

Algeria

Discrimination / Unchanged —



Religion

Population

Area

- Muslims : **98.5%**
- Agnostics : **1.3%**
- Christians : **0.2%**
- Others : **0.0%**

40,376,000

2,381,741 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The vast majority of people in Algeria are Sunni Muslims. There is a group of several hundred local Jews.

Officially, almost all Christians are foreigners; many come from sub-Saharan Africa. There are Catholic and Protestant communities in the country. The Catholic Church is the largest Christian community and is organised into four dioceses. There are also Evangelical communities, especially in the Kabyle region. The number of Muslim citizens who convert to Christianity is small and, among them, the majority join Evangelical communities.

The preamble of Algeria's constitution describes Islam as being a fundamental component of the country's identity^[1] According to article 2, Islam is the religion of the state.^[2] Article 10 prohibits state institutions from doing anything against Islamic morality.^[3]

Article 87 specifies that only a Muslim can become president.^[4] Algerian law does not include a criminal offense of apostasy.

Offences related to religion include article 144 (2) of the penal code, which provides that any individual who insults the Prophet Mohammed or denigrates the creed or prophets of Islam through writing, drawing, declaration, or any other means, will receive three to five years in prison, and/or be subject to a fine of between 50,000 and 100,000 Algerian dinars^[5] (between about US\$450 and US\$900).

In addition, although Algeria permits religious organisations to participate in humanitarian work, it makes proselytising by non-Muslims an offence punishable by a fine and up to five years' imprisonment for anyone "who incites, constrains, or utilizes means of seduction tending to convert a Muslim to another religion; or by using to this end establishments of teaching, education, health, social, culture, training ... or any financial means"[6]

In 2006 President Abdelaziz Bouteflika issued Ordinance 06/03 which regulates non-Muslim religious worship. The ordinance forbids attempts to convert a Muslim to another religion or even to "shake the faith of a Muslim", although it does not forbid conversion as such. Under the ordinance, Algerians can be fined up to one million dinars and sentenced to five years in prison for printing, storing or distributing materials intended to convert Muslims.[7] Christian books and manuals are therefore rare in the country, and Christians do not feel free to carry Christian literature with them.

All religious groups have to register with the Ministry of Interior before conducting any activities and may gather at state-approved locations only.

Matters of family law are regulated by *Shari'a* law. According to the Family code, a Muslim man can marry a non-Muslim woman if she belongs to a monotheistic faith. Muslim women cannot marry non-Muslim men unless the man converts to Islam.[8] Children born to a Muslim father are considered Muslims without regard to the mother's faith.

Incidents

Algeria was ranked 42nd in the 2018 Open Doors World Watch List of countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian.[9]

On 8th March 2018, two brothers, who had been arrested in March 2015 for carrying Bibles, were sentenced at their appeal hearing to suspended sentences of three months each and a 100,000 dinar fine (about \$900)[10]

On 2nd March 2018, a church that had been running for over six years had to close after receiving an official notification. In the three preceding months, three EPA-affiliated^[11] churches in the region of Oran were also forced to close.^[12]

In December 2017, Louis Martinez of the French Reformed Church was deported upon arrival at Oran's airport. Although no official reasons were given, it was reported that "Algerian church leaders note that this deportation is consistent with a wider pattern of denial of visas for church visitors, which seems to be part of a policy whereby the Algerian authorities are restricting the ability of Algerian churches to partner with outside entities"^[13]

In July 2017, a Christian convert from Islam, Slimane Bouhafis, received a partial Presidential pardon. He had been arrested in July 2016 and had been accused of "insulting Islam and the prophet Muhammad" in his social media posts. On the occasion of the 55th anniversary of Algeria's independence, Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika reduced his sentence by 16 months.^[14]

In September 2017, Mohamed Fali, the head of the country's tiny Ahmadiyya community was found guilty of "offending Islam" and was given a six-month suspended sentence, according to his lawyer, Salah Dabouz^[15]

There are believed to be about 2,000 Ahmadi Muslims in Algeria. They are considered heretics and have recently been victims of a crackdown by Algerian authorities.^[16]

The Minister of Religious Affairs, Mohamed Aissa,^[17] has stated on more than one occasion that the Ahmadi Muslims in Algeria are manipulated by "a foreign hand" and has accused their leaders of collusion with Israel.^[18] He has also said that their presence is part of a "deliberate sectarian invasion" and indicated that the Government aims to "stop deviation from religious precepts". In a television interview in February 2017, he stated that Ahmadi Muslims are damaging the very basis of Islam.^[19]

Prospects for freedom of religion

Ordinance 06/03 remains a matter of concern. An opportunity was missed when the constitution was revised in February 2016. Article 2, which states that Islam is the religion of the State, was not amended.^[20] The President supported an amendment to article 36 which arguably would have explicitly guaranteed the right to freedom of religion and the right not to practise any religion. However, this amendment was blocked because of opposition from conservative Muslims.^[21]

Algerian Catholic Archbishop Paul Desfarges said, with reference to foreigners, that Christians in Algeria can practise their religion in freedom (“en toute liberté”). As for Muslim converts to Christianity, things are different. According to Monsignor Desfarges, they do not fear physical threats but are worried about social pressure and may face disadvantages when it comes to the inheritance of property. The Catholic Church is critical of the law criminalising proselytism. Monsignor Desfarges also complained about the slow process of granting visas to non-Muslim religious workers.^[22]

There is a concern about Daesh in neighbouring Libya and other Islamist groups operating in the country. Their presence has a negative effect on security in Algeria and increases religious tensions.^[23]

Endnotes / Sources

[1] Duane A Miller & Patrick Johnstone, ‘Believers in Christ from a Muslim Background: A Global Census’, *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, Volume 11 2015, pp. 1-19, p. 14, http://www.academia.edu/16338087/Believers_in_Christ_from_a_Muslim_Background_A_Global_Census (accessed 18th March 2018).

[2] *Journal Officiel de la République Algérienne Démocratique et Populaire. Conventions et accords inter-nationaux – Lois et décrets arrêtés, décisions, avis, communications et annonces (traduction française)*, 7 mars 2016, N° 14 55ème année, p. 5, https://www.joradp.dz/FTP/jo_francais/2016/F2016014.pdf, (accessed 18th March 2018).

[3] *Ibid*, p. 7.

[4] *Ibid*, p. 16.

[5] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2016 Report on International Religious Freedom – Algeria, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/269128.pdf>, (accessed 12th March 2018).

[6] Global Legal Research Directorate, ‘Algeria,’ *Laws Criminalizing Apostasy*, Library of Congress, http://www.loc.gov/law/help/apostasy/#_ftn11, (accessed 18th March 2018); Ali Amzal, ‘La loi interdit le prosélytisme’, *L’Expression*, 27 Octobre 2015, <http://www.l'expressiondz.com/actualite/228266-la-loi-in-terdit-le-proselytisme.html>, (accessed 20th March 2018).

[7] ‘Algeria: Stop Persecuting a Religious Minority’, Human Rights Watch, 4th September 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/04/algeria-stop-persecuting-religious-minority>, (accessed 29th March 2018).

[8] Article 30 of the Algerian Family Code, *Le mariage en droit algérien*, <http://www.cicade.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Le-mariage-en-droit-alg%C3%A9rien.pdf>, (accessed 29th March 2018); The Algerian family code resulting from the law of 9th of June 1984 has been modified by the ordinance n ° 05-02 of 27th of February 2005.

[9] ‘World Watch List: Algeria’, Open Doors. Serving persecuted Christian worldwide, 2018, <https://www.opendoors.org.za/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/algeria/>, (accessed 29th March 2018).

[10] The two brothers intend to appeal this 8th of March sentence, and benefit from EPA’s (Eglise Protestante d’Algérie)

legal aid. 'Algeria government criticised over heavy fines for transporting Bibles', World Watch Monitor, 16th March 2018, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/03/algeria-government-criticised-over-heavy-fines-for-transporting-bibles/>, (accessed 29th March 2018).

[11] Eglise Protestante d'Algérie, Algeria's main Protestant-church body, officially recognised by the government since 1974.

[12] 'Algeria closes fourth church in four months', World Watch Monitor, 22nd March 2018, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/03/algeria-closes-fourth-church-in-four-months/>, (accessed 29th March 2018).

[13] 'Sentencing of pastor adds to uptick in persecution in Algeria', Morning Star, 12th March 2018, <https://morningstarnews.org/2018/03/sentencing-of-pastor-adds-to-uptick-in-persecution-in-algeria/>, (accessed 29th March 2018).

[14] 'Jailed Algerian Christian receives partial presidential pardon', World Watch Monitor, 12th July 2017, <https://wwrn.org/articles/47075/>, (accessed 29th March 2018).

[15] 'Ahmadiyya Community's local Head convicted of blasphemy in Algeria', The Express Tribune, 14th September 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1505904/ahmadiyya-communitys-local-head-convicted-blasphemy-algeria/>, (accessed 29th March 2018).

[16] 'Algeria's Ahmadis forced to worship behind closed doors', The New Arab, 26th August 2017, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/society/2017/8/26/algerias-ahmadis-forced-to-worship-behind-closed-doors>, (accessed 29th March 2018).

[17] 'Mohamed Aïssa : «Notre référent religieux est menacé par une invasion sectaire»', Algérie patriotique, 9th October 2016, <https://www.algeriepatriotique.com/2016/10/09/mohamed-aissa-notre-referent-religieux-est-menace-par-une-invasion-sectaire/>, (accessed 29th March 2018).

[18] July 2017.

[19] Interview of Mohamed Aïssa, Algerian Minister of Awqaf, Radio Algérie, 23rd February 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LvJxiWiyQ9U>, (accessed 20th March 2018).

[20] 'L'Algérie adopte une nouvelle constitution contestée par l'opposition', Le Parisien, 7 February 2016, http://www.leparisien.fr/international/l-algerie-a-adopte-une-nouvelle-constitution-contestee-par-l-opposition-07-02-2016-5523183.php#xtref=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.de%2Furl%3F-sa%3Dt%24rct%3Dj%24q%3D%24esrc%3Ds%24frm%3D1%24source%3Dweb%24cd%3D15%2cad%3Drja%24uact%3D8%24ved%3D0ahUKEwiz5NyhvpPMAhXJ2ywKHxs_AMY4ChAWC4wBA%24url%3Dhttp%253A%252F%252Fwww.leparisien.fr%252Finternational%252Fl-algerie-a-adopte-une-nouvel-le-constitution-contestee-par-l-opposition-07-02-2016-5523183.php%24usg%3DAFQjCNF8usXtJ0Cje-EUSQmj5v4_uX7bCA%24bvm%3Dbv.119745492%2Cd.bGg, (accessed 10th April 2018).

[21] 'Révision de la constitution. Une pomme de discorde nommée liberté de culte', Algérie Focus, 15th December 2015, <http://www.algerie-focus.com/2015/12/revision-de-la-constitutionla-liberte-de-culte-au-sein-du-palais-del-mouradia/>, (accessed 10 April 2018).

[22] Amayas Zmirli, 'Algérie – Mgr Paul Desfarges : « Nous préférons continuer à parier sur le vivre-ensemble »', Le Point, 24 December 2017, http://afrique.lepoint.fr/culture/algerie-mgr-paul-desfarges-nous-preferons-continuer-a-parier-sur-le-vivre-ensemble-24-12-2017-2182289_2256.php, (accessed 10th April 2018).

[23] Tunisia army clashes with armed group on Algeria border', Middle East Monitor, 29th March 2018, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180329-tunisia-army-clashes-with-armed-group-on-algeria-border/>, (accessed 10th April 2018).