

Algeriet(2)



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Algeria

Polity: Dominant party (military-influenced)

Political Rights: 6

Civil Liberties: 5

Status: Not Free

Economy: Statist

Population: 31,400,000

PPP: \$5,308

Life Expectancy: 70

Religious Groups: Sunni Muslim (99 percent), Christian and Jewish (1 percent)

Ethnic Groups: Arab-Berber (99 percent), other (1 percent)

Capital: Algiers

1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF

Overview

Although Algeria's Islamist insurgency continued to wane in its tenth year, brutal terror attacks by small bands of Islamic militants claimed the lives of more than 1,100 civilians and undermined public confidence in the government. The Berber uprising that began last year continues to smolder, and a Berber boycott of parliamentary elections in May resulted in the lowest overall turnout in Algerian history. On the whole, however, civil liberties improved slightly.

Following 130 years of French colonial rule, Algeria won its independence in 1962. The National Liberation Front (FLN) ruled as a virtual one-party regime for more than a quarter-century. Following the collapse of world oil prices in the mid-1980s, housing shortages, unemployment, and other severe economic problems rapidly fueled antigovernment sentiments, which culminated in the "hunger" riots of October 1988 in Algiers and other major cities that left more than 500 people dead. In response, President Chadli Benjedid introduced a new constitution that permitted the formation of independent political parties and presided over the country's first multiparty elections. In January 1992, however, the army canceled a second round of legislative elections in order to forestall a victory by the radical Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), banned the group, and arrested its leadership.

The coup set off a bloody civil war that has claimed 100,000 to 150,000 lives, mostly civilians. Although radical Islamists have been responsible for most of the massacres, government-backed militias have also been accused of committing mass killings. Human rights groups have charged Algerian security forces with responsibility for thousands of "disappearances." The country remains under martial law.

In 1997, the government reached a truce with the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), the outlawed military wing of the FIS. After President Abdelaziz Bouteflika took office in 1999, the government introduced a "civil harmony" law that granted amnesty or leniency to Islamist rebels who renounced violence. Up to 6,000 Islamist rebels took advantage of the amnesty, and the AIS was formally disbanded. However, two AIS offshoots, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSCP), rejected the amnesty and have continued their violent struggle. Around 2,500 Algerians are believed to have died in 2000 as a result of the fighting;

nearly 2,000 died in 2001.

The April 2001 death of a Berber teenager in the custody of the gendarmerie sparked massive riots in the northeastern Kabylie region and demonstrations erupted throughout the country against abuses by the security forces, government corruption, housing shortages, unemployment, and political stagnation. Riots resulted in the deaths of some 80 protestors during the year.

Although a commission set up to investigate the violence concluded that the gendarmes used excessive force in suppressing the uprising, it did not attribute responsibility to any high-level officials. The government also refused to meet any of the core demands made by the association of local village councils that led the uprising, the CADC (Coordination des aarouch, dairas et communes). Although the gendarmes vacated some positions in the heart of Tizi Ouzou, the regional capital, the authorities refused to completely withdraw the gendarmes from Kabylie. In March 2002, President Bouteflika announced that Tamazight, the native Berber language, would be recognized as a "national language." His proposal fell short of Berber demands that Tamazight have official status on par with Arabic. These limited concessions were overshadowed by the arrests of scores of CADC leaders and hundreds of their supporters in 2002.

The government's paralysis in dealing with the Berber uprising and growing public disaffection is widely attributed to the continuing grip on power of senior military officers, who have obstructed economic reforms needed to improve social conditions and combat corruption. The generals control much of Algeria's oil and gas wealth, as well as many private sector monopolies. As a result, despite a relatively sound macroeconomic situation and \$22 billion in oil and gas revenues in 2001, more than half of the population lives on less than \$1 per day and unemployment remains around 30 percent. The corrupt legal system, which perpetuates this imbalance of prosperity has also made the country unattractive to foreign investors outside the hydrocarbon sector.

Algerians frequently complain that unlike military dictatorships elsewhere in the world the generals who hold real power in Algiers cannot even provide the security they have long awaited. Despite the killing of GIA head Antar Zouabri, in February, violence by Islamic extremists continued in 2002. An upsurge in Islamist violence in the month preceding the May 30 parliamentary elections left 390 dead.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

The right of Algerians to choose their government freely is heavily restricted. Although the president and lower house of parliament are elected by popular vote, and two-thirds of the upper house is chosen by elected municipal and provincial councils, all of these institutions are subservient to a clique of military and intelligence officers, commonly known as the *decideurs* or the *pouvoir*, who wield real power. Moreover, the electoral process is flawed. On the eve of the 1999 presidential election, all other candidates except Abdelaziz Bouteflika withdrew from the race, alleging fraud.

Although the last two rounds of parliamentary elections were free of systemic fraud and vote-rigging, the government's refusal to license FIS and other radical Islamist groups limited the choices of voters to a panoply of regime-approved parties. Turnout for parliamentary elections in May 2002 hit an all-time low as a result of electoral boycotts by the two leading pro-Berber parties, the Socialist Forces Front (FFS) and the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD), and a grassroots campaign by the CADC to obstruct access to the polls in Kabylie, where turnout was a mere 3 percent.

The main result of the elections was a transfer of seats from one political vehicle of the regime to another. The National Democratic Rally (NDR), established by military circles prior to the 1997 elections, saw its 155-seat bloc reduced to 48, while the FLN which is close to Bouteflika and other civilian political elites, tripled its number of seats from 64 to 199. While the results may have bolstered Bouteflika's position vis-a-vis the *pouvoir*, they did not produce a substantial parliamentary opposition. The FLN consolidated its political resurrection during municipal elections in October, winning a majority of the seats in 43 out of 48 provincial assemblies and 668 out of 1,541 local assemblies.

A variety of legislation passed under the state of emergency imposed in 1992 restrict the right of detainees to due process. Although extrajudicial execution, torture, and th arbitrary arrest and detention without trial of suspects by security forces and pro-government militias have continued to decline, abuses continue, particularly in Kabylie. The government's failure to bring any high-ranking gendarmerie commander to trial in connection with the 2001 massacres in Kabylie highlights the continuing impunity enjoyed by the security services in Algeria. The number of political prisoners is estimated to be several thousand, mainly suspected members of radical Islamic groups and their sympathizers.

The judiciary in Algeria is not independent. Since judges are appointed to ten-year terms by the Ministry of Justice and can be removed at will, in practice the judiciary is squarely dependent on the executive branch. In August 2000, President Bouteflika replaced 80 percent of lower court judges and all but three higher court judges, a move that both "reformed" the judiciary by removing corrupt judges and demonstrates the president's power over this branch of government. Civilians arrested for security-related offenses are often tried in military courts, where due process rights are frequently ignored. Some lawyers refuse to represent individuals accused of security offenses, particularly Islamists, out of fear of retribution from the security forces.

Press freedom is limited by government control of the broadcast media, laws that bar vaguely defined defamation of state officials, and the overall lack of security. At least 70 journalists have been murdered since the early 1990s. A June 2001 amendment t the penal code increased the penalties for defamation of any "authority of public orde and facilitates their prosecution. Nevertheless, the print media remain among the mo vibrant in the Arab world. While many journalists were interrogated by the authorities in 2002, and a handful were charged with press offenses, the few who were convicted did not received prison sentences. Nevertheless, journalists continue to be harassed, beaten, and sometimes killed under mysterious circumstances. In March 2002, a journalist in Tizi-Ouzou was severely injured by a tear gas grenade fired by police (he was not in the vicinity of any public disturbances). In July, a journalist in the northern town of Tebessa, Abdelhai Beliardouh, was kidnapped and beaten by the head of the local chamber of commerce and his henchmen as police looked on (Beliardouh committed suicide in November). Also in July, the body of a television correspondent was found bound and gagged in his Algiers apartment. In August, a caricaturist for th daily El Youm went into hiding after being threatened by employees of a state-owned television station. In December, two papers complained that the state-owned Algiers Printing Company (SIA) had repeatedly delayed printing their issues, a method that they say is used by the government to impose extrajudicial financial penalties on opposition print media.

Emergency legislation restricts freedom of assembly and association. The Interior Ministry has refused to license some political parties, mostly on the grounds that they are linked to the FIS. Workers have the right to establish trade unions and to strike, though the government can deny or revoke licenses to unions if their objectives are deemed contrary to public order or morals.

The country's vibrant human rights movement operates openly, and most demonstrations are tolerated unless they turn violent. However, investigation of abuses by the security forces, particularly the fate of an estimated 4,000 Algerians who disappeared since 1993 following their arrests by security forces and government-backed militias, is clearly off-limits. Organizations that focus exclusively on this issue, such as the Association of Families of the Disappeared of the Province of Constantine, have been denied legal registration. Human rights groups that investigate this issue continue to be jailed on defamation charges. In February 2002, the president of the Relizane branch of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LADDH) was sentenced to a year in prison. Abderrahmane Khelil, a leading official of SOS Disparus, which represents families of the disappeared, was arrested three different times in 2002 and received a six-month suspended sentence in May. Demonstrations by families of the disappeared were violently dispersed by police on several occasions during the year.

Islam is the state religion, though small Christian and Jewish communities are allowe to practice without governmental interference. The government exerts considerable

control over mosques. All Muslim preachers must be approved by the government and can be imprisoned on charges of delivering sermons that are "contrary to the noble nature of the mosque" or that undermine "the cohesion of society."

Berbers do not face official discrimination, but their cultural identity and language are not fully recognized under the law. Those who openly celebrate Berber culture have been targeted by Islamic radicals, while security forces have used excessive force in dispersing Berber demonstrations. Government spending for housing and other services in Kabylie is not on par with that for other regions.

The family code, based on Sharia (Islamic law), discriminates against women in matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody. Women have also been attacked by radical Islamists for such activities as working outside the home or going to beauty salons. Bouteflika appointed the country's first female provincial governor in 1999 and has improved the representation of women in other areas of government, though the proportion of men to women remains unbalanced.

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Freedom House is a clear voice for democracy and freedom around the world. Founded nearly sixty years ago by Eleanor Roosevelt, Wendell Willkie, and other Americans concerned with the mounting threats to peace and democracy, Freedom House has been a vigorous proponent of democratic values and a steadfast opponent of dictatorships of the far left and the far right.

Non-partisan and broad-based, Freedom House is led by a Board of Trustees composed of leading Democrats, Republicans, and independents; business and labor leaders; former senior government officials; scholars; writers; and journalists. All are united in the view that American leadership in international affairs is essential to the cause of human rights and freedom.

Over the years, Freedom House has been at the center of the struggle for freedom. It was an outspoken advocate of the Marshall Plan and NATO in the 1940s, of the U.S. civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, of the Vietnam boat people in the 1970s, of Poland's Solidarity movement and the Filipino democratic opposition in the 1980s, and of the many democracies that have emerged around the world in the 1990s.

Freedom House has vigorously opposed dictatorships in Central America and Chile, apartheid in South Africa, the suppression of the Prague Spring, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, genocide in Bosnia and Rwanda, and the brutal violation of human rights in Cuba, Burma, China, and Iraq.

It has championed the rights of democratic activists, religious believers, trade unionists, journalists, and proponents of free markets. In 1997, a consolidation took place whereby the international democratization training programs of the National Forum Foundation were incorporated into Freedom House.

Today, Freedom House is a leading advocate of the world's young democracies, which are coping with the debilitating legacy of statism, dictatorship, and political repression. It conducts an array of U.S. and overseas research, advocacy, education, and training initiatives that promote human rights, democracy, free market economics, the rule of law, independent media, and U.S. engagement in international affairs.

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