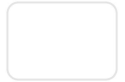


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Freedom House

Freedom in the World 2023 - Algeria

NOT FREE

32 / 100

Political Rights 10 / 40

Civil Liberties 22 / 60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

32 / 100 Not Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

Caption

Overview

Political affairs in Algeria have long been dominated by a closed elite based in the military and the ruling party, the National Liberation Front (FLN). While there are multiple opposition parties in Parliament, elections are distorted by fraud, and electoral processes are not transparent. Other concerns include the suppression of street protests, legal restrictions on media freedom, and rampant corruption. The *Hirak* protest movement in 2019 put pressure on the regime to reform, but a crackdown on dissent in the following years has prevented large-scale demonstrations from continuing.

Key Developments in 2022

- Mohamed Benhalima, a dissident and whistleblower who fled the country in 2019 after participating in the *Hirak* protests, was extradited to Algeria from Spain on dubious terrorism charges in March. Benhalima was sentenced to 12 years in prison in August, but additional charges remained pending; according to some reports, he was also sentenced to death by a military court on charges including "espionage."
- The government continued to crack down on other activists and groups linked to the *Hirak* movement throughout the year. Numerous opposition figures were subjected to arbitrary arrest and prosecution under vaguely worded terrorism laws.
- In December, the authorities closed the critical media outlet Radio M after security forces raided its offices and arrested its editor in chief, Ihsane el-Kadi. He was charged with threatening

national security and “receiving suspicious funding from foreign sources.”

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 1 / 4

The president, who is directly elected for five-year terms, remains the dominant figure in the executive branch, though some authority was shifted to the prime minister under constitutional reforms adopted in 2020.

A two-term limit has been in effect since 2016, but it did not apply to the prior terms of longtime president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, whose plans to seek a fifth consecutive term sparked the Hirak protests in 2019. Bouteflika resigned that April after losing the support of the armed forces.

Former prime minister Abdelmajid Tebboune won the December 2019 presidential election with 58 percent of the vote. Abdelaziz Belaïd of the Future Front, the only candidate who had not served in cabinet posts under Bouteflika, won 7 percent. Voter turnout was reportedly as low as 20 percent. Protesters called the election a sham and orchestrated a boycott. Outside observers were not allowed to enter the country to monitor the poll.

The president nominates the prime minister after consulting with the parliamentary majority. Tebboune appointed then finance minister Ayman Benabderrahmane as prime minister in 2021.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 1 / 4

The 407 members of the National People's Assembly, the lower house of Parliament, are directly elected to five-year terms, which can only be renewed once under the 2020 constitutional reforms. In early elections held in 2021, the ruling FLN won 98 seats, while the allied National Democratic Rally (RND) took 58. The Islamist Movement of Society for Peace (MSP) won 65 seats, the Future Front captured 48, and the moderate Islamist National Construction Movement (El-Binaa) took 39. No other party won more than 10 seats, though 84 independent lawmakers were elected.

The MSP and El-Binaa alleged that the elections were marred by fraud, while Hirak supporters boycotted the polls. Nationwide turnout stood at 23 percent. The Independent National Authority for Elections (ANIE) reported that over 360 polling facilities were shuttered due to looting and other disruptions.

The president appoints one-third of the members of the upper house, the Council of the Nation, which has 144 members serving six-year terms. The other two-thirds are indirectly elected by local and provincial assemblies. Half of the chamber's mandates are renewed every three years. Partial upper house elections took place in February 2022. The FLN took the most seats, securing 25, while independents took 14, RND took 11, and the Future Front and the Socialist Forces Front (FFS) took 5 and 2 seats, respectively.

Local and regional elections were held amid low turnout in 2021. The FLN and RND won the most town council seats and a plurality of regional assembly seats.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the 1 / relevant election management bodies? 4

Prior to 2019, Algeria's elections were administered by the Interior Ministry and were often subject to government interference. Pressure from protesters ultimately forced the government to establish the ANIE. However, the slate of approved presidential candidates that was announced ahead of the 2019 presidential election was dominated by Bouteflika-era officials, raising doubts about the efficacy of the electoral reforms. The absence of international election monitors drew criticism from Algerian civil society.

Constitutional reforms were adopted through a 2020 referendum that was marred by low voter turnout. Reform-package opponents, including Hirak activists, had called for a boycott after being prevented from campaigning or airing their views on state media.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive 1 / political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and 4 fall of these competing parties or groupings?

The Interior Ministry must approve political parties before they can operate legally. Parties cannot form along explicitly ethnic lines. The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), which swept the 1990 local and 1991 national elections that preceded Algeria's decade-long civil war, remains banned. Since the Hirak emerged in 2019, the authorities have intensified their repression of opposition groups, especially parties espousing separatism, Islamist groups, and parties perceived as closely aligned with the Hirak.

In January 2022, the Council of State suspended the opposition Socialist Workers' Party (PST) for allegedly failing to organize its annual congress within the legally mandated timeframe.

In recent years, authorities have increasingly used vaguely worded antiterrorism legislation to prosecute members of the opposition. In 2021, the High Security Council designated the Rachad—an organization that includes former FIS members—and the Movement for the Self-Determination of Kabylie (MAK) as terrorist organizations. Numerous people accused of affiliation with the groups have since faced arrest. In November 2022, exiled MAK leader Ferhat Mehenni was sentenced in absentia to life in prison on terrorism-related charges.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power 1 / through elections? 4

Opposition parties play a marginal role in Parliament, and their campaigns are regularly curtailed by the government. Election boycotts by opposition groups are not uncommon.

Opposition leaders have also been subject to detention and prosecution. In January 2022, an Algiers court sentenced Democratic and Social Movement (MDS) leader Fethi Ghares to two years'

imprisonment and a 200,000 dinar (\$1,400) fine on charges including “offending public bodies.”

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people’s political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means? 1 / 4

The military retains its long-standing influence over civilian politics. Its vast resources and lack of public accountability have helped shape its role as the most powerful political actor in Algeria.

Allegations and scandals involving corruption in the selection of political candidates, as well as vote-buying during elections, have surfaced in recent years. After Bouteflika stepped down in 2019, the authorities initiated an anticorruption campaign targeting entrepreneurs and officials who were accused of exercising improper influence on political decisions under the former administration.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 1 / 4

No specific ethnic or religious group dominates the main state institutions, which tend to include both Arab and Amazigh (Berber) officials. Kabylie-based parties associated with the Amazigh community, like the Rally for Culture and Democracy and the FFS, have controlled a small number of municipalities, but their activities are often curtailed by the military. Some Amazigh activists have been targeted by the authorities for mobilizing in support of their political interests.

Women remain reluctant to run for office, are often unable to secure meaningful influence within Parliament, and are more likely to lose intraparty debates. Women won only 8 percent of the seats in the 2021 lower house elections.

LGBT+ people are politically marginalized and have little practical ability to advocate for their political interests.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 1 / 4

The military has historically served as the ultimate arbiter of policy disputes in Algeria, and elected leaders have relied on its support to maintain office. The loss of military backing played a significant role in Bouteflika’s resignation in 2019. The army chief of staff continues to wield considerable influence over the administration of President Tebboune.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 1 / 4

Inadequate anticorruption laws, a lack of official transparency, low levels of judicial independence, and bloated bureaucracies contribute to widespread corruption at all levels of government. Anticorruption investigations that do occur are often used to settle scores between factions within the regime. The constitutional reforms passed in 2020 included provisions for a transparency and anticorruption authority, as well as a ban on combining roles in public office and private business.

A number of Bouteflika's former political and economic allies have received harsh prison sentences as part of the anticorruption campaign that followed his resignation. In August 2022, former prime minister Nouredine Bedoui was detained in connection with a corruption investigation. In December, former finance minister Mohamed Loukal, who first came under scrutiny in 2019, was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment on corruption charges.

Whistleblowers have few legal protections, and those safeguards that exist often go unenforced in practice. Several high-profile whistleblowers have faced retaliation from the government in recent years. In March 2022, Mohamed Benhalima, a former army officer who fled the country in 2019 after participating in the Hirak protests, was extradited to Algeria from Spain on dubious charges related to his purported involvement with the banned Rachad movement. While living abroad, Benhalima had publicly exposed corruption within the military through his posts on social media. He faced at least 30 charges for his activism, and was sentenced to 12 years in prison on an initial set of three charges in August. Some human rights organizations reported that Benhalima was also sentenced to death by a military court on charges of "espionage and desertion."

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 1 / 4

Algeria lacks access-to-information legislation. There is considerable opacity surrounding official decision-making procedures, the publication of official acts is rarely timely, and rules on asset disclosure by government officials are weak and poorly enforced. The 2020 constitutional revision introduced a requirement for all appointed and elected officials to declare their assets at the beginning and end of their terms, and obliges the public administration to justify its decisions within a time period to be determined by law. While the revised constitution nominally guarantees the right to access information, it includes vague exceptions for "the rights of others, the legitimate interests of businesses, and the requirements of national security."

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 1 / 4

Although some newspapers are privately owned and some journalists remain aggressive in their coverage of government affairs, most papers rely on government agencies for printing and advertising, encouraging self-censorship. Authorities sometimes block distribution of independent news outlets that are based abroad or online. Viewers can access unlicensed private television channels that are located in Algeria but legally based abroad, though these are subject to government crackdowns.

A 2020 law criminalized "fake news" that undermines public order and security; offenders can receive one- to five-year prison sentences. News sites must be directed by Algerian nationals and based physically in Algeria, report income sources, and keep an archive of at least six months. Foreign-language websites must be approved by a special authority. In September 2022, the government unveiled a bill that, if approved, would prevent newspapers from receiving any funding from abroad or from "suspicious sources."

Authorities use these and other legal mechanisms to restrict media activity. A number of media outlets were shuttered in 2022, including the independent French-language newspaper *Liberté*, which reportedly closed due to political pressure. In December, authorities closed Radio M—one of the last remaining critical media outlets in Algeria—after security forces raided its offices and arrested Ihsane el-Kadi, its editor in chief. El-Kadi, who has been arrested in connection with his work several times in recent years, was charged with threatening national security and “receiving suspicious funding from foreign sources.”

Journalists and bloggers are frequently subjected to harassment, including brief detentions and fines for offenses such as defamation and “undermining national unity.” Journalists covering demonstrations or who are close to the Hirak have been arbitrarily arrested and interrogated; several of these incidents were reported in 2022. In one case in January, journalist Merzoug Touati was sentenced to a year in prison for “spreading false information” after writing an article condemning the conditions in which a detained activist was being held.

Foreign outlets are also subject to government interference. In 2021, the government withdrew France 24’s authorization to operate in Algeria, alleging that the French state-owned broadcaster engaged in “repeated hostility” toward national institutions.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 1 / 4

Algeria’s population is overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim. Members of religious minorities, including Christians and non-Sunni Muslims, suffer from state persecution and interference. Authorities have cracked down on the small Ahmadi community, claiming that its members denigrate Islam, threaten national security, and violate laws on associations. In June 2022, 18 Ahmadis were charged in Béjaïa with participating in “an unauthorized group” and “denigrating Islam.” In a September trial, three were sentenced to a year in prison, and the remaining 15 were fined and sentenced to six months’ imprisonment.

Religious communities may only gather to worship at state-approved locations. Accusations of nonbelief or blasphemy can draw criminal punishments. Proselytizing by non-Muslims is illegal.

In September 2022, authorities requested that the Algerian branch of Caritas, a charitable organization affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, cease operating in the country. The government did not provide an explanation, but local sources reported that the request was likely made because the government considered Caritas to be a foreign organization.

Authorities have engaged in a crackdown on the Algerian Protestant Church (EPA) since 2017, though the EPA had been legally recognized in 1974. In April 2022, a Protestant church in Tizi Ouzou Province was closed following an order from the governor, becoming the 17th Protestant church to be closed since 2017.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 2 / 4

Authorities generally do not interfere directly with the operations of universities, but debate is circumscribed in practice due to restrictive laws that limit speech more broadly. Academic work is also

affected by state censorship of domestically published and imported books. Student organizations were active in the Hirak, with members calling for political reforms. The authorities occasionally resorted to violence to suppress these demonstrations.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics 2 / without fear of surveillance or retribution? 4

Private discussion and the public expression of personal views are relatively unhindered when they do not focus on certain sensitive topics, but social media users are subject to prosecution for critical comments that touch on the government or religion. The government monitors internet activity in the name of national security and does not disclose information about the program's targets or range, which is thought to be extensive.

The authorities are known to prosecute social media users, particularly Hirak supporters. A Hirak activist, Hakim Debbazi, was arrested in February 2022, allegedly for posting pro-Hirak information on Facebook. Debbazi died in pretrial detention in April, after a court rejected a request that he be released due to his deteriorating health.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 1 / 4

Legal restrictions on freedom of assembly remain in place but are inconsistently enforced. Though the Hirak protests that began in 2019 were sometimes tolerated, the authorities frequently used force and arbitrary arrests to preempt or disrupt rallies.

Hirak protesters faced increasing repression after demonstrations resumed in 2021, causing the movement to lose momentum; large-scale Hirak protests did not return in 2022. However, police continued to arrest individuals alleged to have ties to the movement during the year.

Other antigovernment demonstrations continued in 2022 and were met with repression by the authorities. In April, security forces dispersed a demonstration commemorating past pro-Amazigh protest movements, arresting several participants.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in 1 / human rights- and governance-related work? 4

The 2012 law on associations effectively restricts the formation, funding, and activities of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Permits and receipts of application submission are required to establish and operate NGOs, but organizations often face considerable delays and bureaucratic obstacles when attempting to obtain such documents, leaving them in a legally precarious position.

The authorities have targeted human rights activists who are close to the Hirak and the political opposition. In February 2022, activist Faleh Hammoudi was sentenced to three years in prison and a 100,000 dinar (\$700) fine on charges including running an "unregistered association," due to his work heading a chapter of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LADDH).

NGOs must notify the government of staffing changes and submit detailed reports on their funding; those that accept foreign funding without government approval risk fines or imprisonment of staff.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 1 / 4

The country's main labor federation, the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA), has been criticized for its close relationship to the government and for its failure to advocate for workers' interests.

Workers require government approval to establish new unions. This is difficult to obtain in practice, leaving many unions without legal status. Authorities routinely clamp down on independent unions. The Autonomous National Union of Electricity and Gas Workers (SNATEG), an independent union that represents public utility workers, has been repeatedly harassed by the authorities in recent years.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 1 / 4

The judiciary is susceptible to pressure from the civilian government and the military. Judges are appointed by the High Council of the Judiciary (CSM), which is headed by the president, although the 2020 constitutional reforms removed the justice minister and attorney general from the body. Two representatives of the judges' union and the chair of the National Human Rights Council were added.

Concerns regarding the judiciary's independence persist despite these reforms. In 2021, the CSM expelled Sadedin Merzoug, a Hirak supporter, from the judiciary for expressing prodemocracy views, claiming that he had obstructed justice and violated his duty of confidentiality.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 1 / 4

The lack of judicial and prosecutorial independence often erodes the due process rights of defendants, particularly in politically sensitive cases against former officials or civic activists. Lengthy delays in bringing defendants to trial are common, and prosecutors' requests to extend pretrial detention periods are typically granted. Security forces frequently conduct warrantless searches and engage in arbitrary arrests and short-term detentions. According to the National Committee for the Release of Detainees (CNLD), more than 300 political prisoners were being held as of April 2022, many in pretrial detention.

In October 2022, Hirak activist Abdelhamid Bouziza was forcibly disappeared after being arrested by security forces. He was found 20 days later, in detention nearly 300 miles from where he was arrested. In a similar case, Slimane Bouhafs, an Algerian refugee in Tunisia, was abducted and forcibly disappeared by unidentified men in August 2021; he was located four days later in Algerian custody. Bouhafs was sentenced in December 2022 to three years in prison and a 100,000 dinar (\$700) fine after being accused of ties to the MAK. The exact circumstances of his forced return to Algeria remained unclear.

F3 0-4 pts

**Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and 2 /
insurgencies? 4**

A 2006 reconciliation law gave immunity to Islamist and state perpetrators of serious crimes during the civil war, while compensating families of those who were subject to such crimes, which included forced disappearances. The reconciliation law also criminalized public discussion on the fate of the disappeared.

Allegations of torture have decreased since the civil war's end, but human rights activists still accuse the police of using excessive force and abusing detainees. In August 2022, pro-Hirak activist and whistleblower Mohamed Benhalima reported that he had been tortured in pretrial detention.

Prison conditions are poor, with some inmates reportedly facing significant overcrowding and poor sanitation.

Terrorist groups, including Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Islamic State (IS) militant group, continue to operate in Algeria. However, attacks have grown less frequent in recent years.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the 2 / population? 4

Officials have made gradual efforts to address the Amazigh community's cultural demands. Tamazight, the Berber language, became a national language in 1995, allowing it to be taught officially in schools serving Amazigh areas. Tamazight received the status of an official language nationwide through a 2016 constitutional amendment, meaning it could be used in administrative documents. The 2020 constitutional revisions made it impossible to change the status of Tamazight as a national language. However, Arabic remains the prevailing language of government.

The constitution guarantees gender equality, but women continue to face both legal and societal discrimination. Many women receive lower wages than men in similar positions, and there are few women in company leadership posts. Sexual harassment, while punishable with fines and jail time, is nevertheless common in workplaces. NGOs dedicated to women's rights have become more vocal as part of the Hirak, calling for a renewed commitment to the constitutional promise of gender equality.

LGBT+ people face discrimination and violence, and many LGBT+ activists have fled the country. Same-sex sexual activity is punishable with prison sentences as long as two years. LGBT+ Algerians face mistreatment at the hands of police and discrimination by health care providers and employers.

About 175,000 Sahrawis from Western Sahara live in refugee camps near the border with Morocco. The camps have been present since 1975, in a remote desert region with limited job opportunities. About 90,000 of the residents are considered "vulnerable" by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as they rely on humanitarian assistance for food, water, and education.

Sub-Saharan African migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, are subject to racial discrimination in Algeria and are often arbitrarily arrested and deported from the country—or simply abandoned at the southern desert borders—without being given the opportunity to challenge the actions in court. In September 2022 alone, more than 1,500 sub-Saharan migrants were expelled from Algeria and left at the border with Niger.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 2 / 4

While most citizens are relatively free to travel domestically and abroad, the authorities closely monitor and limit access to visas for non-Algerians. Men of military draft age cannot leave the country without official consent. The land border between Algeria and Morocco remains closed. Police reportedly limit the movement of sub-Saharan African migrants attempting to reach the Mediterranean coast. Married women younger than 18 must obtain the permission of their husbands to travel abroad.

The government has at times banned Algerian diaspora activists from leaving the country. At least three Algerian-Canadian activists were temporarily prevented from leaving in 2022. All three were interrogated about their potential links to the Hirak, but were later able to return to Canada.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 2 / 4

The government plays a dominant role in the economy, leaving little room for private competitors. Cronyism is also a major obstacle to private enterprise, with businesspeople who are not aligned with the regime often facing harassment by the authorities. Numerous regulations and their flawed implementation make Algeria one of the most difficult environments in the world in which to establish and operate a business. Inheritance rules favor men over women.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 2 / 4

Women do not enjoy equal rights in marriage and divorce under the family code, which is based on Islamic law. Among other provisions, women must obtain a male guardian's permission to marry, and the father is the legal guardian of his children. No law addresses spousal rape.

Domestic violence is common, and the laws against it are weak; for example, cases can be dropped if the victim forgives the alleged abuser. Women's rights groups report that between 100 and 200 women are killed in domestic abuse incidents each year.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 1 / 4

The weak rule of law, government involvement in the economy, and bureaucratic obstacles pose major barriers to economic opportunity and social mobility. Laws against unsafe or abusive working conditions are poorly enforced.

A 2009 law criminalized all forms of trafficking in persons, and Algeria reported its first conviction under the law in 2015. In recent years, the government has made an effort to enforce the ban through prosecutions and has provided protection for victims, though not systematically. Undocumented sub-Saharan African migrants are particularly susceptible to trafficking, including through debt bondage and sexual exploitation.

ecoi.net summary:

Annual report on political rights and civil liberties in 2022

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