

Algeria Country Profile

Algeria, officially known as the “People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria,” is over ninety percent Berber. Yet it has been almost constantly colonized, conquered in turn by the Romans (first – fourth centuries), Arabs (eighth – eleventh centuries), Ottoman Empire (sixteenth – nineteenth centuries) and finally by the French (1830 – 1962.) The French actually made Algeria part of metropolitan France and many French citizens settled there. The Algerian War of Independence (1954 – 1962) was exceptionally bloody. Between 350,000 and one million Algerians died during the war and two million more were forcibly displaced. Following their victory, The Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) pushed for expulsion of the French, and regeneration of indigenous languages, especially Arabic and Berber. Ahmed Ben Bella was elected President in 1963, but was toppled in a military coup in 1965 and the military has ruled Algeria to the present.

Although Algeria has remained secular, Islamists increasingly demanded that national laws be based on Islam. The country faced civil war for ten years between December 1991 and February 2002. The war was ignited when the Islamic Salvation Front party gained popularity in 1991 and won the first round of multiparty elections. The National Liberation Front refused to hold the second round of elections and the country’s military kept control of the government.

Islamist guerrillas began an armed campaign against the government. The guerrillas were composed of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and the Islamic Armed Movement (MIA). The guerrillas initially attacked the Algerian army but eventually the GIA also attacked and committed atrocities against civilians. The anti-government movement began to ideologically split over these massacres. This division led to war between the two Islamist armed movements. This weakened their ability to oppose the government and led to negotiations between militants and the government that quelled the fighting. Only a small splinter group of the GIA rejected amnesty. Conflict is now minimal but there is still fighting between a few holdouts of the GIA and the Algerian government.

Hassan Hattab, a former regional commander of the GIA founded Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb after splitting off from the GIA. It has been involved in terrorist attacks all over north Africa, including Mali.

The Algerian government continues to violate the human rights of its citizens. A state of emergency was imposed in 1992 that severely restricted freedom of expression and association, ostensibly to combat “terrorism” during the civil war. Journalists and independent publications were arrested and prosecuted for criticism of the government. The state of emergency was lifted in February 2011 due to widespread protests during the “Arab Spring.” Since the lifting of this state of emergency, human rights organizations are hopeful that the human rights situation in Algeria will improve.

Algeria has seen a decrease in the risk of Genocide or Politicide in the last five years. With the lowered prevalence of Islamist extremist groups, fighting has decreased significantly. The twenty year state of emergency ended in 2011 and shows that steps are being made to improve human rights. Algeria has tried terrorists and pledged commitments to human rights in 2012.

Genocide Stage Assessment: Stage 4