

Executive Summary:

The government in February 2016 pushed through a number of constitutional revisions that were apparently designed to improve its popular support and lay the foundation for a smooth presidential transition in light of growing concerns about President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's health and possible successors. Amendments approved by the parliament reintroduced a two-term limit for the presidency, though Bouteflika would be able to seek reelection in 2019; enlarged the role and powers of the legislature relative to the executive, for example by requiring the president to consult the parliamentary majority on the appointment of a prime minister; made Tamazight, the language of the Berber population, an official language, meaning it could be used on administrative documents; and set the goal of gender equality in the labor market and public institutions.

However, the authorities also worked to ensure control over the media and suppress dissent. In July, the government secured a court ruling that prevented businessman and Bouteflika critic Issad Rebrab from purchasing El-Khabar media group, the parent company of television station KBC. Also that month, two KBC journalists received suspended prison sentences connected to satirical television programming, and the programs in question were shut down; the government said the journalists had violated licensing rules. Journalist and blogger Mohamed Tamalt, who had been arrested in June and sentenced to two years in prison in July for insulting the president on Facebook, died in December after engaging in a hunger strike and reporting beatings by prison guards.

Security forces regularly restricted the freedom of assembly. Among other incidents during the year, January protests against the relocation of a power plant in the town of Oued El Ma led to violent clashes between demonstrators and police after the latter used tear gas, and a demonstration by teachers seeking greater job security in Algiers in March was violently dispersed by police. The authorities also used aggressive tactics to cope with migration from sub-Saharan Africa. In December, following clashes between Algerians and migrants in an Algiers neighborhood, police rounded up some 1,400 sub-Saharan Africans and moved them to a remote camp near Tamanrasset before arbitrarily expelling many of them from the country.

Explanatory Note:

This country report has been abridged for *Freedom in the World 2017*. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Algeria, see [Freedom in the World 2016](#).

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