

Algeria

Ethnicity in Algeria

Group selection

The **Arabs** (72%) and **Berbers** (28%) are politically relevant ethnic groups in Algeria.

Power relations

As the anti-colonial nationalism which led to Algerian independence in 1962 developed in tandem with the rise of **Arab** nationalism, the cultural identity of Algeria along with other newly independent North African states was “generally defined by nationalist orthodoxy as Arabo-Muslim”⁽²⁷⁾. The long history of **Amazigh/Berber** ancestry was consequently ignored by this new definition of national identity, leading to the development of a greater consciousness of Berber identity and resentment against the lack of its recognition in national politics. The development of Berber consciousness was “pioneered” in the Kabylia region of Northern Algeria before spreading to other regions⁽²⁸⁾.

²⁷ [International Crisis Group, 2003]

Ethnicity and political power are confounded in the Algerian case, making the coding somewhat fuzzy. To be sure, the Berber Spring as a cultural movement over the course of two decades led to the achievement of minority language rights. However, Berbers (not only Kabyles) are members of both the FLN and RND and therefore it would be false to say that Kabyles do not enjoy political power. Minority status is non-controversial from the point of view of the state as long as it does not challenge the ultimate control of the regime in power which is only democratic as a matter of façade. Further, in addition to cultural rights, which are not really contested any longer by the government, the FFS and RCD are primarily advocating for drastic reform of the state allowing for true democratization. In this sense, ethnicity plays a false or confounded role with power-sharing.

²⁸ [International Crisis Group, 2003]

Algeria gained independence from France in 1962 following nearly a decade long war for independence, after which the country was run as a one-party socialist state by the FLN (National Liberation Front). The regime gained legitimacy through efforts to establish a dominant official Arab-Muslim vision of the nation. Algeria does not have a ‘Berber party’ which appeals to Algeria’s Berbers, and the beginnings of a Berber cultural movement are not nation-wide⁽²⁹⁾. However, the Berber vision of the nation was excluded from post-independence nation-building developments, and their struggle

²⁹ [International Crisis Group, 2003]

for cultural and linguistic recognition, as well as their activism for a more secular state, competed against the dominant Islamic identity of the FLN (Arabs coded Dominant; Berbers coded Powerless) ⁽³⁰⁾. As the FLN's legitimacy has been closely tied to the Arab-Islamic vision of the nation, "Berber identity re-imagined in opposition to the rigid Arab-Islamic identity of the nation has become a powerful expression of dissidence - making the "Berber question a contested one" ⁽³¹⁾.

³⁰ [Watanabe, 2014]

In 1962 Ait Ahmed founded the FFS in an effort to challenge the hegemony of the FLN in the country's one party system. Although Ait Ahmed was Kabyle, his PRIMARY goal was to share power in the new state, not to advance ethnic rights. Many members of the 1962 constituent assembly (one-party, FLN) were Kabyle and over half OPPOSED Ait Ahmed and the FFS. In 1964 Ait Ahmed was arrested and sentenced to death but later received a life sentence and escaped to Switzerland.

³¹ [Watanabe, 2014]

The Berber Spring begins in the early 1970s raising awareness of the question of Berber cultural and linguistic identity in contrast to the FLN's Arabo-Muslim conceptualization of the state (though the FLN certainly had many members from the Kabylie). Until the opening of multiparty elections in 1989, in which the RCD but not the FFS participated, the Berber movement is politically powerless. A Berber Cultural movement gained ground in 1970, demanding democratized Algerian political life and recognition of Tamazight. It was instrumental in Algeria's 1980 Berber Spring which resulted in violent clashes between Berbers and Islamists, and forced a degree of state recognition for Berbers ⁽³²⁾. Algeria's ruling Arab-Muslim elites remained in control and underlying grievances were left unresolved

³² [Maddy-Weitzman, 2011]

Werenfels ^(33, 41) reports that "[i]n 1980, for the first time in the history of independent Algeria, a strong social movement emerged in Kabylia and in Algiers." Similarly, Hart ^(34, 26) calls the Berber movement apolitical as it does not include demands for political power and is peaceful in its intentions. However, the fact that discriminatory actions such as the prohibition to use an evolving Berber alphabet or of other cultural expressions were in place well before the awakening of ethnic cultural consciousness on the side of the Berber, as indicated by the adoption of Arabic as the official language of the state, corroborates this coding. The government amended the constitution to include Berber as a 'national' language in 2001, but not an 'official' language ⁽³⁵⁾.

³³ [Werenfels, 2007]

³⁴ [Hart, 2000]

The elections, in which the RCD won seats at the national level, were annulled by the military. During the civil war, one supporter of the RCD holds a position in the transition government. During this period, Tamazight is officially recognized as a national language due to political pressure and the success of the Berber Cultural Movement more generally. The state is willing to grant language rights, but not willing to grant the RCD's (and FFS's) other demand—true democratic change. Between 1997 and 2001, RCD holds 19 seats

³⁵ [Minority Rights Group International, 2014]

in the lower house and FFS holds 20 seats. These parties represent some Kabyles, but Kabyles are also members of the government parties FLN and RCD. RCD and FFS exist in opposition to the government but as a result of boycotting the 2002 elections hold no seats ⁽³⁶⁾.

According to Werenfels ⁽³⁷⁾, 51-2) the current prime minister of Algeria, Ahmed Ouyahia, who has served as prime minister in two previous stints, is a Berber from Kabylie ⁽³⁸⁾, the region where most Berbers live. As most powers remain with the President and as Ouyahia is not claiming to speak on behalf of the Berber, but was an accepted mediator between the government and political representatives of the Berber in 2005, it appears reasonable to code the Berber as powerless. More promises were made by the government regarding expanding the expansion of economic aid to the Berber people and recognition of their culture and identity, but these were not officially realized.

During the 2011 Arab Spring, some Berbers used pro-democracy protests to advocate for Berber recognition, In 2013, large demonstrations took place in Grande Kabylie to commemorate the 1980 Berber Spring, organized by the RCD and the MAK movement for Kabyle autonomy. The ability for the extremist MAK movement to gain political ground is said to be a serious sign of the failure of national policy regarding Berber grievances ⁽³⁹⁾. Although the constitution is currently undergoing revision, the lack of official response to such agitation does not spell optimism for major upcoming changes regarding the political power of Berbers in Algeria.

In January 2016, the Berber language was ordained as an official national language in the constitution ⁽⁴⁰⁾. This development was heralded as a step towards cultural equivalence for the Berber and Arab communities. The President, Bouteflika, remains in power and the Prime Minister in this time period is Abdelmalek Sellal. They are both members of the National Liberation Party, which has traditionally not dealt with the separate identity of the Berbers ⁽⁴¹⁾, and there is no evidence that the Berber were included in the political power sharing within government at this time, regardless of the cultural progress made.

³⁶ [Maddy-Weitzman, 2007]

³⁷ [Werenfels, 2007]

³⁸ [New York Times, 2003]

³⁹ [Yezza, 2013]

⁴⁰ [Al Jazeera, 2016]

⁴¹ [The Economist, 2013]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Algeria

From 1962 until 2017

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Arabs	0.72	DOMINANT
Berbers	0.28	POWERLESS

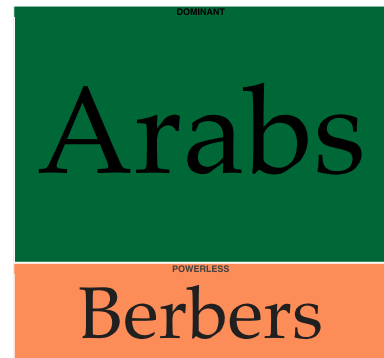


Figure 15: Political status of ethnic groups in Algeria during 1962-2017.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Algeria

From 1962 until 2017

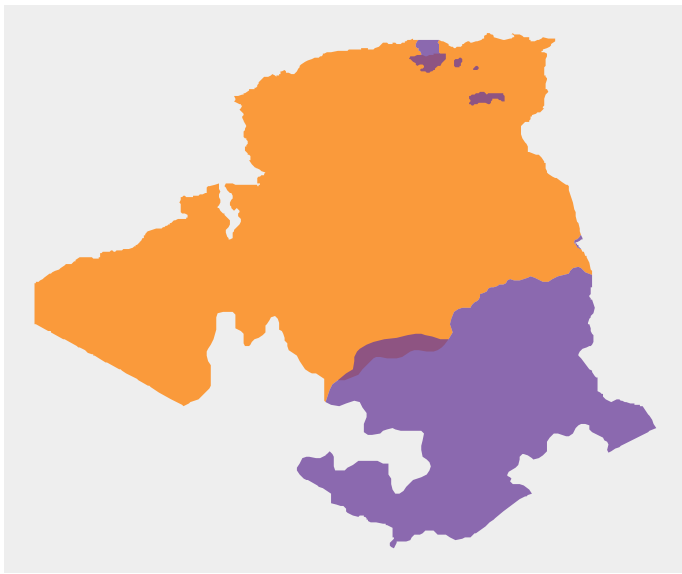


Figure 16: Map of ethnic groups in Algeria during 1962-2017.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
Arabs	1 380 126	Regional & urban
Berbers	661 547	Regionally based

Table 7: List of ethnic groups in Algeria during 1962-2017.

Conflicts in Algeria

Starting on 1954-10-31

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of France	FLN		1954-10-31			
Government of France	MNA		1955-12-30			

Starting on 1963-10-07

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Algeria	Government of Morocco		1963-10-07			

Starting on 1985-08-26

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Algeria	AIS	Arabs	1985-08-26	No	Yes, from EGIP	Split
Government of Algeria	Takfir wa'l Hijra	Arabs	1990-12-19	No	Yes, from EGIP	No
Government of Algeria	GIA	Arabs	1992-02-09	No	Yes, from EGIP	No
Government of Algeria	AQIM	Arabs	1998-12-14	No	Yes, from EGIP	No
Government of Algeria	MUJAO		2012-03-02			

Starting on 2014-12-10

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Algeria	IS		2014-12-10			