

# COUNTRY PROFILE: ALGERIA

August 2008



## BASIC FACTS

- Population of 33,333,216 (2007 est.), area of 2,381,740 sq km.
- Life expectancy at birth – 71 years (men), 74 years (women) (UN)
- Total adult literacy rate – 70%.
- GDP per capita – US\$ 3,086 (nominal), US\$ 8,100 (PPP) (2007 estimate)

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT:

Algeria was originally inhabited by Berbers until the Arabs conquered North Africa in the 7th century. Staying mainly in the mountainous regions, the Berbers resisted the spreading Arab influence, managing to preserve much of their language and culture. They make up some 30% of the population.

Part of the Turkish Ottoman empire from the 16th century, Algeria was conquered by the French in 1830 and given the status of a “departement”. The struggle for independence began in 1954, headed by the National Liberation Front, which came to power on independence in 1962. More than a million Algerians were killed in the fight for independence from France up to 1962.

In the 1990s, Algerian politics was dominated by the struggle involving the military and Islamist militants. In 1992 a general election won by an Islamist party was annulled, heralding a bloody civil war in which more than 150,000 people were killed. An amnesty in 1999 led many rebels to lay down their arms.

In 2001, the government agreed to a series of demands by the minority Berbers, including official recognition of their language, after months of unrest involving Berber youths demanding greater cultural and political recognition.

## POLITICS:

The head of state is the President of Algeria, who is elected to a five year term and is constitutionally limited to two terms. Algeria has universal suffrage at 18 years of age. The President is the head of the Council of Ministers and of the High Security Council. He appoints the Prime Minister who is also the head of government. The Prime Minister appoints the Council of Ministers.



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

## AT A GLANCE:

- Full name: The People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria
- Population: 33.3 million (UN, 2007)
- Capital: Algiers
- Area: 2.4 million sq km (919,595 sq miles)
- Major languages: Arabic, French, Berber
- Major religion: Islam
- Life expectancy: 71 years (men), 74 years (women) (UN)
- Monetary unit: 1 dinar = 100 centimes
- Main exports: Oil, gas
- GDP per capita: US \$3,086
- Internet domain: .dz
- International dialling code: +213

The Algerian parliament is bicameral, consisting of a lower chamber, the National People's Assembly (APN), with 380 members; and an upper chamber, the Council of Nation, with 144 members. The APN is elected every five years.

Under the 1976 constitution (as modified 1979, and amended in 1988, 1989, and 1996) Algeria is a multi-party state. All parties must be approved by the Ministry of the Interior. To date, Algeria has had more than 40 legal political parties. According to the constitution, no political association may be formed if it is "based on differences in religion, language, race, gender or region."

#### **ECONOMY:**

The fossil fuels energy sector forms the backbone of the Algerian economy, accounting for roughly 60% of budget revenues, 30% of GDP and over 95% of export earnings. The country ranks fourteenth in petroleum reserves, containing 11.8 billion barrels of proven oil reserves with estimates that the actual amount is even more. It was reported in 2005 that Algeria had 160 trillion cubic feet of proven natural gas reserves, the eighth largest in the world.

Sustained high oil prices in recent years have helped improve Algeria's financial and macroeconomic indicators. Algeria is running substantial trade surpluses and building up record foreign exchange reserves. Algeria has decreased its external debt to less than 10% of GDP after repaying its Paris Club and London Club debt in 2006. Real GDP has risen due to higher oil output and increased government spending.

#### **AGRICULTURE:**

Over 25% of Algerians are employed in the agricultural sector, and more than 7,500,000 acres (30,000 square kms) are devoted to the cultivation of cereal grains. The Tell is the grain-growing area and during the time of French rule its productivity was increased substantially by the sinking of artesian wells in districts which only required water to make them fertile. Of the crops raised, wheat, barley and oats are the principal cereals. A great variety of vegetables and fruits, especially citrus products are exported. Algeria also exports figs, dates, esparto grass and cork.

#### **Sources:**

BBC News - [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/country\\_profiles/790556.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/790556.stm)

Wikipedia - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Algeria>

UNDP - <http://www.dz.undp.org/>