

Algeria

Ethnicity in Algeria

Group selection

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

Power relations

Algeria gained independence from France in 1962 following a war that lasted for nearly a decade. The anti-colonial nationalism which fueled the struggle for Algerian independence had developed in tandem with the rise of Arab nationalism. Thus, similar to other newly independent North African states, Algerian identity was “generally defined by nationalist orthodoxy as Arabo-Muslim” ⁽³⁷⁾. The National Liberation Front (FLN), the country’s primary political party, was established in 1954 as part of the struggle for independence and has since largely dominated politics. The FLN has legitimized their power by propagating the vision of a unified Arab-Muslim nation.

³⁷ [International Crisis Group, 2003]

In 1962 Ait Ahmed founded the Socialist Forces Front (Front des forces socialistes, FFS) in an effort to challenge the hegemony of the FLN in the country’s one party system. Although Ait Ahmed was Berber, his primary goal was a power sharing structure for the new state, not to advance his ethnic group’s rights. Many members of the 1962 constituent assembly (one-party, FLN) were Berber and over half opposed Ait Ahmed and the FFS, highlighting that politics were not primarily defined by ethnic divides.

Algeria does not have a ‘Berber party’ which appeals to Algeria’s Berbers per definition. However, it can be said that the Berber vision of the nation was excluded from post-independence nation-building, leading to a greater consciousness of Berber identity and resentment against the lack of its recognition in national politics. The development of Berber consciousness emerged in the Kabylia region of Northern Algeria, the region where most Berbers live, before spreading to other regions ⁽³⁸⁾. Their struggle 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). As the FLN’s legitimacy was 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” ⁽³⁹⁾.

³⁸ [International Crisis Group, 2003]

³⁹ [Watanabe, 2014]

A Berber Cultural Movement gained ground in 1970, demanding a democratized Algerian political life and raising awareness of Berber cultural and linguistic identity in contrast to the FLN's Arab-Muslim conceptualization of the state, despite the fact that the FLN certainly had many Berber members. 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 ⁽⁴⁰⁾. Werenfels ^(41, 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." However, before the first multiparty elections in 1989, in which the Berber-affiliated *Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie* (RCD) but not the *FFS* participated, the Berber movement was politically powerless. Hart ^(42, 26) called the Berber movement apolitical as it did not voice demands for political power and was peaceful in its intentions. The fact that discriminatory actions such as the prohibition to use the Berber alphabet or other cultural expressions were in place well before the awakening of ethno-cultural consciousness on the side of the Berber, as indicated by the adoption of Arabic as the official language of the state, corroborates this analysis.

The elections, in which the RCD won seats at the national level, became obsolete following the military backed coup in January 1992. During the subsequent civil war, one supporter of the RCD held a position in the transition government. Between 1997 and 2001, the RCD held 19 seats in the lower house and the *FFS* held 20 seats. These parties represented some Kabyle Berbers, but Berbers were also members of the nationalist government parties, namely the FLN and *Rassemblement National Démocratique* (RND) .

In 2001, "years of Berber agitation for greater recognition of their Tamazight language, music and culture culminated in rioting, and dozens of deaths. The government amended the constitution in October 2001 to make Berber a 'national', but not an 'official' language" ⁽⁴³⁾. The state was willing to grant language rights, but not willing to compromise on the RCD's (and *FFS*'s) demand for profound democratic change. The RCD and *FFS* continued to form the opposition to the government but held no more seats after boycotting the 2002 elections ⁽⁴⁴⁾.

Ahmed Ouyahia, who has served as prime minister four times (1995-98, 2003-2006, 2008-2012, 2017-2019), is a Berber from Kabylia ⁽⁴⁵⁾. As most powers remained with the President and as Ouyahia did not claim to speak on behalf of the Berber, it remains justified 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

⁴⁰ [Maddy-Weitzman, 2011]

⁴¹ [Werenfels, 2007]

⁴² [Hart, 2000]

⁴³ [Minority Rights Group International, 2014]

⁴⁴ [Maddy-Weitzman, 2007]

⁴⁵ [New York Times, 2003]

Kabyle autonomy. The ability for the extremist MAK movement to gain political ground was considered a serious sign of the failure of national policy regarding Berber grievances ⁽⁴⁶⁾. However, in January 2016, the Berber language was ordained as an official national language in the constitution ⁽⁴⁷⁾. This development was heralded as a step towards cultural equivalence for the Berber and Arab communities. Moreover, Berber movements campaigning for autonomy have only represented a small minority of this ethnic group. For example, riots in early 2017 were linked to calls for an autonomous Kabylia. However, there was a general consensus that these riots were more about increasingly high prices of consumer goods while “Algeria increasingly embraces its Berber heritage and identity” ⁽⁴⁸⁾.

Ethnicity and political power are confounded in the Algerian case, making the coding somewhat fuzzy. Berbers from Kabylia and other regions have been members of both the FLN and RND, indicating that they are not politically discriminated, even though they lack political power as an ethnic group. Minority status is non-controversial in the eyes of the government as long as it does not challenge the ultimate power of the regime, 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. Overall, this assessment validates the Berber coding as powerless for the entire period since Algerian independence.

⁴⁶ [Yezza, 2013]

⁴⁷ [Al Jazeera, 2016]

⁴⁸ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Algeria

From 1962 until 2021

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

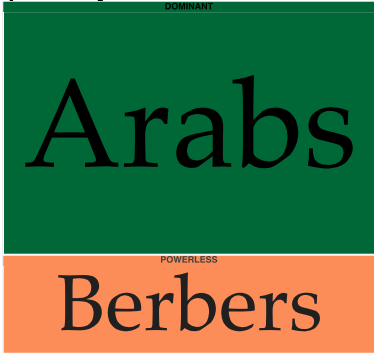


Figure 18: Political status of ethnic groups in Algeria during 1962-2021.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Algeria

From 1962 until 1962

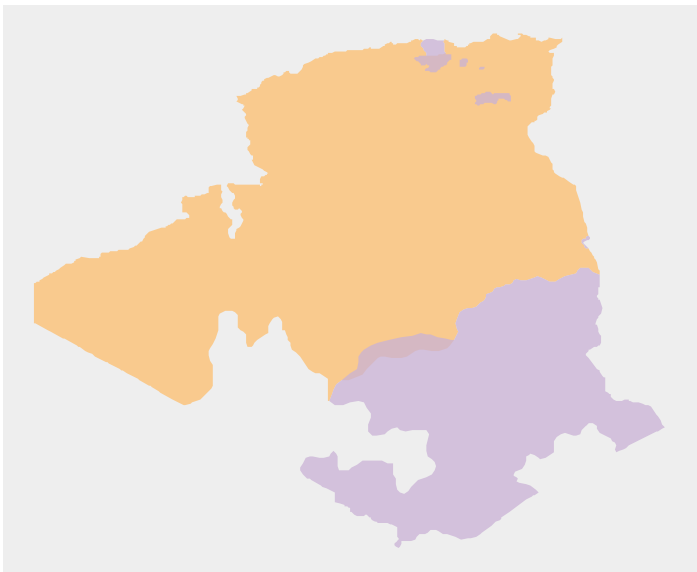


Figure 19: Map of ethnic groups in Algeria during 1962-1962.

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 1962-1962.

From 1963 until 2021

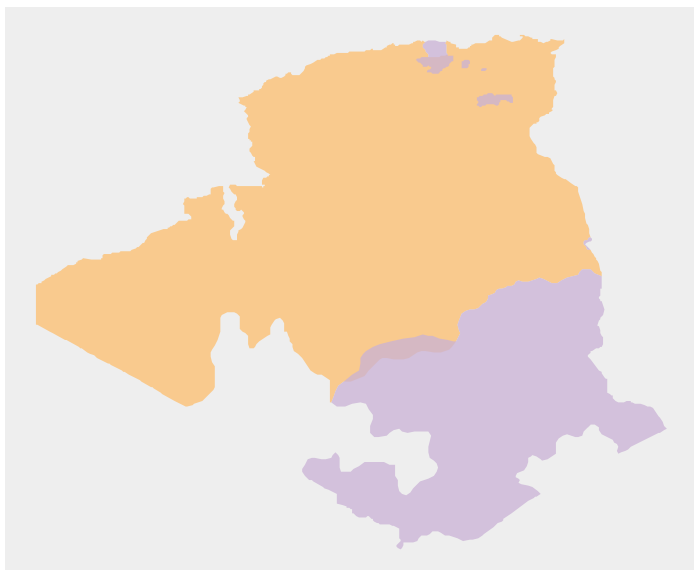


Figure 20: Map of ethnic groups in Algeria during 1963-2021.

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

Table 8: List of ethnic groups in Algeria during 1963-2021.

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	1998-12-09	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			