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Freedom Status: Not Free

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

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

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

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

Quick Facts

Population: 40,800,000

Capital: Algiers

GDP/capita: \$4,160

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). While there are multiple opposition parties in the parliament, elections are distorted by fraud, and electoral processes are not transparent. Other concerns include the suppression of street protests, restrictive laws to curb the media, and rampant corruption.

Key Developments in 2017:

- In May, the ruling FLN and the military-backed National Democratic Rally (RND) won over half the seats in legislative elections. The polls saw just 35.6 percent turnout, the lowest turnout rate since the introduction of multiparty elections.
- In May, the registration of SNATEGS, a union comprised of employees of the state-owned gas and electricity company, was cancelled by the authorities, following a series of labor strikes staged by the organization.
- In September, the head of Algeria's Ahmadi Muslim community was sentenced to six months in prison for offending the Prophet and Islam.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 10 / 40 (-1)

A. ELECTORAL PROCESS: 3 / 12 (-1)**A1. Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 1 / 4**

The president is directly elected to a five-year term. Constitutional revisions approved in 2016 reintroduced a two-term limit for the presidency, though President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who has been in power since 1999 and is currently serving his fourth term, is nevertheless eligible to seek reelection in 2019. The 2014 presidential vote was marred by ballot stuffing, multiple voting, inflated electoral rolls, and the misuse of state resources to benefit the incumbent. Moreover, the authorities were unable to give election observers access to the national electoral roll.

A2. Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 1 / 4 (-1)

The 462 members of the People's National Assembly, the lower house, are directly elected to five-year terms. In the May 2017 elections, the ruling FLN and RND won a combined 261 seats. Several other parties won a smaller share of seats. An unpublished European Union (EU) assessment of the polls, acquired by the Algerian newspaper *Liberté*, noted serious deficiencies in the electoral process, including a general lack of access to voter lists and opaque vote-counting processes. Opposition parties and other observers alleged widespread electoral fraud, and media outlets carried videos taken by voters that appeared to depict ballot-box stuffing and other irregularities. Vote buying was also reported. Turnout was just under 36 percent.

The president appoints one-third of the members of the upper legislative 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.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 because the 2017 legislative elections were marred by allegations of fraud, and their administration was generally opaque.

A3. Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies? 1 / 4

Electoral management bodies are subject to government influence. In 2016, the government created the High Independent Commission for Election Oversight (HIIE) to run and observe elections and respond to complaints. However, the body's head and all of its members are appointed by Bouteflika, and it has not yet assumed its responsibilities for administering elections; polls are instead run mainly by the Interior Ministry. In 2017, the opposition and other observers questioned the independence of the HIIE, and criticized the generally opaque administration of the year's elections.

B. POLITICAL PLURALISM AND PARTICIPATION: 4 / 16**B1. Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings? 1 / 4**

The Interior Ministry must approve political parties before they can operate legally. Parties cannot form along explicit ethnic lines. The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), which swept the 1990 and 1991 elections, remains banned.

B2. Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 1 / 4

Opposition parties play a marginal role in the national legislature. Election boycotts by opposition parties are not uncommon. Indecision by opposition parties on whether to boycott the 2017 polls contributed to depressed turnout that harmed the competitiveness of parties that chose to participate.

B3. Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group that is not democratically accountable? 1 / 4

In recent years, there have been allegations of corruption and financial sway over the selection of political candidates, as well as of vote buying. In March 2017, gendarmes found the son of FLN secretary general Djamel Ould Abbas with several candidate lists and around 200,000 euros (\$210,000). He was detained but released shortly afterward, apparently without being charged.

B4. Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 1 / 4

Amazigh-dominated parties like the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) and the Socialist Forces Front (FFS) are allowed to operate, although they sometimes boycott elections. Amazigh-dominated parties control a handful of municipalities, mainly concentrated in Kabylie Region.

Women hold 26 percent of seats in the lower house. While women's participation in politics is increasing, many women reportedly feel reluctant to run for office, and have difficulty making their voices heard in the legislature and in intraparty debates. In 2017, some parties obscured the faces of women candidates on their campaign posters.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people are politically marginalized, and have little ability to fight for relevant antidiscrimination laws or the repeal of laws criminalizing same-sex sexual relations.

C. FUNCTIONING OF GOVERNMENT: 3 / 12**C1. Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 1 / 4**

The executive is extremely powerful, and parliament plays only a marginal role in policymaking. The aging Bouteflika has increasingly withdrawn from political life, and several actors hold strong influence over executive decisions, including the president's brother, Saïd Bouteflika; oligarchs; and the army.

C2. Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 1 / 4

Anticorruption laws, a lack of government transparency, low levels of judicial independence, and bloated bureaucracies contribute to widespread corruption. While lower-level officials have been held accountable for corrupt behavior, few corruption investigations are filed against senior officials.

C3. Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 1 / 4

There is no legislation that guarantees citizens' to access official information. There is considerable opacity surrounding official decision-making procedures, the publication of official acts is rarely timely, and public officials rarely declare their assets.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 25 / 60 (+1)

D. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND BELIEF: 7 / 16

D1. Are there free and independent media? 1 / 4

Although some newspapers are privately owned and journalists remain aggressive in their coverage of government affairs, most newspapers rely on government agencies for printing and advertising, encouraging self-censorship. In October and November 2017, access to the online newspaper *Tout sur l'Algerie* was blocked by two state-owned networks, allegedly following a request by the communications minister. People can access unlicensed private television channels located in Algeria but legally based outside the country, but these can be subject to government crackdowns, including office raids and confiscation of equipment.

Authorities use legal mechanisms to harass the media and censor controversial reporting. In January 2017, a blogger was arrested for interviewing an Israeli diplomat. A cybercrime law gives authorities the right to block websites "contrary to the public order or decency."

D2. 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. Religious communities may only gather to worship at state-approved locations. Proselytizing by non-Muslims is illegal. Religious minorities sometimes face repression. Authorities have cracked down on Ahmadi Muslims, claiming they pose a security threat and at times calling them heretics; nearly 300 such believers were arrested between June 2016 and June 2017, with some receiving prison sentences or large fines. In September 2017, the head of Algeria's Ahmadi community was sentenced to six months in prison on charges of offending the Prophet and Islam.

D3. 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, though due to restrictive laws and practices, debate is somewhat circumscribed.

D4. Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 3 / 4

Private discussion can take place relatively freely outside of certain sensitive topics. 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.

E. ASSOCIATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL RIGHTS: 5 / 12

E1. Is there freedom of assembly? 2 / 4

The government regularly uses force to disrupt public gatherings and protests. A ban on demonstrations in Algiers remained in place at the end of 2017. Demonstrations against increased

taxes turned into riots in the Bejaïa Province in January, and security forces responded by deploying tear gas.

E2. Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 1 / 4

The law on associations in effectively restricts the formation, funding, and operations of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Permits and receipts of application submission are required to establish and operate NGOs. Both new and old organizations experience bureaucratic labyrinths while waiting not just for permits but also for application receipts. NGOs must notify the government of staffing change and submit detailed reports on their funding, and gain government approval before accepting foreign funding or risk fines or imprisonment.

E3. Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 2 / 4

Workers can establish independent trade unions, but the main labor federation, the General Union of Algerian Workers, has been criticized for being too close to the government and failing to advocate for workers' interests. Algerian authorities have increasingly clamped down on efforts to form independent unions. In May 2017, the registration of SNATEGS, a union for workers of the state-owned gas and electricity company, was canceled by the authorities, following a series of strike actions. Over 800 workers of the company were charged over their involvement in strikes.

F. RULE OF LAW: 6 / 16 (+1)

F1. Is there an independent judiciary? 1 / 4

The judiciary is susceptible to government pressure. The constitution empowers the president to appoint all judges and prosecutors. Judges are selected by the High Judicial Council, which is led by the president. Those with resources or connections can also influence judicial decisions.

F2. Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 1 / 4

The lack of independence of the judiciary and of prosecutors often erodes the rights of defendants, particularly in political trials. Lengthy delays in bringing cases to trial are common. Prosecutors' requests to extend pretrial detention periods are typically granted. Security forces frequently conduct warrantless searches.

F3. Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 2 / 4 (+1)

Allegations of torture have decreased since the end of the 1990s civil war, but human rights activists still accuse the security forces of abusing detainees. In July 2017, the family of prominent lawyer Mohcine Amara accused security forces of beating and torturing him.

Terrorist groups operate in Algeria, and in August, a suicide bomber targeted a police station in the city of Tiaret, killing two officers. However, the rate of such attacks has decreased over recent years.

Prison conditions in Algeria generally do not meet international standards due to overcrowding and poor nutrition and hygiene.

Score Change: The score improved from 1 to 2 due to a gradual improvement in the security environment.

F4. Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 2 / 4

Officials have made modest efforts to recognize the Berber community's cultural demands. Tamazight, the Berber language, is now a national language.

Throughout 2017, thousands of sub-Saharan African migrants, refugees and asylum seekers among them, were arbitrarily arrested and deported from the country without being given the opportunity to challenge procedures against them. Government officials have broadly characterized migrants from sub-Saharan Africa as criminals, effectively encouraging discrimination against them.

LGBT people face severe discrimination and risk violence for expressing their sexual orientation, and many LGBT activists have fled the country. Same-sex sexual relations are punishable with two months to two years in prison, though no prosecutions were reported in 2017.

Though the constitution guarantees gender equality, women continue to face discrimination at both the legal and societal levels. Many women make lower wages than men in similar positions, and there are few women in company leadership positions.

G. PERSONAL AUTONOMY AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS: 7 / 16

G1. Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 2 / 4

While most citizens are free to travel domestically and abroad, the authorities closely monitor and limit access to visas for non-Algerians. Men of military draft age are not allowed to leave the country without official consent. The land border between Algeria and Morocco has been closed for years, separating families that live in the border areas and forcing many to resort to illegal smuggling networks for routine travel. 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.

G2. 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. Numerous regulations make Algeria one of the most difficult environments in the world in which to establish and operate a business.

G3. 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, divorce, or inheritance. Gender-based violence is common, and womens' rights groups report that between 100 and 200 women are killed in domestic violence incidents each year. No law prevents spousal rape. Sexual harassment is punishable with fines and jail time, but is nevertheless common in workplaces and on the street.

G4. Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 1 / 4

Weak rule of law, government involvement in the economy, and bureaucratic obstacles represent barriers to social mobility.

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

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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