

Polity IV Country Report 2010: Algeria

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2009</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2010</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>2</td> <td>2</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>3</td> <td>3</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>6</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2009	2010	Change	Polity:	2	2	0	Democ:	3	3	0	Autoc:	1	1	0	Durable:		6		Tentative:		No		
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SCODE	ALG	CCODE	615	Date of Report	1 June 2011																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
2	0	0	5	3	3																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date			Begin Date																						
8 April 2004			9 April 2004																						
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution	1996																								
Executive(s)	President Abdelaziz Bouteflika (RND); first directly elected April 1999; reelected 8 April 2004, 85%; reelected 9 April 2009, 90%																								
Legislature	Bicameral: National People's Assembly (389 seats; proportionally elected, 8 seats reserved for Algerians living abroad; most recent elections, 17 May 2007) Front for National Liberation (FLN): 136 National Rally for Democracy (RND): 61 Movement of the Society for Peace (MSP): 52 Workers' Party (PT): 26 Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD): 19 Algerian National Front (FNA): 13 Other parties: 49 Non-partisans: 33 National Council (144 seats; 96 elected by communal councils, 48 selected by the President)																								
Judiciary	Supreme Court																								

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Gradual Transition from Self-Selection (5)

The short-lived liberalization of the Algerian political system initiated in the late 1980s came to a sudden halt in 1992 when the military cancelled the second round of legislative elections when it became apparent that the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was poised to win. Despite the fact that presidential elections were held in 1995 and 1999, executive recruitment did not meet the threshold of a procedural democracy. While elections were held, the military and the bureaucracy orchestrated these events to such an extent that citizens had no real ability to change their government. In April 1999, for example, six of Algeria's seven presidential candidates withdrew from the electoral process, citing fraud by the government in favor of the military-backed candidate, Abdelaziz Bouteflika of the National Liberation Front (FLN).

The presidential elections of 8 April 2004, however, marked a significant, albeit incomplete, shift toward democratic executive recruitment in Algeria. In a competitive and spirited campaign that included six candidates representing widely divergent political agendas, the military remained uncharacteristically neutral, even suggesting at one point that they would support the victory of an Islamist candidate so long as they pledged to uphold the constitution. While President Bouteflika was clearly the beneficiary of a 12-year state of emergency, the continued state dominance of the country's media outlets and the disqualification of several political challengers, nevertheless, the April 8 poll was widely seen as the cleanest in Algerian history and the most competitive in the Arab world. President Bouteflika was re-elected in a landslide victory with 83% of the vote.

International election monitors deemed the election to be both transparent and fair, citing little credible evidence of significant electoral fraud. In contrast to the 1999 campaign, electoral monitors judged the 2004 election to be transparent enough to exclude the possibility of rigging on a scale wide enough to put President Bouteflika's victory in doubt. A massively popular politician, President Bouteflika, who is widely credited with restoring political stability to Algeria, soundly defeated former Prime Minister Benfelis, who garnered 8% of the vote, and an Islamist candidate, Abdallah Djaballah, who came in third with 5% of the electoral tally. In November 2008, the National Assembly voted to revise the constitution to allow Bouteflika to seek a third term in office. President Bouteflika garnered over ninety percent of the vote in the 9 April 2009 presidential election; the election was boycotted by several opposition groups.

Despite the largely fair election, however, the military continues to hold nearly hegemonic power within the Algerian political system. While President Bouteflika has grown increasingly autonomous in recent years, nevertheless, the military maintains significant control over the broad structures of governance.

Executive Constraints: Substantial Limitation (5)

The military and the FLN/RND-controlled bureaucracy have dominated the political arena in Algeria in the post-independence era. The political order in Algeria, for the most part, has reflected the will of these two groups rather than the will of the people. In this sense, the chief executives of Algeria have faced no real limits on their power except for the constraints provided by these two un-elected groups. The legislative and judicial branches of government have traditionally been subordinate to the chief executive while key issues of security and economic policy have been decided by a secretive group of senior army and intelligence officers whom Algerians call "les decideurs," or the decision-makers.

While President Bouteflika was the chosen candidate of the military establishment in 1999, his election signaled a general weakening of direct military control over the political process. The election of Bouteflika, widely viewed as Algeria's "most sincere politician," reflected a compromise on the part of the military. Instead of being a compliant subordinate of *les decideurs*, Bouteflika has shown himself to be an independent voice for social reform and political compromise. In 1994, for example, Bouteflika refused the job of president because the army would not allow him to negotiate with the FIS to resolve the conflict between Islamists and secularists that had erupted in 1992. Moreover, since taking office, Bouteflika has actively sought to negotiate an end to this conflict despite fierce resistance by hardliners in both the military and the bureaucracy. Despite the increasing autonomy of President Bouteflika from the country's

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

traditional power-brokers, it is still too early to tell if this is a permanent or just temporary liberalization of the political process.

Political Participation: Factional/Restricted Competition (6)

While more than thirty parties operate actively in Algeria, the populist, Islamist-based FIS continues to be banned. The 1999 and 2004 presidential elections have reflected a gradually increasing openness of the political process in Algeria. While most opposition groups eventually boycotted the 1999 polls, alleging widespread fraud, the 2004 election was relatively clean and transparent. However, despite these encouraging signs, the ability of opposition parties to effectively challenge the military-backed social order remains highly circumscribed and the government's human rights record remains poor. Contributing to the poor human rights record of the current regime is the persistent conflict with radical Islamic groups throughout the country and the simmering political tensions between the government and the Berber community in the Kabylie region.

Thus, despite the increasing openness of the electoral process, Algerian politics remain highly factional in nature. In addition to factional struggles within the military and between the military and civilian challengers, Algerian society continues to be torn apart by intense political rivalries between secularists and Islamists and between Algerian nationalists and the Berber community. Moreover, in recent years factional divisions have also become visible within the ruling elite. In May 2003 President Bouteflika dismissed his prime minister, Ali Benflis (who was secretary general of the FLN). As a result, the ruling coalition split into two rival factions. While the Benflis faction has sought to push economic and political reform – including concessions to the Islamists and Berbers – the Bouteflika faction has been more cautious, fearing that any significant concessions would incite a military rebellion.

While conflict between Islamic fundamentalists and the secular government continues to threaten the stability of this country, President Bouteflika has actively sought to negotiate an end to this violence which has claimed over 150,000 lives since 1992. In 1999 voters approved President Bouteflika's plan to negotiate a peace settlement with the armed wing of the FIS, the Islamic Salvation Army, and accepted his decision to offer a general amnesty to all Islamic guerrillas who would lay down their guns. Two groups, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (a splinter group of the GIA that objected to its strategy of targeting civilians) rejected this offer and continued to wage war against the central government of Algeria. Despite both groups having been significantly weakened by defections in recent years, ethno-religious political killings continue to be common in Algeria.

According to government reports, over 7,500 Islamist militants have downed their weapons since a 2005 peace accord was signed between President Bouteflika and the Islamic Salvation Army, while nearly 1,300 have been killed by security forces. Among the 7,500 militants who have surrendered were 81 "emirs" or leaders, including founding member of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, Hassan Hattab, who turned himself in to authorities in 2007. Hattab had been pushed out of the group when it joined Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network in 2006 and renamed itself al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb killed scores of people in 2007 and 2008 in suicide attacks along Algeria's Mediterranean coast. While the level of violence perpetuated by this group declined in 2009, it has moved its focus further south, to the vast Sahara Desert region of the country.

In 2001 the conflict between the central government and the country's ethnic Berbers, the Amazighs, escalated. The Berbers constitute 20% of the Algerian population and are the original inhabitants of North Africa. While most Algerians are a mixture of Berber and Arab, nevertheless, in the mountainous areas of the country, such as Kabylie and Aures, the populations have remained more distinctly Berber and continue to speak one of several Tamazight languages. While the Berber communities of these regions have long sought cultural recognition, a 1998 law that mandated the exclusive use of Arabic in public life lies at the root of this most recent outbreak of violence. The Berbers have viewed this law as an attempt by the central government to appease Islamic fundamentalists within the country at their expense. Rising Berber nationalism has become increasingly troublesome to the regime because their cultural demands – that include the official recognition of their language – have become increasingly intertwined with a general opposition to authoritarian rule. Political unrest and rioting in the Kabylie region in 2001 resulted in brutal government repression. However, in an attempt to diffuse Berber unrest, in the past few years the government has pursued a policy of increasing economic aid to the region and making Tamazight a national, although not an official, language.

Some seventy legal political parties have been formed in Algeria since the political arena was liberalized in 1989 but most lack clear political platforms and only a few of these parties represent a

significant threat to the status quo. The Islamist FIS, which was banned in 1992, is a significant exception. Key to understanding the weakness of opposition parties in Algeria is the active government regulation of party registration and organization. A law adopted in 2001 effectively bans all demonstrations by political opponents in the capital city. Moreover, the countrywide state of emergency in effect since 1992 allows the government to ban any demonstrations they deem likely to disturb the public order. The military's insistence on law and order has produced significant human rights problems for the nation.

Despite the slow evolution of democratic politics in Algeria, the May 2002 legislative elections demonstrated that this country still has a long way to go before it could be considered a democratic polity. These elections, which were won by Prime Minister Ali Benfli's FLN party, were marred by violence and low turnout. While twenty-three parties and 123 independents participated, four parties (including two which represent Berber political interests) boycotted the election as a sham. The return to legislative power of the FLN, the national liberation front that won Algeria's independence and governed under a one-party system for twenty-five years, was no surprise. The party that the FLN unseated, the National Democratic Rally, was a recent creation of the Pouvoir, the narrow class of generals, appartchiks and crony businessmen that actually ran the country.

The most recent round of legislative elections was held 17 May 2007 and was marked by widespread boycotting of the election, resulting in the lowest turnout in Algeria's history with only 35% of eligible voters casting ballots. Despite threats of violence by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, the elections proceeded relatively peacefully. The FLN received 23% of the vote for 163 seats and the RND 10% of the vote for 61 seats. The low-turnout of the election reflected popular views that the continuing ban of the FIS has disaffected a large segment of the population and limited popular support for the current regime. The relative transparency of the 2004 presidential elections contrasts sharply with a general, political malaise that may constrain further progress toward a democratic future in Algeria. In practice, entrenched political power and deep factional divisions continue to limit the speed and scope of political liberalization in this country.