

FINAL WWL 2019 COUNTRY DOSSIER

ALGERIA

LEVEL 3/EMBARGO

(Reporting period: 1 November 2017 – 31 October 2018)

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Introduction

Copyright Notice

Introduction

| World Watch List Algeria | Points | WWL Rank |
|--------------------------|--------|----------|
| WWL 2019 | 70 | 22 |
| WWL 2018 | 58 | 42 |
| WWL 2017 | 58 | 36 |
| WWL 2016 | 56 | 37 |
| WWL 2015 | 55 | 34 |

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country was among the fifty highest scoring countries (Top 50) in the WWL 2015-2019 reporting periods.

Please note: The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.

WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Algeria

Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14118852>

Recent country history

Just like most other countries in North Africa, Algeria used to be a territory of the Ottoman Turkish Empire. However, in 1830, Algeria was conquered by France. Algeria gained independence in 1962 after a bloody and violent war of independence that was led by the National Liberation Front and which lasted for about eight years. Since independence, the National Liberation Front has been in power and the dominant political party in Algeria. For a few decades since independence the National Liberation Front outlawed other political parties and ruled as the sole legal party. In 1992, Algeria introduced multiparty elections and when Islamist parties won the election, the army suspended the result of the election in the country descended in to a civil war that resulted in the death of an estimated 150,000 Algerians. After engulfing the country for almost a decade, the conflict subsided in 1999.

The religious landscape

The government of Algeria describes its population as "Algerian, Muslim and Arab". Historically, Algeria is an ethnic mix of peoples of both Arab and Berber descent. Ethnicity and language is a sensitive issue after many years of government marginalization of Berber culture. Today the Arab-Berber issue is more a case of an individual's identification with language and culture rather than a racial or ethnic distinction. About 20% of the population identifies itself as Berber and speaks Berber languages. Berbers are divided into several ethnic groups, notably Kabyle (the largest), Chaoui, Mozabites and Tuareg. Society in Algeria is divided since Kabyles are deeply discriminated against. For example, the housing problem in Algeria is worst in the Kabyle region since the government would seem to be deliberately refusing help to the Kabyle region with housing projects. Other regions are being helped with housing projects set up and financed by the government.

The political landscape

In 2014 President Bouteflika was re-elected for a fourth mandate. The Algerian Constitution allows only 2 mandates, but with the help of the Islamist parties Bouteflika was able to amend the Constitution. Islamist influence is increasing in the government. Since January 2011 political tensions have been rising and many demonstrations have been held, mainly caused by a general dissatisfaction with the price-explosion of food and the high levels of unemployment. Since he suffered a stroke in 2013, President Bouteflika has rarely been seen in public and he did not even campaign for the presidential elections in 2014. Much about the future of the Algeria is intertwined with who will succeed the ailing president. Algeria has introduced a host of constitutional amendments in 2016 to give more power to parliament and to reinstate the two terms limit on the presidency. However, many critics and opponents of the regime have dismissed this reform as superficial. Presidential elections will be held at the beginning of 2019. At the end of October 2018, the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale, the presidential party) [announced](#) that President Bouteflika will go for a fifth mandate, despite the two terms limit.

The socio-economic landscape

Algeria is ranked 85 out of 188 countries on the [UNDP human development index](#). With an average life expectancy of 76.3 and an adult literacy rate of 79.6%, Algeria seems to perform much better than most African and Arab countries in the provision of social goods and services. However, youth unemployment is still a problem and the decline in energy prices has paused a serious economic challenge to the Algerian state. Nevertheless, with a [Gross National Income per capita of 15.050 dollar PPP](#), Algerians enjoy better economic conditions than most other countries in Africa and some Arab countries too. However, the decline in natural gas prices which is a key export commodity in Algeria has exacerbated the economic challenges faced by the country.

Concluding remarks

Despite its violent past and the persistent threat of Islamic insurgencies, Algeria is relatively stable. However, this stability is fragile: One concern is the increasing economic pressure on the government as it tries to deal with a rising level of unemployment and economic discontent with a declining revenue from natural gas. Another cause for concern is the potential political struggle over who will take over from President Bouteflika when he eventually stands down from office (or dies). A further concern is the fear that the lawlessness in Libya could undermine stability in Algeria since the two countries share a long border. Any instability arising in Algeria as a result of any of these causes is likely to make the situation for Christians worse than it is currently.

External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Algeria

- The political landscape: announced
https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2018/10/28/le-president-algerien-bouteflika-sera-candidat-a-sa-reelection-en-2019-annonce-le-chef-du-fln_5375835_3212.html
- The socio-economic landscape: UNDP human development index
<http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/DZA>
- The socio-economic landscape: Gross National Income per capita of 15.050 dollar PPP
<https://tradingeconomics.com/algeria/gni-per-capita-ppp-us-dollar-wb-data.html>

WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

| Pop 2018 | Christians | Chr% |
|------------|------------|------|
| 42,008,000 | 125,000 | 0.3 |

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

How did Christians get there?

Christianity became rooted in Algeria by the 2nd century AD. Renowned Church Fathers such as Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine of Hippo all hailed from Algeria. Many Berbers in Algeria were identified with the [Donatist movement](#). The strong Christian presence gave way to Islam after the Arab invasion in the 8th century. The Kabyle (a Berber group, originally Christian) resisted Islam stubbornly but eventually accepted it. In the late 15th century, Christianity came back to the country when Spain conquered the coastal areas; however, Spanish rule lasted only briefly, and the Ottomans conquered the country in 1525. After France gained control of Algeria (in 1830 and lasting until 1962), Catholic missionaries came with French settlers and established churches. There were also Protestants among the French settlers and Methodists from Britain.

According to Katia Boissevain (Boissevain K, *Algeria and Tunisia, in: Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, Edinburgh Companion to Global Christianity, eds. Ross, Tadros and Johnson, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, pp.45-51): "Catholics are now identified with the colonial period, whereas Evangelicals are perceived to be participating in a modern call to Jesus [...] *tapping* into the ancient history of North Africa, particularly the pre-Arab, pre-Muslim, 'original' Berber identity. This Berber discourse is particularly effective in Algeria."

In addition, Sub-Saharan African migrants (be it students, workers or refugees) have started their own churches since the 1990s; some locals have joined them too.

What church networks exist today?

| Church networks: Algeria | Christians | % |
|--|----------------|--------------|
| Orthodox | 1,300 | 1.0 |
| Catholic | 6,200 | 5.0 |
| Protestant | 6,300 | 5.0 |
| Independent | 111,000 | 88.8 |
| Unaffiliated | 140 | 0.1 |
| Doubly-affiliated Christians | 0 | 0.0 |
| Total | 124,940 | 100.0 |
| <i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i> | | |
| Evangelical movement | 37,500 | 30.0 |
| Renewalist movement | 26,500 | 21.2 |

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: Believers 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. Renewalist movement: Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

The majority of Christians in Algeria are part of the Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA) and are concentrated in the Berber-populated Kabyle region. Other major denominations in Algeria include the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, Methodists and Adventists. There are also several Independent churches and house groups.

Religious context

| Religious Context: Algeria | Numbers | % |
|----------------------------|------------|------|
| Christians | 125,000 | 0.3 |
| Muslim | 41,293,000 | 98.3 |
| Hindu | 0 | 0.0 |
| Buddhist | 6,300 | 0.0 |
| Ethnoreligionist | 0 | 0.0 |
| Jewish | 620 | 0.0 |
| Bahai | 3,800 | 0.0 |
| Atheist | 7,500 | 0.0 |
| Agnostic | 558,000 | 1.3 |
| Other | 12,900 | 0.0 |

OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

As in most countries in northern Africa, Algeria is a country in which Muslims are the overwhelming majority. According to WCD 2018 data, an estimated 98.3% 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 negligible.

Radical Islamic influence is growing. Yet at the same time there is openness to the Gospel and Christianity is growing fast in Algeria. Christians within Muslim families face legal discrimination from the State in personal status issues, and hostility from within their own extended family.

Notes on the current situation

- The fourth consecutive term for ailing President Bouteflika (re-elected in 2014) reaffirmed the regime's apathy towards any democratic shift. Bouteflika will contest again for his fifth term during the 2019 elections.
- The government continues to enforce Ordinance 06-03, which regulates the exercise of religious worship other than Islam, in an effort to control the Algerian Christian minority, particularly in the Kabyle region.
- Economic poverty, rising food prices and a lack of economic development is especially apparent in the Kabyle region which is home to many of Algeria's Protestants. The government's efforts have done little to reduce high youth unemployment rates or to address housing shortages. In some regions unemployment is above 50%. On the [Corruption Perceptions Index](#) Algeria is ranked at 112 out of 175 countries. (Rank 1 means very clean, rank 175 means highly corrupt.)
- There is a huge youth bubble: 46% of the population is under the age of 25.

- Algeria is the largest country in Africa and the 10th largest country in the world.

External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

- How did Christians get there?: Donatist movement
<http://www.britannica.com/topic/Donatists>
- Notes on the current situation: Corruption Perceptions Index
<https://tradingeconomics.com/algeria/corruption-rank>

WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

With a score of 70 points in WWL 2019, Algeria rose to rank 22. (In WWL 2018 Algeria scored 58 points.)

What type of persecution dominates?

Islamic oppression: Islamist movements influencing government and society, in combination with pressure from family members on Christian converts from a Muslim background, have led to persistent background persecution.

Ethnic antagonism: Issues of ethnic identity, culture and language figure prominently in the difficult relationship between the government and the Kabyle region, where most Christians are found.

Dictatorial paranoia: The autocratic style of President Bouteflika's government is an important source of restrictions on Christians.

Who is driving persecution?

A major source of persecution in Algeria is the intolerance relatives and neighbors of Christians with Muslim background show by exerting pressure on them making it difficult for Christians to live out their faith. The state also adds to this pressure through its laws and administrative bureaucracy restricting the freedom of religion. The persecution Christians face is also reinforced by the tension between Amazighs and Arabs, since most of the growth of the Algerian church is taking place in the Kabylie region among Amazighs (who are also referred to as ethnic Berbers). The influence and activity of radical Islamic groups in the region is also a source of danger and persecution for Algerian Christians.

What it results in

There are laws that regulate non-Muslim worship and there are also blasphemy laws that make it difficult for Christians to share their faith out of fear that their conversations may be considered blasphemous. It is forbidden by law to 'shake the faith of a Muslim' or to use 'means of seduction tending to convert a Muslim to another religion'. Christians also suffer from harassment and discrimination in their daily life. Members of extended family and neighbors try to force converts to adhere to Islamic norms and follow Islamic rites. The pressure and danger faced by Christians is particularly high in the rural and religiously more conservative parts of the country. These regions acted as a stronghold for Islamist insurgents in the fight against the government in the 1990's.

Violence

The following table is based on reported cases. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures.

| Algeria | Reporting period | Christians killed | Christians attacked | Christians arrested | Churches attacked | Christian-owned houses and shops attacked |
|----------|------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------|---|
| WWL 2019 | 01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018 | 0 | 22 | 0 | 9 | 3 |
| WWL 2018 | 01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 0 |

Christians killed refers to the number of Christians killed for faith-related reasons (including state-sanctioned executions). Christians attacked refers to the number of Christians abducted, raped or otherwise sexually harassed, forced into marriage to non-Christians or otherwise physically or mentally abused (including beatings and death-threats) for faith-related reasons. Christians arrested refers to the number of Christians detained without trial or sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment or similar things for faith-related reasons. Churches attacked refers to the number of churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons. Christian-owned houses and shops attacked refers to the number of houses of Christians or other property (including shops and businesses of Christians) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons.

Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period

- In July 2018, an Algerian convert [was acquitted](#) after being sentenced for carrying a Bible and other Christian items with him. Earlier, he had received the maximum prison sentence for this 'crime' of six months and a fine.
- In April 2018, a Christian convert was [released](#) after 18 months in prison. He had been sentenced to five years imprisonment and received a fine for posting statements on his Facebook page deemed insulting to Islam. His sentence was commuted after a presidential amnesty.
- During the WWL 2019 reporting period, the Algerian government continued its crackdown on Protestant communities. Several churches [were closed down](#) by the Algerian authorities. Some were allowed to re-open after a few months, but others remain closed. [These actions](#) create uncertainty among Algerian Christians.

External Links - WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: was acquitted
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/07/algerian-christian-happy-to-be-free-at-last-after-jail-sentence-and-fine-for-carrying-bible/>
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: released
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/04/finally-my-father-is-home-slimane-bouhafs-released-after-18-months-in-jail/>

- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: were closed down
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/07/algerian-government-allows-three-churches-to-re-open-in-june-but-now-closes-another/>
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: These actions
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/07/un-tells-algeria-to-guarantee-freedom-of-religion-to-all-after-church-closures/>

WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 70 points in WWL 2019, the score for Algeria rose 12 points from the WWL 2018 score of 58 points. Pressure was at a very high level (or above) in all but one *sphere of life*. The score for violence has risen mainly due to the closure of several churches and to the growth in fear related to this.

Persecution engines

| Persecution engines: Algeria | Abbreviation | Level of influence |
|---|--------------|--------------------|
| Islamic oppression | IO | Strong |
| Religious nationalism | RN | Not at all |
| Ethnic antagonism | EA | Medium |
| Denominational protectionism | DPR | Not at all |
| Communist and post - Communist oppression | CPCO | Not at all |
| Secular intolerance | SI | Not at all |
| Dictatorial paranoia | DPA | Medium |
| Organized corruption and crime | OCC | Not at all |

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology (long version).

Islamic oppression (Strong):

As Islam has become increasingly influential in Algeria's government in the past few years, so the freedom of Christians is becoming more and more restricted. Pressure from Islamist movements on government and society, in combination with pressure from family members on Christian converts from a Muslim background has led to persistent difficulties for Christians. Islamist groups, encouraged by the Arab Spring in other North African countries, are exerting pressure on a government that has been forced to work with Islamic parties. Nevertheless, despite this cooperation, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) is still banned. Islamists are becoming more visible and they monitor the activities of Christians and other non-Muslim minorities (such as the small Jewish and Bahai communities).

Ethnic antagonism (Medium):

Most Algerian Christians are found in the Kabyle region which is located in the northern part of the country. Since independence, there has been political tensions between this region and the central government in Algeria. Among other matters, issues of ethnic identity, culture and language figure prominently in the difficult relationship between the government and residents of the Kabyle region, most of whom are ethnic Berbers while the dominant ethnic identity in the country is Arabic. The ethnic tension and antagonism also spills into religion and contributes to the persecution of Christians in the Kabyle region.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium):

This engine is evident in the autocratic nature of President Bouteflika's government, which imposes restrictions on Christians. Although the government does not necessarily see Christians as a threat to its power, it is still unable to provide a robust protection of their rights since doing so would undermine its standing with the more conservative Islamic segments of the population. Therefore, some of the measures of the government could also be seen as attempts to appease this segment of society. Furthermore, the anti-colonial and revolutionary roots of the ruling party which has been in power since independence, provides it with an ideological perspective that makes it suspicious of Christian missionary activities, especially when they are allied to churches and Christian groups in the West.

Drivers of persecution

| Drivers of Persecution: Algeria | IO | RN | EA | DPR | CPCO | SI | DPA | OCC |
|--|-------------|-----------|-------------|------------|-------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| | STRONG | - | MEDIUM | - | - | - | MEDIUM | - |
| Government officials | Strong | - | Weak | - | - | - | Medium | - |
| Ethnic group leaders | Medium | - | Medium | - | - | - | - | - |
| Non-Christian religious leaders | Strong | - | Strong | - | - | - | - | - |
| Religious leaders of other churches | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Violent religious groups | Medium | - | Weak | - | - | - | - | - |
| Ideological pressure groups | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs | Strong | - | Strong | - | - | - | - | - |
| One's own (extended) family | Very strong | - | Very strong | - | - | - | - | - |
| Political parties | Strong | - | Medium | - | - | - | - | - |
| Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Organized crime cartels or networks | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology (long version).

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

As is the case in most other countries in the region, the major drivers of persecution in Algeria are society, radical Islamic teachers and state officials who adhere to the views of such teachers. Algerian Christians, most of whom are converts from Islam, face persecution especially from their family members and extended family. Therefore, the family and the wider community - including local traditional (ethnic) leaders and elders - are important drivers of persecution. State officials at various levels of the administrative hierarchy also play a role in exerting pressure on Christians to renounce their faith and to restrict the freedom of Christians to express their views and live out their faith in public. Some Islamic teachers actively promote the persecution of Christians and also serve as drivers of persecution.

Drivers of Ethnic antagonism:

Government officials and the ruling party play an important role as drivers of persecution. The hostility of these actors towards the cultural, linguistic and political claims of non-Arab ethnic groups means that, in their efforts to suppress such demands, local churches in the Kabyle region are made to also face restrictions and persecution. The growth of the church particularly in this region is perceived as a threat to the predominantly Arab and Islamic identity of the country.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

Algeria is one of the few countries in northern Africa that has managed to ensure regime continuity and avoid sweeping democratic reforms. Since independence, the National Liberation Front has maintained its grip on power despite several changes of presidents. The National Liberation Front has often been challenged by Islamist political movements and in order to win over the supporters of the Islamist movements and shore up its legitimacy, the government restricts the freedom of Christians.

Context

In 2014 President Bouteflika was re-elected for a fourth mandate. The Algerian Constitution allows only 2 mandates, but with the help of the Islamist parties Bouteflika was able to amend the Constitution. Since he suffered a stroke in 2013, President Bouteflika has rarely been seen in public and he did not even campaign for the presidential elections in 2014. Much about the future of Algeria is intertwined with who will succeed the ailing President.

Algeria is ranked 83 out of 188 countries on the [UNDP human development index](#). With an average life expectancy of 76.2 and an adult literacy rate around 80%, Algeria seems to perform much better than most African and Arab countries in the provision of social goods and services. Algeria is relatively stable but this could change. One concern is the increasing economic pressure on the government as it tries to deal with a rising level of unemployment and economic discontent with a declining revenue from natural gas. The potential for a succession battle among army officers is also another cause for concern. There is also a risk that the lawlessness in neighboring Libya could flow into Algeria. The chance of instability is growing as the 2019 presidential elections approach. Despite President Bouteflika's age and ill-health, he has announced that he will be contesting again in the 2019 election.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: This category consists mainly of Sub-Saharan migrant Christians, complemented with some (Western) expatriate Christians. The small number of Sub-Saharan African Christian students in the country face discrimination at universities and in day-to-day life in the cities.

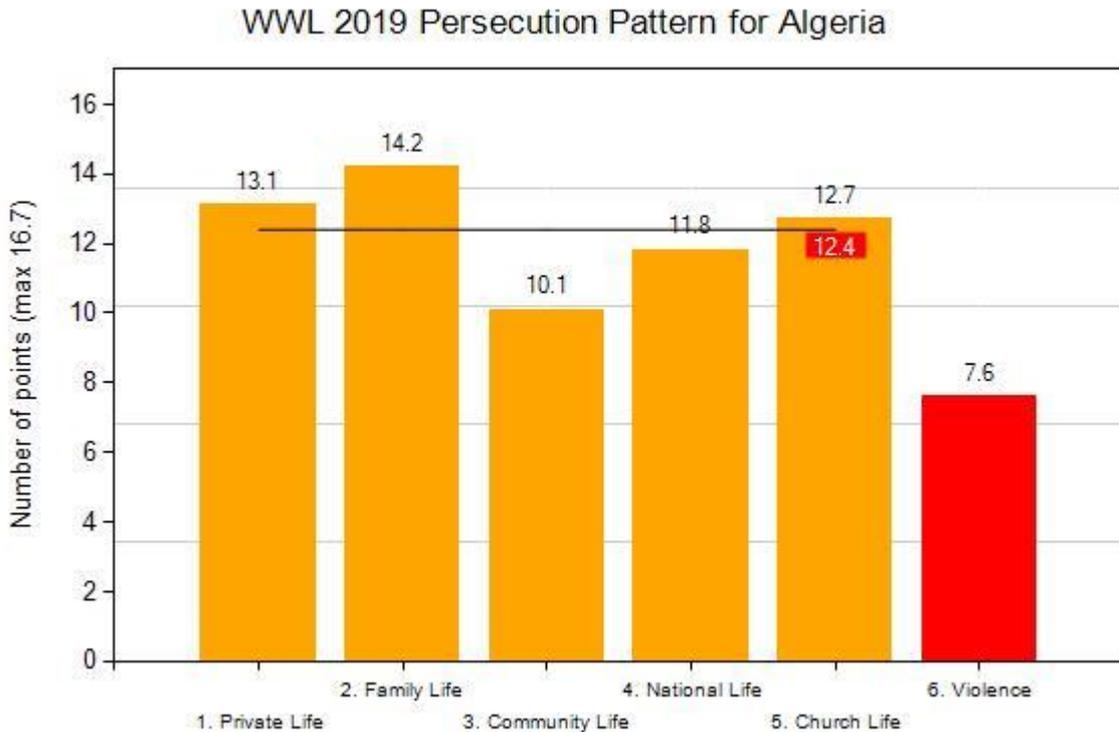
Historical Christian communities: The Roman Catholic is the only remaining church in this category, as the Protestant churches nowadays are (fully) made up of convert believers (next category). The Catholic community face restrictions outside their place of worship but are allowed to exist if registered. Catholic churches (including the cathedral in Algiers - the seat of the Archbishop), conduct services without government interference.

Converts to Christianity: The majority of Christians in Algeria are converts with a Muslim background and face on-going pressure. The law prohibits public assembly for the purpose of practicing a faith other than Islam - with the exception of registered churches. However, individual churches are often denied registration. There is a large number of unofficial groups meeting regularly in the Berber regions; non-Muslims usually congregate in private homes for religious services. The very young

Algerian church (mostly consisting of first generation Christians) faces many forms of discrimination by the state and by family members. While some Protestant churches under the EPA (Algerian Protestant Church) go back to colonial times, it mainly consist of communities of converts to Christianity.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This category does not exist as defined in the WWL Methodology.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The WWL 2019 Persecution pattern for Algeria shows:

- The average pressure on Christians stayed at a very high level, rising from 11.1 points in WWL 2018 to 12.4. This is mainly due to increased pressure from the government.
- Pressure is highest in the *Family* (14.2), *Private* (13.1) and *National* (12.7) *spheres of life*. This reflects the very high pressure converts face due to the risk of discovery and following ostracization by their families, as well as the opposition they face from society and government.
- The score for violence went up from 2.0 in WWL 2018 to 7.6 in WWL 2019. This increase has mainly been caused by the closure of several churches during the WWL 2019 reporting period.

Private sphere:

Algeria has a law that criminalizes any attempt to proselytize and make someone leave Islam for another religion. However, converting from Islam by itself is not criminalized (no crime of apostasy). Hence, technically, it is those who cause the conversion or attempt to convince someone to convert (and not the convert himself) who will be criminally liable. The main problem for converts is family persecution and this can be very severe. Church leaders report that especially women converts are

sometimes placed under house-arrest by their Muslim families. They are not allowed to meet other Christians or to have any contact with them. They are not allowed to watch TV or listen to the radio as Christian channels are broadcast into Algeria. In the Arabic part of the country, persecution is even more severe and converts risk being killed. For many believers, sharing about their faith in written form, with family members or with guests, is simply not possible and they are exposed to a lot of domestic violence.

Family sphere:

For the Algerian government, every citizen is a Muslim. There are also cases where the Muslim population in villages has refused to allow Christians to bury their deceased family members. Christian marriages are only valid within a church community but are not accepted by the government, which registers them as a Muslim marriage.

Community sphere:

Algerian Christians tend to speak of "villagers who don't talk to them," while Christian human rights organizations speak routinely of verbal and physical abuse being used. The [2017 International Religious Freedom Report](#) states that "some Muslim citizens who converted to Christianity reported they and others in their communities continued to keep a low profile due to concern for their personal safety and the potential for legal, familial, career, and social problems. Other Muslim citizens who converted to Christianity practiced their new religion openly, however." The latter depends on the region where the convert lives. The (small) Berber regions tend to be more open than the Arab regions.

The Algerian government is especially concerned with reports of religious proselytism, particularly in the more conservative Muslim communities – i.e. in areas that served as a base for the radical Islamic groups that fought against the government in the civil war (1991-1999). Christian school-children living in these areas have to hide their faith, as otherwise they are likely to suffer discrimination by teachers and be refused entry to university studies.

National sphere:

The freedom of Christians is particularly under pressure in the *national sphere* because of the continued enforcement of the very restrictive ordinance 06-03, which was passed in March 2006 and enforced in February 2008. The introduction of this anti-conversion law was a turning point for the Church in Algeria, marking a step backward for religious freedom.

Ordinance 06-03 prohibits any action that "incites, constrains or utilizes means of seduction intending to convert a Muslim to another religion, or by using to this end establishments for teaching, for education, for health, of a social or cultural nature, or training institutions, or any other establishment, or any financial means." Punishment is two to five years in prison and a fine. The law also prohibits Christian activities being carried out anywhere outside a state-recognized church building. One particular area of concern of Ordinance 06-03 is its vague wording that renders it susceptible to arbitrary interpretation and application.

Church sphere:

The apparently positive news in 2011 that the EPA (Algerian Protestant Church) had finally obtained official registration after many years of trying, turned out to be a disappointment. No real freedom was given and local churches were still required to obtain their own registration. On a local level, oppression has intensified and no local churches belonging to the EPA have been registered. The government has not registered any new churches since enforcing Ordinance 06-03 in February 2008,

so many Christian citizens continue to meet in unofficial house-churches, which are often homes or business offices of church members. From the legal perspective, ordinance 06-03 sets regulations for church buildings, so a meeting at home is forbidden. The legal sentence can be up to three years of prison and a fine of 300,000 DA (3,000 Euros). For the moment, no Christians are in prison for this and Christians continue to meet in homes. Still, the law hangs like a sword of Damocles over them. In the WWL 2019 reporting period, some churches affiliated with the Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA) were [closed down](#) (some of them being allowed to re-open later).

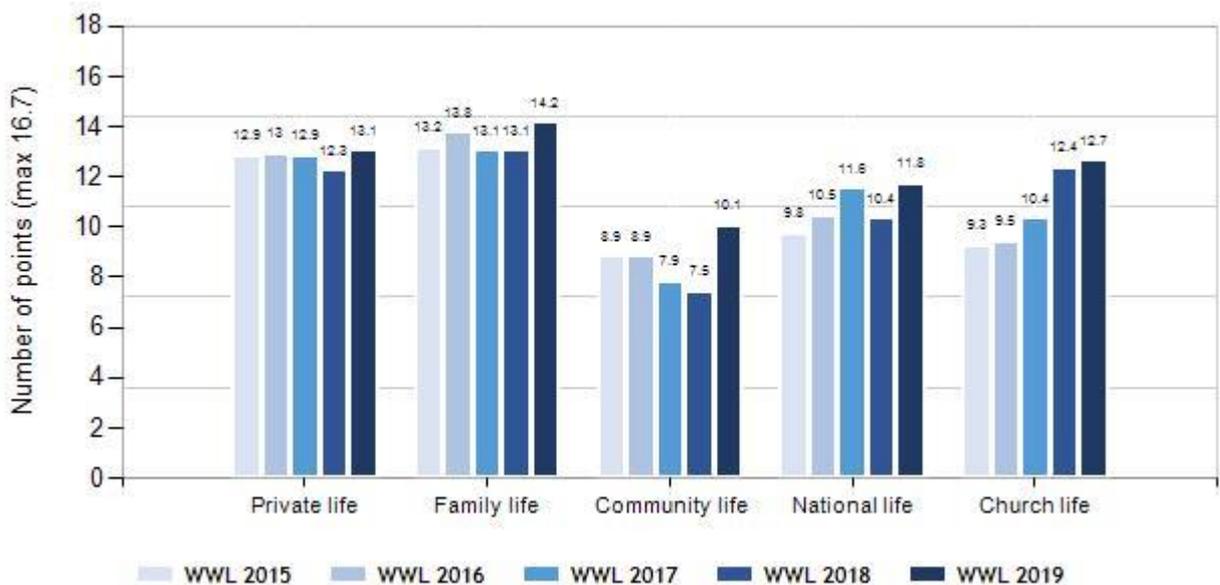
Violence:

The main source of violent persecution for the individual Christian in Algeria continues to be close family and relatives. The broader society influenced by the teachings of radical Islamic teachers also contributes to the violent persecution of Christians in Algeria. For an overview of statistics and examples, see the Short and Simple Persecution Profile section above.

5 Year trends

While the levels of pressure in the *private, family and national spheres of life* have been more or less stable over the last five years (first chart), there have been notable increases in the pressure in the *community and church spheres of life*. The second chart, showing average pressure, shows that the overall level of pressure on Christians has remained very high over the last five year, but increased during WWL2019 mainly due to the closure of churches, but also due to greater access to data. This reflects the fact that the situation for Christians in Algeria has become worse. The violence level recorded in Algeria did not change dramatically in the period WWL 2015 - WWL 2018. However, the closure of several churches in the WWL 2019 reporting period caused a rise in score. The score for violence (third chart) has thus increased to a very high level after having been low during the previous years.

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Algeria (Spheres of life)



| WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern history: Algeria | Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life |
|---|--|
| 2019 | 12.4 |
| 2018 | 11.1 |
| 2017 | 11.2 |
| 2016 | 11.1 |
| 2015 | 10.8 |

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Algeria (Violence)



Gender specific persecution

Female:

Women are more disadvantaged in law and society, which has an additional effect on the level of persecution experienced. They will very likely be divorced by their Muslim husbands, leaving them without any financial support; they can thus end up on the street because they do not have an income. The custody of their children may be taken from them, as well as inheritance rights. Female converts may be confined to the family house or face physical, verbal or even sexual abuse and harassment. There have been cases in which families of female converts did not allow them to attend church services. If they have a job, they might be fired upon discovery of their faith. One country researcher wrote: "We observe that many Christian women went through traumatic situations and this is impacting them directly as well as their families."

Male:

In contrast with women, men are more likely to be forced out of the house and are subsequently ostracized by their families. They also face physical violence, as well as harassment at work or school or loss of employment. The latter affects not only men, but also their families as in most cases men are the main source of income for families. This then brings the whole family into financial difficulties.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Apart from Christians, Algerian Jews and Ahmadiyya Muslims also face varying levels of persecution. Algerian Jews fear for their security due to the threat of violence from Islamists and there have been instances of desecration of Jewish cemeteries. The Ahmadiyya face more intense persecution including criminal charges for "denigrating the dogma or precepts of Islam". They face hostility from public officials and are denied their right to form [associations](#). According to the US State Department's 2017 IRF [Report](#) (p.8), "the government conducted investigations of at least 205 Ahmadi Muslims, arresting dozens".

Future outlook

The political outlook: The high numbers of people who boycotted the presidential elections in 2014 are a silent expression of the population's widespread discontent over unemployment, the housing crisis and political stagnation. Should Bouteflika die in office, social unrest is quite likely to erupt under the pressure of a younger generation desperate for change, as 70% of the population is under 30.

The outlook for Christians - through the lens of:

- **Islamic oppression:** It is clear that radical Islam is gaining influence in North Africa and the future of Algeria will depend in part on developments in neighboring countries. Among the main worries are the relentless attempts by radical Muslims to justify murdering members of security forces, civilians and Christians with their interpretation of Islam. It is not likely that the Islamist influence will decrease, nor that the society will change its approach towards converts and conversion.
- **Ethnic antagonism:** Most Algerian Christians are Berbers originating from the Kabyle region which is located in the northern part of the country. The political tensions between this region and the central government in Algeria is not likely to cease; this ethnic tension will continue to make any relationship with the government complicated.
- **Dictatorial paranoia:** The government will likely continue discriminating against Christians, especially converts, as a way of appeasing society and radical Islamic movements. The presence of Christians is creating unrest in society and especially in times of elections, the government is not likely to become more open towards Christianity.

Conclusion:

The question is whether what comes after Bouteflika's regime will be any better for the country's Christians. In the current situation, Christians are very much under pressure, but have found ways to survive and even to grow. The Church may be far worse off in a new political constellation if Islamists capitalize upon the societal discontent as they did in Tunisia and Egypt. The outcome of the 2019 presidential elections in April will be of vital importance.

External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

- Context: UNDP human development index
<http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/DZA>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: 2017 International Religious Freedom Report
<https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/281220.pdf>

- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: closed down
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/07/un-tells-algeria-to-guarantee-freedom-of-religion-to-all-after-church-closures/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: associations
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/04/algeria-stop-persecuting-religious-minority>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Report
<https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/281220.pdf>

Additional Reports and Articles

WWR in-depth reports

A selection of in-depth reports is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

Open Doors article(s) from the region

A selection of articles is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/articles/> (password freedom).

World Watch Monitor news articles

Use the country search function at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

Recent country developments

Use the country search function at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/> (password: freedom).