

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	120
Land:	Algeriet
Kilde:	Freedom House.
Titel:	Freedom in the World 2010
Udgivet:	3. maj 2010
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	22. juni 2010

Title	Freedom in the World 2010 - Algeria
Publisher	Freedom House
Country	Algeria
Publication Date	3 May 2010
Cite as	Freedom House, <i>Freedom in the World 2010 - Algeria</i> , 3 May 2010, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4c0ceb0c28.html [accessed 8 June 2010]

Freedom in the World 2010 - Algeria

Capital: Algiers

Population: 34,700,000

Political Rights Score: 6 *

Civil Liberties Score: 5 *

Status: Not Free

Overview

Press freedom was severely curtailed prior to the April 2009 presidential elections, which President Abdelaziz Bouteflika won with over 90 percent of the vote amid protests of fraud by his opponents. The government consolidated its internet monitoring power during the year, and international observers reported that the authorities began blocking websites. Meanwhile, as the terrorist group Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb continued to attack military, state, and foreign targets in the country, the government joined forces with neighboring countries to combat the regional threat of terrorism.

Unlike many other French colonies, Algeria was considered an integral part of France, leading to an especially bloody war of independence that lasted from 1954 to 1962. After the military overthrew the country's first president in 1965, it dominated Algerian politics for the next four decades, backing the National Liberation Front (FLN) to the exclusion of all other parties for most of that time. President Chadli Benjedid permitted the establishment of legal opposition parties in 1988, and Islamist groups quickly gained popularity in the face of the government's failures; the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) became the main opposition faction. With the FIS poised to win parliamentary elections in 1991, the army canceled the elections, forced Benjedid from office, and summarily imprisoned FIS leaders under a declared state of emergency.

Over the next decade, various Islamist groups engaged in a bloody civil conflict against the military and one another. All sides targeted civilians and perpetrated large-scale human rights abuses, causing well over 150,000 deaths and the disappearance of at least 6,000 people. Journalists and intellectuals were also targeted.

In 1999, the military-backed candidate – former foreign minister Abdelaziz Bouteflika – easily won the presidential election after his opponents withdrew to protest alleged fraud. Bouteflika's first attempt at resolving the civil war was the promulgation of a civil harmony law, which granted partial amnesty to combatants who renounced violence. A few thousand militants surrendered, but the more uncompromising groups – including one which later renamed itself Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) – continued to

kill government personnel and civilians. The next several years saw occasional outbursts of violence, and the government continued to commit human rights abuses.

The FLN gained power in the 2002 elections to the lower house of Parliament and the 2003 elections to the upper house, while the number of seats won by the army-backed National Democratic Rally (RND) fell considerably in both. Bouteflika, who began to distance himself from the military, won reelection in 2004 with 85 percent of the vote.

In 2005, Algerians overwhelmingly approved a referendum on the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation. The document offered a general amnesty to most militants and government agents for crimes committed during the civil war, and it called for victims to receive compensation. Victims' groups criticized the charter for not addressing the issue of the disappeared, and international human rights groups denounced it for not allowing perpetrators to be brought to justice.

Elections for Parliament's lower house in May 2007 drew a turnout of just 35 percent, the lowest in Algerian history. Many opposition groups, both Islamist and leftist, asked supporters not to participate, arguing that the results would be rigged. The FLN lost 63 seats in the voting, though it remained the largest party, followed by the RND, the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD), and the Movement for Peaceful Society. Indirect elections for the upper house in December 2009 saw the FLN again secure the largest number of seats, followed by the RND.

On April 9, 2009, Bouteflika won his third term with around 90 percent of the vote amid accusations of fraud from the other five candidates. Although officials announced a 74 percent voter turnout, an informal poll conducted by the Associated Press at 17 randomly chosen voting stations indicated that turnout was about half that number.

Algeria continued to be racked by terrorist attacks against government and foreign targets throughout 2009. AQIM claimed responsibility for a series of attacks throughout the year, including a March suicide bombing that killed two guards; a June ambush that left 18 national gendarmeries officers dead; a July ambush on a military supply convoy that killed 23 soldiers; and an October attack that left seven Algerian security guards at a Canadian water project dead. Immediately before the April presidential election, terror groups linked to al-Qaeda carried out three ambushes, killing five security guards, and six voting stations were set on fire. Algerian nationals with ties to AQIM have been increasingly implicated in terrorist plots abroad. In November, Italian police broke up a terrorist cell based in Milan, arresting 17 men living in Italy and neighboring countries. Similar arrests occurred in France and the United Kingdom, although on a smaller scale.

In response to terrorist attacks, the government appeared to be increasing its antiterror efforts throughout the year. In March, it announced that 150 militants had been killed and another 50 had surrendered in exchange for amnesty, including Ali Ben Touati, a senior commanding officer of AQIM. In May, eight militants were killed in a government raid of AQIM strongholds just east of Algiers. Meanwhile, in August, Algeria hosted a meeting between high-level military commanders from Mali, Niger, and Mauritania in an effort to generate regional cooperation in an antiterrorism initiative. Several thousand additional Algerian troops were sent to the already-large contingent of troops protecting the country's southern border.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Algeria is not an electoral democracy. However, Algerian parliamentary elections are more democratic than those in many other Arab states. The military still plays an important role in politics despite fluctuations in its prominence in recent years. The June 2008 appointment of Ahmed Ouyahia as prime minister in a cabinet shuffle appeared to signal an increase in military influence, as he had first held the post as part of the military-dominated regime of the 1990s.

The People's National Assembly (APN), the lower house of the bicameral Parliament, has 389 members directly elected for five-year terms. The upper house, the National

Council (CN), has 144 members serving six-year term; 96 members are chosen through indirect elections by local assemblies, and the president appoints the remaining 48. The president is directly elected for five-year terms, and constitutional amendments passed in November 2008 allowed President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to run for a third term in April 2009. The amendments, which were approved 500 to 21 in a joint session of Parliament and without recourse to a referendum, also increased the president's powers relative to the premiership and other entities, drawing criticism from segments of the press and opposition parties.

The Ministry of the Interior must approve political parties before they can operate legally. While there are dozens of active political parties, movements that are deemed too radically Islamist are outlawed, and many of the Islamist groups that were banned in the 1990s remain illegal.

High levels of corruption still plague Algeria's business and public sectors. Customs police face particular scrutiny, both in the press and by government monitors; by the end of May 2009, 202 customs officers had been arrested on bribery charges. Algeria was ranked 111 out of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Journalists face an array of government tools designed to control the press, but current restrictions bear little resemblance to those during the peak of the civil war in the mid-1990s, when journalists were regularly murdered for their work. Private newspapers have been published in Algeria for nearly two decades, and journalists have been aggressive in their coverage of government affairs. While Arabic and French-language satellite channels are popular, the government keeps tight control over local television and radio broadcasts. In late 2009, the information minister announced a proposed centralized system for monitoring incoming and outgoing internet information. The purported purpose of the system was to inhibit cyber terrorists and online piracy, as well as limit access to pornography.

International press freedom groups continued to document numerous cases of harassment of critical journalists in 2009. During the April presidential elections, the government banned multiple publications that criticized the president. Foreign journalists often faced obstacles in covering the election, including being arrested or otherwise physically prevented from reporting on the polls. Defamation remains a criminal offense. According to the U.S.-based Committee to Protect Journalists, the managing editor of the news website al-Waha, Nedjar Hadj Daoud, began serving a six-month prison sentence in March 2009 after being convicted in 2005 of defamation over an article he wrote that was critical of a local government official; however, he was released days later for medical reasons. Rabah Lamouchi, the local correspondent of the national Arabic-language daily *Ennahar*, was charged with defamation and lacking press credentials; he was convicted in July and sentenced to six months in prison. The privately-owned daily newspaper, *El Watan*, also faced continued pressure from government officials and private entities. In December 2008, the editor of *El Watan* and one reporter were convicted of libeling a faith healer in articles published in 2004 and were sentenced to three months imprisonment and a fine of 50,000 dinars (\$678); both remained free at the end of 2009 pending their appeals. The editor was summoned before the court again in December 2008, facing libel charges for three different articles. Two charges were brought by the CEO of Air Algerie, one related to an article that covered fare hikes by the airline. Police brought a third charge connected to a 2001 article that claimed the police had killed over 100 protesters in Bouira. In the first quarter of 2009, the editor was summoned before police at least 14 times for questioning related to defamation charges, sparking criticism from international observers who considered the police questioning to be harassment.

Algeria's population is overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim, and the small non-Muslim communities are able to practice their faiths without systematic harassment. However, non-Muslims may only gather to worship at state-approved locations, proselytizing by non-Muslims is illegal, and the government in February 2008 began enforcing an ordinance that tightened restrictions on minority faiths. Given Algeria's civil conflict, security services monitor mosques for radical Islamist activity. Academic freedom is

largely respected.

The police sometimes disperse peaceful gatherings, and the government generally discourages demonstrations featuring clear or implicit criticism of the authorities. As terrorist attacks continued in 2009, the government remained wary of large public gatherings and restricted freedom of assembly. An attempt by minority parties in April to stage demonstrations in favor of boycotting the 2009 presidential elections was stopped by the authorities, who blocked marchers from taking to the streets of an Algiers suburb. In July, police dispersed a conference organized by the Collective of the Families of the Disappeared in Algeria. Permits are required to establish nongovernmental organizations, and those with Islamist leanings are regarded with suspicion by the government. Workers can establish independent trade unions. The main labor federation, the General Union of Algerian Workers, has been criticized for being too close to the government and failing to advance workers' interests aggressively.

The judiciary is not independent and is susceptible to government pressure. International human rights activists have accused the security forces of practicing torture. The human rights situation remains poor, though there have been significant gains since the peak of the civil war. As of October 2009, most of the eight Algerian citizens who had been repatriated after having been in U.S. custody in Guantanamo Bay were released pending domestic trials on terrorism-related charges. Prison conditions generally do not meet international standards. Overcrowding remains the primary issue; other conditions, including nutrition and hygiene, are also substandard. In September, the justice minister announced that 14 prison workers had been prosecuted and jailed for mistreating their charges, and stated that abuse of inmates by prison officials would not be tolerated in general.

Algeria's ethnic composition is a mixture of Arabs and Berbers. Those who identify themselves as Arabs have traditionally formed the country's elite. In the last few years, following outbreaks of antigovernment violence in the Berber community, officials have made more of an effort to recognize Berber cultural demands. Tamazight, the Berber language, is now a national language.

While most citizens are free to move throughout the country and abroad with little government interference, the authorities closely monitor and limit the movement of suspected terrorists. The long-standing state of emergency permits the government to restrict where certain people live and work. Men of military draft age are not allowed to leave the country without government consent.

Women continue to face discrimination at both the legal and societal levels. Under the family code, which is based on Islamic law, women do not enjoy equal rights in marriage, divorce, and inheritance. They are poorly represented in parliament, holding only 5.2 percent of the upper house and 7.2 percent of the popularly elected lower house. In 2009, presidential candidate Louisa Hanoun came in a distant second place with about 4 percent of the vote. Under legislative changes made to the nationality law in 2005, Algeria is one of the few countries in the region to allow women to transfer their nationality to their children, regardless of their father's nationality. A law adopted in January 2009 criminalizes all forms of trafficking in persons, but had not gone into effect by year's end.

**Countries are ranked on a scale of 1-7, with 1 representing the highest level of freedom and 7 representing the lowest level of freedom.*

Copyright notice: © Freedom House, Inc. · All Rights Reserved
