

World Watch Research

Algeria: Background Information

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OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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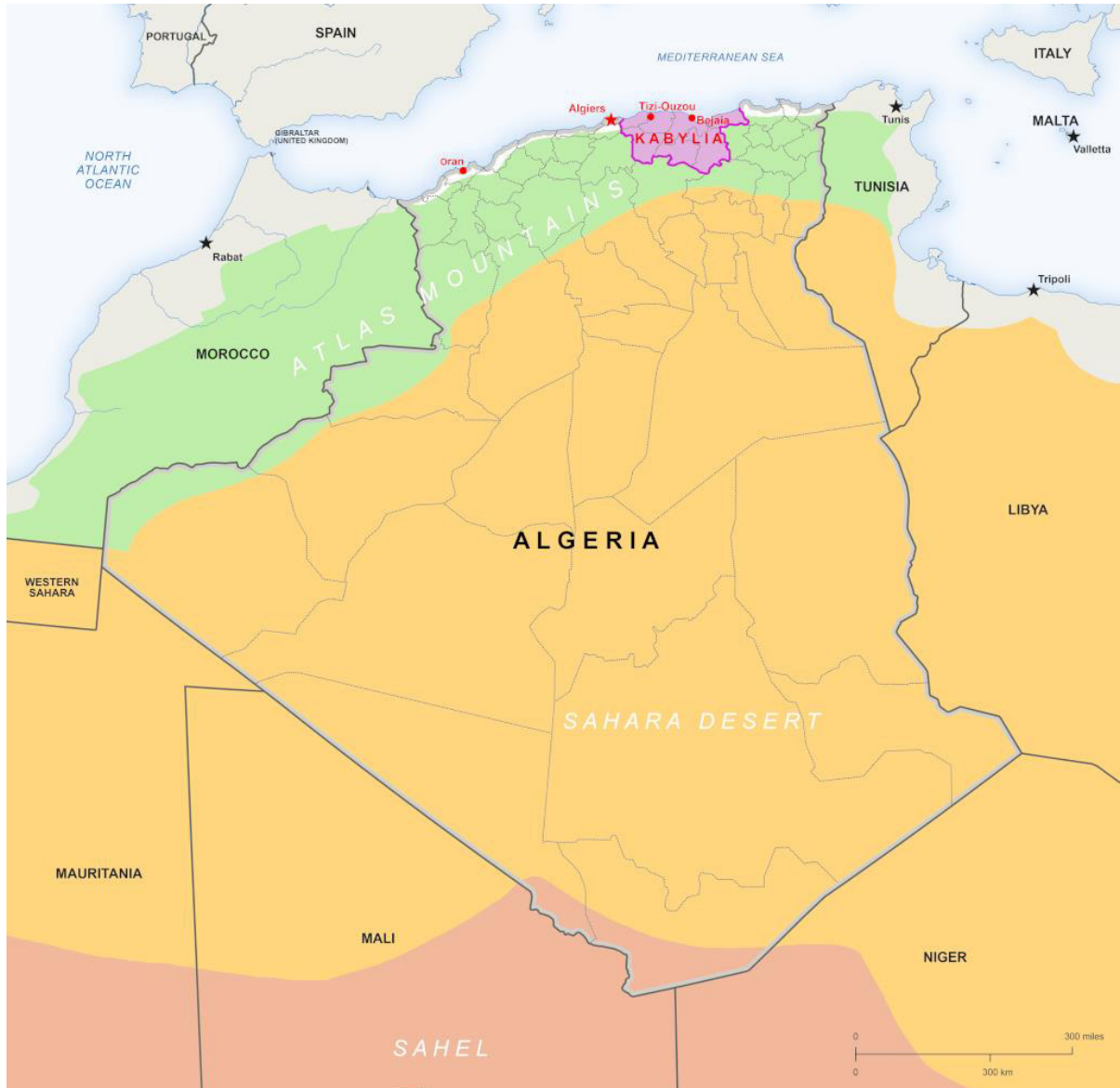
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World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- Background country information (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD). Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

Map of country



Algeria: Population (UN estimate for 2024)		Christians	
46,279,000		144,000	OD estimate

Recent history

Like many other countries in North Africa, Algeria used to be a territory belonging to the Ottoman Turkish Empire. However, in 1830, Algeria was conquered by France. Algeria gained independence in 1962 after a violent 8 year war that was led by the National Liberation Front (FLN). Since independence, the FLN has been the dominant political party in Algeria and has been able to stay in power. For three decades the FLN outlawed other political parties and ruled as the sole legal party. However, in 1991 Algeria introduced multi-party elections. But when Islamist parties won the election, the army

suspended the result of the election and the country descended into a civil war that only ended in 2002 and resulted in the death of an estimated 150,000 Algerians. From 1999 until 2019, Abdelaziz Bouteflika served as president.

Bouteflika was viewed by many as a puppet of the powerful Algerian army, especially after he suffered a stroke in 2013. He was rarely seen in public since then and did not even campaign for the presidential elections in 2014. Back in 2008, he had been able to amend the Constitution with the help of Islamist parties, removing presidential term limits and strengthening presidential powers. However, since January 2011 political tensions had been rising and many demonstrations were held, mainly caused by a general dissatisfaction with the high food prices and high levels of unemployment. In 2016 a number of constitutional amendments were made to give more power to parliament. However, many opponents of the regime dismissed this reform as superficial and this dissent developed into further demonstrations which finally led to Bouteflika's resignation in April 2019.

The following presidential elections in December 2019 were won by former prime-minister and career politician Abdelmadjid Tebboune, a close ally of the powerful army. He won 58% of the votes, but the official turnout was only 40%, with some observers even saying that it was as low as 10%. Unconvinced that he would bring any real change, the protests continued, meanwhile known as the 'Hirak movement' (In Arabic, 'al-Hirak' means 'the movement') ([BBC News, 21 February 2020](#)).

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 was used by the regime to end all the protests for health reasons. This initial step was followed by legislation against 'fake news', which subsequently has been used to target prominent activists and journalists. In the meantime, in a bid to quell further unrest, several former high-ranking politicians and businessmen have been sentenced to lengthy prison sentences on corruption charges. President Tebboune announced a referendum to be held on 1 November 2020 on a newly drafted Constitution ([World Politics Review, August 2020](#)). The referendum went ahead but had such a low turnout (23.7%) that it is clear that "it was seen by many as merely a manoeuvre to extend the life of an authoritarian and corrupt system" ([Chatham House, 9 November 2020](#)). The parliamentary elections on 12 June 2021 were also boycotted by the opposition and resulted in a low turnout of 30.2%, even lower than in the 2017 parliamentary elections (35.7%) ([Al-Jazeera, 12 June 2021](#)). One of the reasons for the boycott was the rejection of no less than 1,200 candidates by the Electoral Commission because of "suspicious activities and transactions", in addition to the arrest and imprisonment of dozens of protesters ([BBC News, 12 June 2021](#)).

During 2023, some high profile politicians were sentenced to five years in prison on corruption charges ([Al-Jazeera, 22 June 2023](#)). However, neither the prison sentences, the new Constitution nor the elections are bringing any real political change. The mostly unelected group of high-ranking generals, businessmen and politicians, collectively known as Le Pouvoir (the Power), are still the ones pulling the strings in Algeria ([Arab Center Washington DC, 3 October 2023](#)). The upcoming presidential elections in September 2024 will most likely not change the current status quo. Due to both government pressure and internal divisions, it is unlikely that the opposition will be able to gather the necessary support to challenge incumbent President Tebboune ([Arab Reform Initiative, 15 March 2024](#)).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 not only increased gas prices, but also Europe's dependency on Algeria as a major hydrocarbon producer. Hence, several high ranking politicians from the EU and major European countries have recently visited the capital Algiers to discuss energy deals.

As a result, Algeria's hydrocarbon revenues increased rapidly. However, most of the increased income is not being used to support necessary reforms, but rather to temporarily ease economic difficulties and protect Le Pouvoir privileges. Because of the armed forces' influence, President Tebboune, who is up for election in 2024, has little room for maneuver: Especially the younger generation needs economic prosperity if unrest is to be averted. This precarious position forces the president into a balancing act i) between traditional ally Russia and the EU (along with other European countries) and ii) between the powerful army and a population looking for (political) change ([ECFR, July 2023](#)).

The protests and even the COVID-19 pandemic did not distract the Algerian regime from oppressing the small Christian minority of mostly Algerian converts to Christianity. In 2006, the Algerian government passed "Ordinance 03-06 to Regulate the Worship of non-Muslim Creeds". From November 2017 onwards, the ordinance has increasingly been used to close churches or force them to cease all activities. Most of the the 47 churches affiliated with the EPA (Église Protestante d'Algérie), the umbrella organization for Protestant churches in Algeria, have now stopped all activities. Pressure rose in 2021 and 2022, with several Christians being prosecuted on charges of proselytizing and of receiving funds from foreign agents. During the same period, several groups were forbidden to meet in non-designated venues. However, pressure further increased significantly in 2023 and 2024, with a further number of churches being closed, while many others ceased meeting, fearing they would be next to receive an order to close or be prosecuted in other ways.

Political and legal landscape

Algeria is a constitutional semi-presidential republic in which the president is the head of state and the prime minister the head of government. As mentioned above, however, de facto Algeria is being ruled by its powerful army and a select group of businessmen and politicians, known as 'Le Pouvoir' (the Power). This is why Algeria has been called a 'controlled democracy' ([New York Times, May 2015](#)).

The political situation in Algeria appears to be relatively stable. Even the unrest caused by the Hirak Movement was unlikely to result in civil war, as happened in neighboring Libya. The memories of the Algerian Civil War (1991-2002) are still fresh and Algerian citizens are generally wary of provoking any repetition of such bloodshed. Admittedly, the Algerian youth are less likely to accept the current status quo with all political power resting in the hands of the army and of those connected to the National Liberation Front, the nationalist party that has ruled Algeria since independence in 1962. Hence, tensions have grown over the years and culminated in the emergence of the Hirak Movement, which was able to force President Bouteflika to resign in April 2019 after months of popular protest with little violence. Nevertheless, no real political change has happened since then and the regime used the COVID-19 pandemic as a golden opportunity for bringing the Hirak protests to a halt.

In the meantime, President Tebboune has replaced a number of influential generals, especially those connected to former Chief of Staff Ahmed Gaïd Salah. Salah, who died in December 2019, had carefully built his network inside the Algerian government and it is likely that former President Bouteflika was more or less his puppet. Tebboune has been dismantling some of the military influence inside the government ([The Africa Report, August 2020](#)), but the old system is effectively still in place. Even the parliamentary elections of June 2021 did not bring any change in that regard.

The Hirak Movement has ceased to play a major role. Firstly, because the regime cracked down on the Hirak's leadership, as well as on independent journalism and other opposition groups, imprisoning

hundreds and dissolving civil society organizations which played a role in the protests. However, secondly - and probably more importantly - division within the Hirak Movement, including a strong faction trying to turn it into an Islamist rebellion, led to the silent majority disconnecting from the movement and withdrawing from the street protests, resulting in a loss of momentum for the whole protest movement ([Middle East Institute, 22 February 2022](#)).

Algeria's indigenous Christian community had hoped that the Hirak Movement would not only bring about more political freedom, but also more religious freedom. However, given the regime's firm stance, it is unlikely that Ordinance 06-03, which regulates non-Muslim worship, will be replaced and that their hopes will materialize in the near future. Ordinance 06-03 was passed in March 2006 and severely limits non-Muslim worship. In 2011 the EPA (Algerian Protestant Church) obtained official recognition after many years of trying, but local churches were still required to obtain their own individual registration. Although hopes were high, the government has not registered any individual new churches since enforcing Ordinance 06-03. During 2013, the EPA then had to apply for official recognition again after a new NGO law was introduced. However, the government has still not responded to this application, leaving the EPA in legal limbo for a decade. Hence, many Christian citizens continue to meet in unofficial house churches, often using private homes or business properties. From the legal perspective, Ordinance 06-03 sets regulations for church buildings, so a meeting at a private home is forbidden and means risking up to three years in prison and a fine of 300,000 DA (3,000 Euros); as a result, there have been several court cases in the recent past. In the WWL 2024 reporting period, at least forty-three churches affiliated to the EPA remained closed, were additionally closed or ceased meeting because of the increasing pressure.

Additional reports

- The Economist Intelligence Unit ([EIU Democracy Index 2023](#)) classifies the country of Algeria again as 'authoritarian' (p.11), after being listed as a 'hybrid regime' for the last time in the 2019 index. With an overall score of 3.66 out of 10, decreasing from 4.01 in 2019.
- FFP's Fragile State Index ([FSI 2024 Algeria](#)) indicates that after initial improvement several indicators, including 'human rights' and 'group grievances' are worsening. The 'State legitimacy' indicator remained high.
- Freedom House's [Global Freedom Index 2024](#) rates Algeria as 'not free' and reports: "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 the 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."

Gender perspective

Algeria's legal system is discriminatory towards women and girls in several areas, particularly in relation to marriage. Whilst it ratified CEDAW in 1996, it maintained a reservation to Article 16, which provides for the elimination of discrimination against women as they enter or exit a marriage ([OCHRC, 2012](#)). Neither levirate marriages nor marital rape are outlawed, and Article 326 of the Penal code

permits exoneration by marriage for perpetrators who abduct girls. Whilst Algeria introduced a 2015 law on domestic violence, it contained loopholes that allowed convictions to be dropped and sentences to be reduced if victims pardon their perpetrators ([HRW 2024 Algeria country chapter](#)). Escaping abusive relationships is also challenging: Whilst a man can divorce his wife unilaterally, a woman must go through the courts; many fear doing so for fear they will end up homeless and cut off from their children. More positively, child marriage rates are relatively low compared to the regional average (an estimated 4% of girls in Algeria are married before they turn 18 (according to [Girls Not Brides Algeria](#), accessed 2 August 2024).

Men face [conscription](#) into the army from the age of 19, where they are bound to serve 12 months (World Population Review, 2023). In more recent years, national service recruits have served in administrative, civil and social projects in addition to military roles. On an individual level, Algerian Christians (from a Muslim background) face legal discrimination from the state in personal status issues. For example, female converts to Christianity cannot marry non-Muslim men, while marriages between Algerian Christians can only take place according to Islamic rites. In addition, converts are very likely to lose custody of their children in divorce cases, as well as their inheritance rights.

Religious landscape

Algeria: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	144,000	0.3
Muslim	45,370,553	98.0
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	7,504	0.0
Ethnic religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	57	0.0
Bahai	5,003	0.0
Atheist	8,405	0.0
Agnostic	727,426	1.6
Other	16,109	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024 (Adapted according to OD-estimate)

According to WCD 2024 data, an estimated 98.0% of Algerians are Muslim. Almost all are Sunni Muslims but there is a small community of Algerians who belong to the Ibadi sect of Islam. The presence of Shiite Islam is probably less than 0.02% of the population ([Shafaqna, 6 November 2021](#)).

The Constitution bans non-Muslims from holding high-level government positions. Non-Muslim and non-religious groups have to keep a low profile in order to avoid discrimination, intolerance and persecution. The [Freedom of Thought report \(23 February 2023\)](#) states that Algeria's Constitution and government use vague criteria like "goals deemed contrary to basic national values, to law and order and public morality" to oppose a range of NGOs, including refusal of registration.

Most of Algeria's Christians are converts from Islam to Christianity, the majority of whom are living in the Kabyle region in the north of Algeria. The Kabyle people are a Berber ethnic group and speak their own Berber language. Many of them try to differentiate themselves from the Arab majority and emphasize their own Berber identity. This has created an environment in which there is some leeway for Christians from a Muslim background to develop their own Christian identity, although family and societal pressure remain problematic.

Economic landscape

According to the [World Factbook Algeria](#) (accessed 2 August 2024) and [World Bank Algeria data](#) (accessed 2 August 2024):

- **GDP per capita (PPP):** \$11,200 (2022 est.)
- **Unemployment:** 12.5% (2022), with youth unemployment being more than twice as high at 31.9% (2021)
- **Percentage of population below national poverty line:** 5.5% (2011 est.)
However, other sources indicate percentages as high as 35% ([The Borgen Project, 20 August 2020](#)).

According to the [World Bank's Algeria Economic Update Spring 2024](#):

- **Economy:** "Algeria's growth was robust in 2023, and inflation started to decelerate. GDP growth accelerated to 4.1 percent, supported by hydrocarbon sector growth, as natural gas production compensated for successive crude oil production quota cuts."
- **Inflation:** "Inflation remained at 9.3 percent over 2023 but moderated to 5.0 percent year-on-year in the first quarter of 2024, amidst a sustained decline in fresh food prices, a strong dinar, and lower import prices."
- **Budget deficit:** "Falling hydrocarbon prices narrowed the current account surplus in 2023, while increasing the fiscal deficit and the public debt-to-GDP ratio. The fall of hydrocarbon and fertilizer export prices and large increase in import volumes resulted in a rapidly narrowing current account surplus, although reserves continued to increase ... Hydrocarbon revenues in the budget have nonetheless remained stable but given the sharp increase in the wage bill and capital expenditures, the overall budget deficit widened to 5.2% of GDP. The deficit was mainly financed outside the banking sector, with bond issuance declining, oil savings increasing to 8.2% of GDP, and public debt as a percentage of GDP increasing slightly to 49.2% of GDP."
- **Economic outlook:** "Growth is expected to slow in 2024 amidst subdued oil and agricultural output, before recovering in 2025. ... Amidst higher imports and public spending, lower hydrocarbon revenues would put renewed pressure on external and fiscal balances. ... The variability of hydrocarbon prices remains the main risk to macroeconomic balances, with projected financing needs highlighting the importance of a gradual fiscal rebalancing. ... Efforts to foster private sector investment and diversification should be strengthened."

The World Bank's [World Development Indicators \(Fiscal Year 2023\)](#) ranks Algeria in the "Upper middle income" category. With a Gross National Income per capita of 11.200 dollar PPP, Algerians enjoy better economic conditions than most other countries in Africa. However, youth unemployment is still a problem. The high energy prices caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine offered opportunities to recover from the economic damage caused by the COVID-19 crisis, since natural gas is a key export commodity. However, most of the hydrocarbon revenue is used for temporary economic relief, instead of long-term structural diversification of the economy. The [FSI 2024 Algeria](#) economic indicators show improvement on average, although the "Economy" indicator slightly worsened.

Gender perspective

Economic pressure restricts the freedom of Christians, especially converts from a Muslim background. They experience discrimination while looking for employment in both the private and public sectors. Women are more economically dependent within Algerian society due to a range of factors, including restricted employment opportunities. A [2021](#) study on women's employment in the Maghreb countries using panel data from 1991 to 2017 indicated that "socio-cultural factors and traditional role assigned to women as mothers and wives" are among the main contributors to the low female labor force participation rates (Mendil, D. and Boukrif - Djemah, N., 2021). The female labor force participation rate in Algeria was 16.4% in 2022, compared to 64% for men ([World Bank, Gender Data Portal 2023](#)). Furthermore, under Sharia rules of inheritance, daughters receive half the share received by sons.

Reports indicate that Christian men have experienced harassment within their workplace or have even lost their jobs when their faith has become known.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the [World Factbook Algeria](#) (accessed 2 August 2024):

- **Main ethnic groups:** The majority of the Algerian population (99%) are from Arab or Berber decent. Other ethnicities are mainly European
- **Main languages:** The official language is Arabic, with French being used as the lingua franca (rather than English). Several Berber languages are also being spoken, with Standard Algerian Berber or Tamazight being an official language as well. Dialects include Kabyle Berber (Taqbaylit), Shawiya Berber (Tacawit), Mzab Berber and Tuareg Berber (Tamahaq)
- **Urban population:** In 2023, 75.3% of the population lived in urban areas, while the annual urbanization rate stands at 2.0%
- **Fertility rate:** 2,94 children born per woman (2024 est.)
- **Literacy rate:** 81.4% of the population can read and write; with a significant difference between men (87.4%) and women (75.3%)
- **Population/youth:** The younger generation - up to 14 years of age - makes up 30% of the population, making it another African country with a young population in need of (economic) opportunities
- **IDPs/Refugees:** More than 100,000 Western Saharan Sahrawi are living in mostly Algerian-sponsored camps in the south-western Algerian town of Tindouf. Around 7350 Syrians have also sought refuge in Algeria.
- **Life expectancy:** 78.3 years on average; women (79.8 years), men (76.8 years).

According to the [UNDP's Human Development Report Algeria](#) (data updates as of 13 March 2024) and the [World Bank](#): Human Capital Project - October 2020:

- **HDI score and ranking:** Algeria ranks #98 out of 204 countries in the Human Development Index (HDI). Despite the ongoing difficulties, the combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a high score of 0.74. Algeria scores highest among the countries on the African continent and scores better than its neighboring countries
- **Gender inequality:** With a Gender Development Index (GDI) score of 0.880, women are still clearly disadvantaged in comparison to men. The GDI measures the differences in life expectancy, years of education and GNI per capita per gender. The mean years of schooling is 7.7 for women, compared to 8.4 for men.
- **Education:** Algerians enjoy 11.5 years of expected schooling on average (12.2 for girls, 11.5 for boys).

Historically, Algeria is an ethnic mix of peoples of both Arab and Berber descent, with the dominant ethnic identity in the country being Arabic. Ethnicity and language is a sensitive issue after many years of government marginalization of Berber culture. For example, the housing problem is most serious in the Berber-dominated Kabyle region since the government would seem to be deliberately refusing to invest in housing projects there. Other regions are being helped with housing projects, set up and financed by the government. This discrimination affects Christians, since many are of Berber origin. The ethnic tension thus affects the religious situation and contributes to religious freedom violations against Christians in the Kabyle region.

Most Algerians are socially conservative and there is a strong and growing Salafist current in the country at the grassroots level, although this (for various reasons) does not translate into support for Islamist political parties ([Carnegie, 3 May 2019](#)). Despite the conservative Islamic context, Algeria has one of the biggest communities of converts from Islam to Christianity in the wider Middle East. As already indicated, most of these converts belong to the already marginalized Berber community in the Kabyle region. In-country sources show that converts outside the Kabyle region experience higher levels of pressure from society and family.

Gender perspective

In light of Algeria's Islamic norms, both male and female converts face significant pressure from their family and community if their faith is discovered. Men are more likely to be driven out of their homes, whereas women are more likely to be trapped behind closed doors. Various media reports have highlighted a rise in femicides and domestic violence in Algeria, exacerbated in part by COVID-19 lockdowns ([Human Rights Report, 2021](#), p.36; [Middle East Institute, 8 February 2021](#)). Victims are hesitant to come forward due to social stigma, economic dependence and a lack of legislative justice.

Technological landscape

According to DataReportal [Digital 2024: Algeria](#) (23 February 2024) / survey date - January 2024:

- **Internet usage:** 72.9% penetration
- **Social media usage:** 54.1% of the total population
- **Active cellular mobile connections:** 110.2% of the total population

According to Georgetown, in 2023 91% of women used a mobile phone ([GIWPS Algeria](#), accessed 2 August 2024). Data reveals that more men than women access social media sites such as [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) (Napoleon Cat, July 2024). This suggests that women in Algeria may have less access to digital Christian resources or online Christian communities than men.

According to [World Press Freedom 2024 Algeria](#):

- **Rank:** Algeria ranked 139th out of 180 countries, decreasing from #136 in 2023.
- **Government control:** "The media landscape in Algeria has never been so deteriorated. The independent media are under pressure, journalists are often jailed and prosecuted, and several websites are blocked. ... Reporters critical of the authorities may face arbitrary detention, surveillance, and wiretapping. Outspoken journalists or those who support the "Hirak" protest movement launched in February 2019 may be subjected to social media threats and hate campaigns waged from anonymous accounts by pro-government trolls known in Arabic as "doubab" (electronic flies)."
- **New media law:** "A media law adopted in 2023 introduced new restrictions and sanctions, and banned Algerian media outlets from benefitting from any direct and indirect foreign funding or material assistance under penalty of heavy fines."

State repression of the few independent media reached a new low with the sentencing of high-profile Algerian journalist Ihsane El Kadi to three years imprisonment. His media outlets were dissolved and he received a hefty fine on top of the prison sentence ([Al-Jazeera, 2 April 2023](#)). He was accused of receiving money from abroad to finance his work.

Christians are not free to exercise their Freedom of Religion and Belief online. Although some Algerian Christian broadcasts are still accessible on social media (see for example: [YouTube, accessed 19 July 2024](#)), Algeria's largest Protestant church, the Full Gospel Church in Tizi Ouzou, was officially closed by the Algerian government in October 2019. On an individual level, writing an online post about one's Christian faith can lead to serious difficulties, especially from a convert's (extended) family.

Security situation

The Algerian police and armed forces are well organized and are specialized in fighting Islamic militancy which is necessary due to the country's location bordering Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Libya. However, it is a great challenge to control all borders since they stretch into the Sahara desert and Sahel region. Thus it remains possible for radical Islamic groups, including al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), to conduct border crossings to find shelter and establish storage locations in Algeria ([Live Universal Awareness Map, July 2023](#)) and avoid being captured by international anti-terrorist operations such as US-led operation against terrorism in Niger and the wider region, known as Operation Juniper Shield ([Code Book Africa, accessed 26 December 2023](#)).

Apart from the threat from Islamic militants, there is ongoing rivalry with Morocco over regional influence. Algeria hosts more than 100,000 refugees belonging to the Sahrawi people; they are originally from Western Sahara, which is mostly under Moroccan control at present. In addition, Morocco is trying to gain influence among the Sahara population, including the Tuareg, while Algeria views the Sahara as its region of influence. Tensions between the countries intensified following Morocco's normalization of ties with Israel in exchange for the USA's recognition of Morocco's claims

regarding Western Sahara. Further, the expulsion of a number of each other's citizens in the 1970's is still unresolved ([Algeria - Morocco relations, 2018, p.11](#)). In August 2021, the situation further escalated following several diplomatic incidents and Algeria severed all ties with Morocco ([Al-Monitor, 25 August 2021](#)). Consequences remain at the moment limited due to a closure of Algerian airspace for Moroccan planes and the discontinuation of the Maghreb-Europe Gas Pipeline, which transferred Algerian gas to Morocco ([Carnegie, 3 May 2022](#)) It is unlikely that the tensions will lead to military conflict, but the frustration, especially on Algeria's side, runs so deep that - unlike all other countries in the wider region - the Algerian government refused to officially congratulate Morocco on its success in the World Cup in Qatar in 2022 ([Reuters, 11 December 2022](#)). However, in December 2023, Algeria's foreign minister stated that the country could be “considered as [being] more inclined towards seeking [a] quick resolution” ([Morocco World News, 25 December 2023](#)).

Another issue regarding the security situation in Algeria is the organized-crime scene. There are several illegal traffic routes operational in Algeria, connecting its Mediterranean coast with hubs in the Sahara and Sahel. This facilitates all kinds of global trade (especially illegal trade). These trade routes are used by human traffickers transporting refugees seeking asylum in Europe or beyond as well as by smugglers bringing drugs, mainly cannabis from Morocco, to Europe. In addition, the illegal arms trade is especially a problem in the border regions with both Libya and Niger ([Organized Crime Index, accessed 2 August 2024](#)).

Christian origins

Christianity came to Algeria in the 2nd century. The church grew rapidly and many Romans and Imazighen ('Berbers') became Christians, in spite of periods of severe persecution. Church Father Augustine was born in what is today Algeria, and exerted great influence over the Church in his own time and even today.

The strong Christian presence slowly gave way to Islam after the Arab invasion (670-711 AD), but there are reports that the Christian faith persisted in the region for several centuries after the completion of the Arab conquest. A Christian community is, for instance, recorded in 1114 in Qal'a in central Algeria.

Most of the time between 1509 and 1792, Spain ruled over Oran and some coastal areas of Algeria; this allowed Christians to be active there. France conquered Algeria in 1830 and made it a province of France in 1848. This led to a renewed Christian influence in Algeria, as 100,000s of French citizens settled in the country. Roman Catholic missionaries - and to a lesser extent Protestants - established churches, mostly for expatriates from France but also from Great Britain and elsewhere. All this was reversed when the colonists were forced to leave after the War of Independence (1962).

For many years, missionary activity among the Muslim population had been largely unfruitful. But in the 1980s, a movement began which was mostly driven by indigenous leaders and resulted in many conversions to Christianity. Today there is a growing Protestant community, especially among the Kabyle Imazighen. This community is organized under the umbrella of the Association of the Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA). After a temporary period of relative freedom, the authorities are currently making it increasingly difficult for these congregations to meet and have now forced many churches to cease all church activities.

Since the 1990s, Sub-Saharan African migrants have also started their own churches, which some local Algerians have joined as well.

Church spectrum today

Algeria: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox		0.8
Catholic		4.7
Protestant		6.7
Independent		87.7
Unaffiliated		0.1
Doubly-affiliated Christians		0.0
Total		99.9
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement		41.9
Pentecostal-Charismatic		30.5

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024 (adapted according to OD-estimate)

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Pentecostal-Charismatic:** Church members involved in renewal in the Holy Spirit, sometimes known collectively as "Renewalists".

The Protestant Church in Algeria (EPA) consists of 47 member churches. Most EPA churches, as well as some independent churches, have been closed now or ceased all activity, including the two biggest churches in Tizi Ouzou and Makouda. Previously, all churches, were closed due to the COVID-19 crisis and did not receive official permission to re-open after COVID-19.

The Roman Catholic Church has four dioceses in the country (in Algiers, Oran, Constantine and Hippone and Laghouat-Ghardaïa).

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

These are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Algeria>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.

External Links

- Recent history: BBC News, 21 February 2020 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-51588420>
- Recent history: World Politics Review, August 2020 - <http://worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/29028/in-algeria-protests-pause-for-covid-19-as-the-regime-steps-up-repression>
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