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Algeria

Last update:	10 June 2017
Population:	39,666,519 million (World Bank 2015 est.)
Prime minister:	Abdelmalek Sellal
President:	Abdelaziz Bouteflika
Governemental type:	Republic
Ruling coalition:	National Liberation Front (FLN), National Rally for Democracy (RND)
Last election:	17 April 2014 (presidential elections)
Next election:	4 May 2017 (parliamentary elections)
Sister parties:	None

The People's Democratic Republic of Algeria is an Islamic, Arab and Amazigh (Berber) country. After a long history of colonisation by France, the Algerian people were dissatisfied with the way the French treated them on their own land. After the independence (1962), a violent civil war emerged, which was the result of an undemocratic interference of the military. In the civil war there were many casualties, but current President Bouteflika gave an amnesty to the guerrilla fighters. The violence has declined from that point on and Algeria can now start to work on a constructive way to democratisation.

In the beginning of 2011, widespread protests broke out over the sudden increase in staple food prices. The government lowered the food prices, but the Arab spring in neighbouring countries inspired labour unions, opposition parties and religious groups to organise large-scale protests across the entire country. In late February, Bouteflika's government lifted the 19-year state of emergency in response to the protests. As a response to the unrest the authorities promised to make the 2012 parliamentary elections a next step on the road towards real democracy. But while officials billed the elections as 'an Algerian spring' they were mainly marked by a low turnout.

Political Situation

The president

The head of the executive branch of Algeria is an elected president for a term of five years. Candidates can be nominated in two ways; either by 600 elected officials or by a popular petition of at least 75.000 registered voters. The prime minister, who is appointed by the president, appoints the members of the cabinet.

On 11 September 1998, President Zeroual announced he would stand down and early presidential elections would be called. He did this to facilitate a transfer back to normal elections for the office, for he was once appointed in 1992 as President to achieve this goal. On 15 April 1999 the elections were held. After the withdrawal of six candidates, only Abdelaziz Bouteflika (National Rally for Democracy, RND) remained. The other candidates withdrew because they were afraid of massive fraud in favour of Bouteflika. Early in April they demanded that results from mobile and other special polling stations should not be counted, as they suspected government departments of swelling their number to make rigging easier. At the end Bouteflika won the elections with 73.79 percent.

The parliament

The People's Democratic Republic of Algeria has a bicameral parliament, which consists of the National People's Assembly and the National Council.

The National People's Assembly

The National People's Assembly (the lower house) consists of 462 members who are elected with the universal, direct suffrage according to the proportional representation system. Eight of these seats are reserved for Algerians living abroad. The term of legislature is five years. The members of the National People's Assembly are directly elected in 48 multi-member constituencies - corresponding to country's wilayas (administrative districts) - with seats allotted according to the population: one seat for every 80,000 inhabitants and one supplementary seat for every fraction of 40,000. No wilaya has less than four seats. Voting is not

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compulsory. Either the president or one of the parliamentary chambers may initiate legislation.

In December 1991 the first free multiparty general elections for the former National People’s Assembly were held. After the first round it was very clear that the fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was going for a victory. The army then cancelled the elections and suspended the constitution. This escalated and was followed by widespread disturbances and numerous arrests of prominent Islamists.

After the escalations had cooled down an advisory body on legislation, the National Consultative Council, was set up in April 1992. It functioned until the National Transitional Council was inaugurated in May 1994 for a three-year transitional period. In March 1997 a new electoral law was adopted and a new date for elections was announced in June 1997. The elections were in a context of mounting violence by armed groups, as well as human rights violations. FIS called for a boycott after being barred from running. The elections took place in the presence of 200 international observers; the turnout was officially 65.6 percent. The National Rally for Democracy (RND), who did not even exist three months earlier, had won 156 out of 380 seats. The MSP-Hamas won 69 seats, the National Liberation Front (FLN) won 64 and the Islamist Party 34. Women represented 3.4 percent of the total number of members of the Assembly. UN observers noted that some voting conditions could not fully guarantee neutrality in the voting process.

The National Council

The National Council (the upper house) was first instituted in 1996 and consists of 144 seats. Wilaya assemblies indirectly elect 96 members of the National Council and 48 are appointed by the president. The term of legislature is six years, of which half of the members are being re-elected or reappointed every three years.

At this moment the elected seats of the National Council mainly go to the RND (about 83.3 percent), FLN (10.4 percent), FFS (Front of Socialist Forces 4.1 percent) and Hamas/HMS/MSP (Movement for a Peaceful Society 2.1 percent). The last election of the National Council took place in December 2003.

The president of the National Council is Adbelkader Bensalah. Women represent 5.5 percent of the total members of the Council. The National Council is a legislative branch and must approve any law approved by the National Assembly with a three-quarters majority.

Parliamentary Elections

On the 4th of May 2017 parliamentary elections for Algeria’s 462-seat National Assembly took place. The National Liberation Front (FNL), party of current President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, won 164 seats, a loss of 44 seats compared to the previous elections. It’s government coalition partner, the National Democratic Rally (RDN), won 97 seats, 29 more than in the previous election. The current coalition will thus retains its majority.

The opposition remains very fragmented with 26 parties getting 10 or less seats. Among the Islamist parties the Islamist alliance Movement for the Society of Peace (MSP) was the biggest party, winning 33 seats. The Rally for Hope in Algeria (TAJ), which participated for the first time, was the second biggest Islamist party with 19 seats. The Islamist parties won 67 seats combined, 7 more than in the previous elections. The secular and social democratic parties Front of Socialist Forces (FFS) and Algerian Popular Movement (MPA) won 14 and 13 seats respectively. Of the 462 MP’s elected, 120 are women.

Election Results

Party	Seats in Parliament
National Liberation Front (FLN)	164
National Rally for Democracy	97
Alliance HMS	33
Independent candidates	28
Tajamoua Amel El Djazair (TAJ)	19
"Nahda - Adala - Bina" (N A B)	15

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Front El Moustakbal (FM)	14
Front of Socialist Forces (FFS)	14
Algerian Popular Movement (MPA)	13
Workers Party (PT)	11
Others	54
Total	462

Turnout was very low in the North-African country, with only 38 percent of the more than 23 million registered voters casting their vote. In the 2012 turnout was low as well, but slightly higher with 43 percent. Many Algerians distrust the political system which they view as corrupt; the National Assembly is granted only limited powers, while the president holds ultimate power. After accusations emerged in February that candidates payed to have their names added to party lists Algerians became even more sceptical about the fairness of the elections. Furthermore many young Algerians didn't vote because of the lack of change and reforms implemented and the high youth unemployment rate.

Allegations of fraud

Dozens of allegations of fraud, and a few hundred irregularities have been reported, despite an independent electoral commission and the presence of nearly 300 observers. Abderrazak Makri, leader of the MSP, also outed allegations of fraud saying his party would have been the biggest party if there hadn't been any fraud. Elections observers have not yet commented on the accusations of fraud. Interior Minister Noureddine Bedoui said the elections were a success.

Presidential Elections

The most recent presidential elections took place in April 2014. Incumbent President Abdelaziz Bouteflika ran and won for a fourth term. He gained over 81 percent of the votes, despite a declining health that prevented him from actively campaigning. Other candidates running in this election were Ali Benfils for the Independents, Louisa Hanoune of the Workers' Party (PT), Moussa Touati of the Algerian National Front (FNA), Abdelaziz Belaid for the Front for the Future Party, and Ali Fawzi Rebaine for Ahd 54.

Algeria's main opposition leaders said before the election that it was a "done deal" set up in Bouteflika's favour.

Election results

Candidates	Votes	%
Abdelaziz Bouteflika (National Liberation Front)	8,332,598	81.53 %
Ali Benfils (Independent)	1,244,918	12,18 %
Abdelaziz Belaid (Front for the Future)	343,624	3,36 %
Louisa Hanoune (Workers' Party)	140,253	1.37 %
Ali Fawzi Rebaine (Ahd 54)	101,046	0.99 %
Moussa Touati (Algerian National Front)	57,590	0.56 %
<i>Invalid votes</i>	<i>1,087,449</i>	-
Total	21,871,393	-

The results of the presidential election of 2012 were clearly in favour of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who gained more than 80 percent of votes. Nevertheless, authorities put the turnout at just above 51 percent, which is quite low. There were a few incidents, especially in the Berber area of Kabylie. Bouteflika called the election an "eloquent lesson in democracy" shortly after results were announced. He thanked Algerians for the confidence they granted him. At the same time, his main opponent Ali Benfils condemned the election as a "fraud on a massive scale".

The proportion of Algerians who went voting was much smaller this time than in 2009, when around 75 percent of went voting.

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Many voices rose to denounce the lack of change within Algerian politics and the need for new political figures to step in. Despite all that, some voters underlined that their priority was on stability and peace and the Bouteflika choice thus made sense. Indeed, his first mandates led to a reduction in the civil war conflicts as well as a restoration of economic stability.

Allegations of fraud

Observers and Bouteflika's five low-profile challengers criticized Bouteflika's victory, according to them there was a lot of fraud. The Interior Minister, however, did not notice any precise and concrete cases which would indicate large scale fraud. People protesting against the results after they were announced, blocked roads with burning tires and clashed with police in the Kabylie province east of Algiers. The opposition Front of Socialist Forces accused the authorities of artificially inflating the turnout. "There was a real tsunami of massive fraud which reached an industrial scale", the party said in a statement. The RCD, which called for a boycott of the election, said youth tried to storm its Algiers headquarters after the announcement of the results. A party statement said clashes occurred when Bouteflika supporters tried to pull out the black flag the party was waving above its offices in sign of mourning for Algeria's faltering democracy. Said Sadi also said he would take Algerian PM Ahmed Ouyahia to court for defamation. During the election campaign Ouyahia had publicly denounced those calling for an election boycott as traitors to the nation. The opposition leader also accused Bouteflika of violating the country's law by appropriating the struggle against the colonial French for himself, saying Bouteflika abused the nation's symbols of heritage. Sadi accused the Algerian president of using liberation war heroes for his campaign posters even though Algerian electoral law prohibits it. He was not very optimistic about his chances of success in an Algerian court, but insisted his legal action did have a more symbolic importance.

The election results matter to the outside world because Algeria, an OPEC member, has the world's 15th largest oil reserves and accounts for 20 percent of the EU's gas imports. Turmoil in Algeria could also lead to a wave of illegal migrants to Europe. Some sections of the population feel disconnected from the political process and analysts say that helps feed Algeria's low-level Islamist insurgency, now affiliated to al-Qaeda.

Left-wing Parties

Front of Socialist Forces (FFS)

Party Leader: Abdelmalek Bouchafa

Number of seats: 27

The Front of Socialist Forces (FFS) is a Berber-based social democratic and secularist political party in Algeria and is a full member of the Socialist International. It was founded in 1963 by Hocine Ait Ahmed and was banned until 1990, because no other parties were allowed to participate in the parliamentary elections. In the elections in December 1991, the FFS became the third most important political party while participating for the first time in parliamentary elections.

The FFS has always been a strong opponent of the army controlling the (setting up of the) institutions and has always called for the re-establishment of the democratic process. The FFS favours the dialogue with the moderate wing of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), despite its deeply secular basis. The FFS has condemned violence as a means of political action, called for real negotiations with the governing power and re-establishing the FIS. In 2002 the party boycotted the parliamentary elections out of protest for the rights of the Berber population. In the latest elections in 2012 the FFS became the fourth party, after the two governing parties and the Islamist Green Alliance, winning 27 out of the 462 seats.

The National Liberation Front (FLN)

Party Leader: Djamel Ould Abbas

Number of seats: 208

<http://www.pfln.dz/>

The National Liberation Front (FLN) is the party of President Bouteflika and a consultative member of Socialist International. It was set up in 1954 as a merger of other smaller groups as a socialist party, to obtain independence for Algeria from France. During the

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1980s the FLN toned down the socialist content of its program. In the 2002 parliamentary elections the FLN received 34.3 percent of the votes, gaining the most seats in parliament (199). It then created a governing coalition together with the National Rally for Democracy and the Movement of Society for Peace.

The former secretary-general of the FLN, Ali Benflis, was a candidate for the presidential elections. He received only 6.4 percent of the votes. After the elections Abdelaziz Belkhadem took control of the party. After the 2007 elections the party formed the ruling presidential alliance, together with the National Rally for Democracy and the Movement of Society for Peace, but the latter stepped out of the alliance in the wake of the 2012 elections. In the 2012 parliamentary elections the party took the majority of the votes winning 208 seats in the parliament. In October 2016, secretary general of the party, Amar Saidani, stepped down. He was succeeded by Djamel Ould Abbas, former minister of health.

Other Parties

National Rally for Democracy (RND)

Party Leader: Ahmed Ouyahia

Number of seats: 68

<http://www.rnd-dz.org/>

The National Rally for Democracy is commonly seen as the sister party of the FLN. The leader of the party is the former Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia. They are loyal to the current President of Algeria, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, and considered to have close relations with the politically powerful Algerian military. In the 2012 parliamentary elections the party gained 68 out of 462 seats.

Parties of the Green Algeria Alliance (AAV)

Party Leader: Bouguerra Soltani

Number of seats: 49

This Islamist alliance is made up of the Movement of Society for Peace (HMS), the Islamic Renaissance Movement (Nahda) and the Movement for National Reform (Islah). The alliance is led by Bouguerra Soltani and was established in 2012. The alliance has 49 seats in parliament.

Workers' Party (PT)

Party Leader: Louisa Hanoune

Number of seats: 24

<http://pt.dz/>

The Worker's Party is a Trotskyist political party that has close relations with the Worker's Party in France. In 2004 the party's chair, Louisa Hanoune, was the first woman in Algeria to run for the presidential elections, receiving 1 percent of the vote. In the 2012 elections the party gained 24 seats in parliament.

Algerian National Front (FNA)

Party Leader: Moussa Touati

Number of seats: 9

<http://www.fnadz.org/>

The Algerian National Front was founded in 1954 and is a right wing conservative party. During the elections in 2012 the party won 9 seats in parliament.

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Movement for National Reform

Party Leader: Abdallah Djaballah
Number of seats: 0

The Movement for National reform was founded in 1999 as a split-off faction of the Islamic Renaissance Movement. In its first elections in 2002, it received almost ten percent of the vote. However, in the next elections it only managed to gain two percent of the vote. In the 2012 elections the party participated as part of the Green Algeria Alliance.

Movement of Society for Peace (MSP)

Party Leader: Abderrazak Makri
Number of seats: 0

The Movement of Society for Peace (MSP) is an Islamist party that used to be part of the ruling coalition together with the FLN and RND. This party has close relations with the international Muslim Brotherhood. Furthermore, it favours the Civil Harmony Act, an amnesty for guerrillas who lay down their arms, while the party simultaneously condemns violence and the violent actions of radical groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. It participated in the 2012 elections as part of the Green Algeria Alliance.

Islamic Renaissance Movement (MRI)

Party Leader: Fatah Rabei
Number of seats:

The Islamic Renaissance Movement was founded in 1990 as an Islamist center-right party, which claims the ideology of the Islamic Brotherhood movement in Egypt. In the 2012 elections the party participated as part of the Green Algeria Alliance.

Biographies

Abdelaziz Bouteflika

President

Born on 2 March 1937 in Morocco, Abdelaziz Bouteflika started his political career in the 1960s after Algeria gained independence. He started as Minister for Youth and Sport, but quickly gained the position of Minister for Foreign Affairs, a position in which he stayed until the death of former President Houari Boumediene in 1978. In this last position Bouteflika was convicted of having fraudulently taken 60 million dinar, but while his colleagues were jailed Bouteflika was granted amnesty after having returned just over 12 million.

After six years abroad, the army brought him back to the Central Committee of the FLN in 1989, after the country had entered a period of unrest and power-struggles and disorganized attempts for reform. After the civil war that lasted throughout most of the 1990s between the army and fractions of the Islamists, Bouteflika ran for president as an independent candidate in 1999, supported by the military.

In his first term as President, Bouteflika mainly focussed on restoring the economy by boosting agricultural production and fiscal reform. Bouteflika was also active in the international scene, after the country had been isolated for over a decade. In 2004 he was re-elected in an election which was accepted by the OSCE as mostly free and fair. In his second presidential term he mainly focussed on reconciliation with Islamist forces and giving rights to the Berber community. Even though he was diagnosed with cancer, he ran for a third term in 2009. After having been elected with over 90 percent of the votes he again promised to focus on the economy and corruption.

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He was re-elected for a fourth mandate in 2014, with about 81 percent of the votes.

Abdelmalek Sellal

Prime Minister

Abdelmalek Sellal entered office in 2013 and was reelected in 2014 after an extensive political career. He has been closely involved in the presidential elections of 2004 and 2009 that had brought Bouteflika to power. Before he was appointed as prime minister, he held various ministerial posts, including transport and water resources. Abdelmalek does not belong to any particular political party and is widely regarded as a technocrat. Sellal is seen as a modernizer and closely related to the military. In 1999 Sellal became the minister of interior, then the minister of youth and sports, followed by minister of transport and finally minister of water resources, before being nominated as prime minister. In 2004 and 2009 Sellal was responsible for Bouteflika's presidential election campaign.

Hocine Aït-Ahmed

Historical leader of the Front of Socialist Forces

Hocine Aït-Ahmed, born in 1926 as a member of the Berber community in Algeria, was one of the front leaders during the war of independence as the leader of the National Liberation Front. However, he spent most of the time in prison. In 1963 he formed the Front of Socialist Forces, in a time during which he led the Berbers in a revolt against the authorities. He was captured but escaped from prison in 1966 and fled to exile in France and later in Switzerland. After the destabilizing October 1988 riots, he returned to Algeria in December 1989. The FFS was legalized as an opposition party. He actively campaigned in the national parliamentary elections in December 1991 to January 1992 and organized a huge rally in Algiers in support of democracy.

Although he never supported the Islamic Salvation Front, he actively opposed the cancellation of the elections in 1992 by the military, which later turned into a civil war. In 1999 he ran for president, but later denounced his candidacy in protest of irregularities and alleged fraud. Ait Ahmed was a strong advocate of democracy, political pluralism, and human (especially Berber) rights.

Aït Ahmed died at the age of 89 in Lausanne, Switzerland on 23 December 2015.

Source

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