

THE ENDURING IMPACT OF FRENCH COLONIALISM IN ALGERIA

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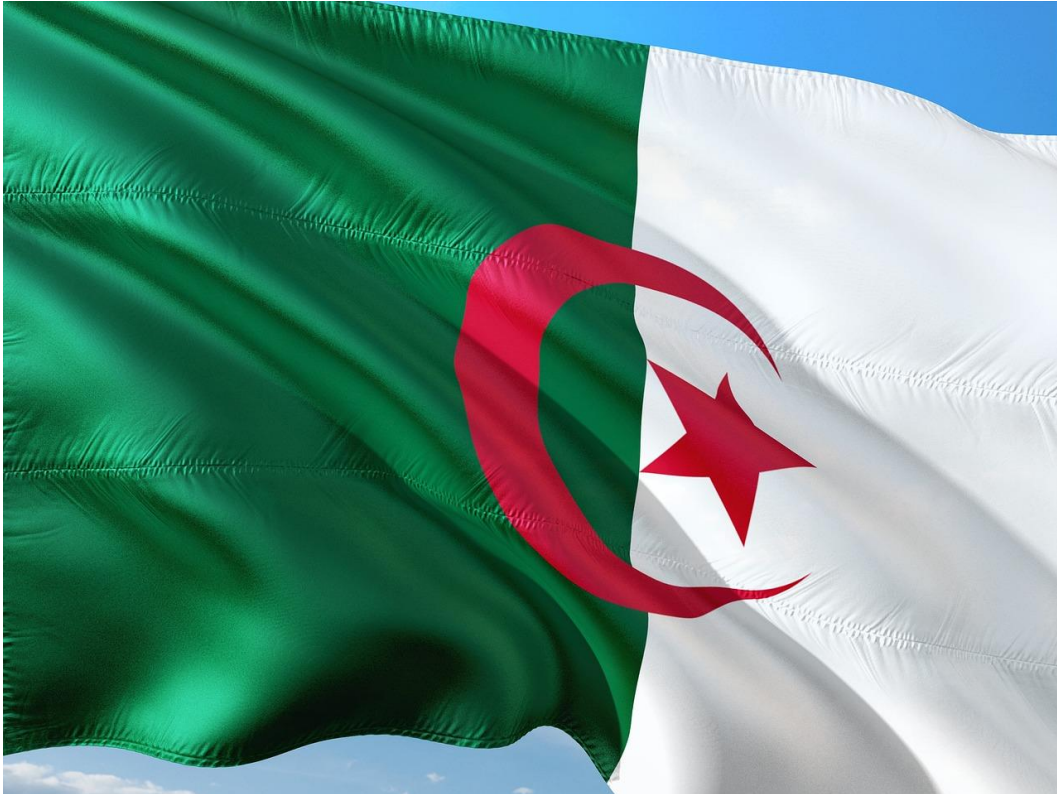


Figure 1 - pixabay.com/es/photos/internacional-bandera-algeria-2684751/

Introduction

Algeria is the biggest country in Africa. It has a fascinating mix of history and culture that often doesn't get much attention worldwide. Even though it's not a top tourist spot, Algeria has much to offer with its different landscapes, exciting heritage, and welcoming people. This report explores Algeria's precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial epochs to explore its complex relationship with France. By presenting an overview of the nation's history, economy, and politics, this report aims to shed light on crucial considerations for engaging in business or social endeavours within The People's Democratic Republic of Algeria. Through understanding these dynamics, stakeholders can navigate the terrain more adeptly, fostering mutually beneficial outcomes for all involved parties.

Understanding Algeria: A Look into its History, Culture, and Socio-Political Landscape



Figure 2: El Mansourah Mosque, Tlemcen, Algeria –

[Almansourah Tlemcen - Free photo on Pixabay - Pixabay](#)

Algeria's history can be understood across distinct epochs: pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial. The country's precolonial period is marked by the vibrancy of Amazigh civilizations. The term "Amazigh" is preferred to the commonly used "Berber" as it has more respectful connotations. The Imazighen (plural of Amazigh) have a rich and ancient history that spans thousands of years. Indigenous to North Africa, these communities have been present across Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso (Aïtel, 2014; Youcef, 2020: 85). Archaeological findings suggest that the Imazighen have inhabited the region for at least several millennia, potentially dating back to prehistoric times. Their cultural and linguistic heritage is one of the oldest in North Africa, with roots deeply intertwined with the history of the Maghreb and Saharan regions (Ferguson & Muscato, 2023).

In the 7th and 8th centuries, during the Arab conquest of North Africa, Algeria came under Arab influence (Abdulrazak, 1982: 30). The spread of Islam, Islamic traditions, and the Arabic language began to take root in the region. It was during the mediaeval period, particularly under the rule of the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties in the 11th and 12th centuries, that Arabisation intensified. Arabic became the dominant language of official administration, education, and literature, shaping the linguistic identity of Algeria. Despite the diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of Algeria's population, Arabisation continued to advance over the centuries, reinforced by the establishment of Arab-Islamic empires and the influence of religious institutions.

Following the Arabisation period, Algeria's history took a significant turn with the arrival of European colonial powers, particularly the French, in the 19th century. Algeria fell under French colonial rule in 1830, marking the beginning of a turbulent chapter in its history (Croisy, 2008; Christelow, 2012: 1). The colonial era was characterised by the Algerian population's exploitation, oppression, and resistance. The struggle for independence gained momentum throughout the 20th century, culminating in Algeria's hard-fought independence in 1962 after a long and bloody liberation war. The post-independence period was marked by efforts to rebuild the nation and establish a new socio-political order. Algeria underwent various phases, including socialist reforms, political turmoil, and attempts at democratisation. The country also faced challenges such as economic instability, social unrest, and the rise of militant extremism.

The Civil War (1991 – 2002) in Algeria, known as "La décennie noire" (the Black Decade), was a brutal and devastating conflict that engulfed the nation and led to international isolation. Stemming from the cancellation of the country's first multiparty elections in the early 1990s, the confrontation quickly escalated into widespread violence and chaos (Khettab, 2015; Ghanem, 2021). Islamist armed groups launched attacks against government targets, security forces, and civilians, sparking a violent retaliation from the Algerian government. The ensuing conflict led to various human rights abuses, including massacres and atrocities committed by both sides, resulting in a staggering loss of life and displacement (Khettab, 2015). The profound impact of the Civil War on Algerian society, politics, and economy continues, even though the conflict began to subside towards the end of the decade.

In contemporary Algeria, the postcolonial legacy continues to shape the nation's socio-political landscape. Since gaining independence in 1962, Algeria has undergone significant transformations, grappling with political stability, economic development, and social justice issues. The National Liberation Front (FLN) has dominated the country's political scene since independence (Connelly, 2002). However, recent years have seen growing demands for political reform and greater democratic participation. Economic challenges, including high unemployment rates and reliance on hydrocarbon exports, have underscored the need for diversification and reform. Additionally, social tensions persist, fuelled by disparities in wealth distribution, regional inequalities, and youth discontent (Croisy, 2008). Both progress and challenges mark Algeria's postcolonial journey as the nation seeks to navigate its path towards a more inclusive and prosperous future while confronting the legacies of its colonial past.

As of the current political situation, Algeria is undergoing a transition period. Following mass protests in 2019 that led to the resignation of long-time FLN President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the country has seen some political reforms to address popular demands for greater transparency and accountability (Kaschula &

Kretzer, 2019). A new president, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, was elected in December 2019, and subsequent constitutional amendments were approved in a referendum in 2020. However, challenges persist, including ongoing protests by some communities demanding deeper reforms and concerns about the influence of the military and entrenched elites on the political landscape. The COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted Algeria, highlighting socio-economic vulnerabilities and testing the government's capacity to respond effectively to crises (Ghebouli, 2024). Overall, Algeria's political situation remains fluid, with the trajectory of reforms and the balance of power between various actors continuing to evolve.

The Ongoing Trauma of the Algerian War of Independence

Algeria's historical narrative is characterised by turbulent events and many dark periods (Christelow, 2012: 1). After 130 years of French occupation, the trauma of Algeria's fight for independence continues to cast a long shadow over Algerian society. This conflict, referred to as the Franco-Algerian War or The Algerian War of Independence, lasted from 1954 to 1962 and was marked by unparalleled brutality (Celarent, 2011: 2066). It consisted of extreme violence and widespread human rights abuses, inflicting deep scars on both Algerian and French populations. For Algerians, the war represents a painful chapter of the struggle for independence marked by immense suffering and loss of life. The legacy of displacement, torture, and atrocities endured during this period persists in collective memory, influencing perceptions of identity, justice, and reconciliation. Much of French activity was censored and hidden in secret official documents, obstructing the retrieval of and allegedly destroying Algeria's archives during the colonial period (The New Arab, 2020). France works hard to hide activities such as concentration camps in the Sahara, among other gruesome acts, so as not to distort its reputation and its image of a civilised country that upholds democratic values and protects human rights.

Following the end of French occupation in 1962, Algeria initiated a process of re-Arabisation in its administration to distance itself from colonial rule's traumatic legacy and construct a postcolonial identity (Croisy, 2008: 84, 92). This re-Arabisation, stemming from the methods of French rule, marked by violence and power imbalances, reinforced a colonial dynamic between France and Algeria even after decolonisation, exacerbating tensions and entrenching colonial identities (Lee, 2015: 183). While the officialisation of classical Arabic was intended to unify the nation, it marginalised languages like Tamazight, the language of the Imazghen (Croisy, 2008: 92, 93; McDougall, 2011: 251). This led to constant protests by Amazigh communities to officialise and stop the marginalisation of indigenous Algerian culture by Arab culture. The trauma of the French-Algerian War, combined with the civil war in the 1990s, deepened societal wounds and left Algerian society fractured, highlighting the lasting impact of colonialism and internal conflict.

Today, Algeria continues to grapple with its fractured identity as it navigates its complex history and politics (Maamri, 2016). Aside from this, in terms of human development indicators, Algeria ranks relatively high compared to many other African countries, with notable achievements in education and healthcare. The government has made strides in reducing poverty and improving access to essential services, although inequalities persist, particularly between urban and rural areas (UNDP, 2022).



Figure 3: The Casbah, Algiers, Algeria - [Alger Algeria City - Free photo on Pixabay - Pixabay](#)

Managing Political Relations: France and Algeria Dynamics

Navigating the political dynamics between France and Algeria is complex. The balancing of historical trauma with contemporary diplomatic relations influences their relationship. In 2022, Algeria removed French as an official language and banned its use in official activities. However, with approximately 15 million Algerians speaking French, the language is functional in Algerian society, particularly in education, media, and business (TRT Afrika, 2023). This conventional use of the French language reveals a closer affinity to French among specific communities of the population than to classical Arabic (Fusha) (Kaschula & Kretzer, 2019). This linguistic duality is a testament to Algeria's colonial past's complexities and subsequent efforts to assert independence and cultural identity. Memory politics also play a significant role. Specifically, France's refusal to acknowledge the full extent of its colonial history and the atrocities committed during the French-Algerian War. This refusal to reckon with the past has strained diplomatic relations between the two nations and perpetuated lingering tensions.

Algeria is treading a precarious path, balancing memory politics and contemporary issues in its relationship with France. The legacy of colonialism and the trauma of the French-Algerian War cast a long shadow over Algerian collective memory, shaping perceptions of historical injustices and fuelling demands for acknowledgement and reconciliation (Ghanem, 2021). Algeria's decision to remove French as an official language and ban its use in official activities in 2022 reflects a desire to assert independence and confront the lingering effects of colonial rule. However, the reality of linguistic and economic interdependence between Algeria and France underscores the complexities of their relationship (Kaschula & Kretzer, 2019: 14). This delicate balancing act reflects Algeria's ongoing efforts to assert its identity, promote historical justice, and pursue pragmatic diplomacy in its relationship with France.

There has been some improvement in these tensions. For example, French President Emmanuel Macron is the only president to have visited Algeria and has made notable gestures towards addressing memory politics concerning France's colonial past and its relationship with Algeria. Macron's approach has called for reconciliation and attempts to foster dialogue on contentious issues. One significant moment came in 2017 when Macron acknowledged France's responsibility for the systemic use of torture during the Algerian War of Independence, describing it as a "crime against humanity" (France 24, 2017). This statement marked a departure from previous French presidents' positions and was a step towards acknowledging the darker aspects of France's colonial history. However, Macron's approach to memory politics has also been criticised. Some argue that his actions need to be revised and that more concrete steps are needed to address colonialism's ongoing impact and promote genuine reconciliation between France and its former colonies. Critics point to France's reluctance to issue formal apologies or provide reparations for colonial-era injustices as evidence of a lack of genuine commitment to reckoning with the past.

Algeria's Pursuit of Economic Autonomy Beyond France and the CFA Franc

The CFA franc, initially established by France during colonial times, is used in West African and Central African countries. It comes in two variants: the West African CFA franc (XOF) for eight West African nations and the Central African CFA franc (XAF) for six Central African countries. "CFA" stands for "Communauté Financière Africaine" or "Coopération Financière en Afrique," reflecting its French financial institution ties (The CFA Franc System, 1963). Pegged to the euro, the currency's fixed exchange rates and reserves tied to French treasury bonds aim to provide stability, facilitating trade within the Francophone region (Gurtner, 1999). However, critics argue that it perpetuates economic dependence on France and limits economic sovereignty, branding it a neo-imperial tool. Algeria was not officially part of the CFA initiative, and after gaining independence from France in 1962, it chose to forge its own path regarding monetary policies. Algeria established its own Central Bank (Banque Centrale d'Algerie) to replace the former Bank of Algeria (Banque d'Algerie) and established the Algerian dinar (DZD) as its national currency, marking a significant step towards economic autonomy (Chekouri et al., 2022; Dris, 2022). However, Algeria did maintain a fixed peg of its national currency to the French franc for over ten years, from 1964 to 1974 (Chekouri et al., 2022).

While Algeria maintains economic and diplomatic ties with some CFA franc-using countries, particularly those in the Francophonie, it has not adopted the CFA franc or participated in the monetary arrangements associated with it. Consequently, Algeria's economic interactions with CFA franc-using countries are primarily conducted through bilateral agreements, regional organisations, or multilateral frameworks rather than through a shared currency. Economically, Algeria's reliance on hydrocarbon exports has contributed to its status as one of Africa's wealthiest nations in terms of GDP per capita. However, this wealth is accompanied by significant socio-economic challenges, including high unemployment rates, particularly among youth, and disparities in wealth distribution. Moreover, Algeria's economic growth has been hindered by its dependence on oil and gas revenues, making it vulnerable to fluctuations in global energy prices.

Algeria's economic relationship with France is multifaceted. Since gaining independence, Algeria has maintained significant economic ties with its former colonial ruler. France remains one of Algeria's largest trading partners, with bilateral trade spanning various sectors, including energy, manufacturing, and agriculture (Talahite & Patnaik, 2021). France is a significant source of foreign investment in Algeria,

particularly in sectors such as telecommunications, construction, and finance. Additionally, Algeria hosts a large Algerian diaspora in France, whose remittances contribute to the country's economy. However, the economic relationship between Algeria and France is not without challenges. Disparities in economic power and unequal trade relations have led to criticisms of neocolonialism and dependency on the part of Algeria. Moreover, fluctuations in global commodity prices, political tensions, and divergent economic policies can impact the stability of the economic ties between the two countries. Despite these complexities, the economic interdependence between Algeria and France underscores the enduring legacy of their historical ties and their relationship's importance in shaping both nations' economic landscape.

Algeria's Foreign Relations: Divergence from France

With its unwavering determination and resilience, Algeria has strategically navigated its foreign relations to assert its independence from France while expanding its international engagement beyond traditional Western powers. Emerging from a period of isolation during the Civil War in the 1990s, Algeria actively diversified its international partnerships beyond France, engaging with various countries in Africa, and Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA).

Algeria prioritised engagement with non-Western countries, particularly in the global south, fostering South-South relations. Algeria has strengthened its relations with other African states through the African Union (AU). This was especially the case during the decolonisation period of the 1960s, where Algeria supplied financial, political, and military support to fellow African nations seeking liberation while also promoting African unity and advocating for fairer economic relations between Africa and the global market (Zoubir, 2013: 39). For example, Algeria initiated a plan to integrate Arab-African dialogue into a broader international strategy, aiming to empower countries to control their natural resources and serve as a bridge between Africa, SWANA, and Europe (Zoubir, 2013: 44, 45). Algeria has also played pivotal roles in mediating conflicts in neighbouring countries such as Libya and Mali, demonstrating its commitment to regional stability and integration. Algeria's active involvement in initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area showcased its leadership in driving forward regional development agendas beyond its immediate borders. Furthermore, Algeria has been instrumental in counter-terrorism efforts in Africa, providing intelligence, military support, and training to countries facing extremist threats. Its experience in combating terrorism domestically, particularly during its Civil War era, has positioned Algeria as a critical ally in the fight against terrorism across the continent for African and European powers (Embassy of Algeria, 2023).

Overall, Algeria's efforts to separate itself from France reflect a broader aspiration to assert sovereignty, independence, and a distinct national identity on the global stage. While historical ties with France continue to shape Algeria's foreign relations, proactive engagement with a diverse range of countries underscores its determination to chart its own course independently of its colonial past. Algeria demonstrates its commitment

to forging its path in the international arena through diplomatic initiatives and economic diversification with non-Western partners.



Figure 4: East-West Highway, Algeria - [Algeria Tlemcen](#) - Free photo on [Pixabay](#) - Pixabay

Mapping the Future: Navigating Algeria's Evolving Partnership with China

As Algeria charts its future trajectory, one non-Western partner that has been heavily involved in Algeria is China. Central to this partnership is China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a global infrastructure development strategy aiming to enhance connectivity and trade between China and other regions (Hanauer & Morris, 2014). The BRI presents significant opportunities for developing motorways, railways, ports, and other critical infrastructure projects in Algeria. These projects have the potential to bolster Algeria's economic growth, improve transportation networks, and enhance its connectivity within the region and beyond – this is particularly important given the neglect of rural communities, especially those in the mountainous areas or nomadic communities in the Sahara. For instance, under the BRI, China has invested in constructing the East-West Highway in Algeria, a vital transportation artery spanning the country from the Tunisian border to the Moroccan border. This highway project aims to enhance connectivity, facilitate trade, and promote economic development across Algeria (Hanauer & Morris, 2014). Additionally, China is supporting the construction of a 6,000 km railway in Algiers. This major urban transportation project will create a metro system in the capital, making commuting more accessible for the residents. (Rédaction Africanews, 2023).

While these projects offer significant economic development and modernisation benefits, they also raise valid concerns about debt sustainability, potential environmental impacts, and potential loss of local autonomy. Algeria, however, is not navigating these complexities blindly. It is taking careful steps to ensure its partnership with China serves its long-term interests while safeguarding its sovereignty and environmental sustainability. As Algeria strives to maximise the benefits of its collaboration with China while mitigating risks, it does so with meticulous strategic planning and a commitment to transparent governance. These pillars will ensure infrastructure projects align with Algeria's long-term development goals and contribute to sustainable growth and prosperity.

Conclusion

This report has offered concise insights into Algeria's history, current socio-political landscape, foreign relations, and economic trajectory. It aims to be a valuable resource for those seeking collaboration with Algeria. Understanding the country's historical, cultural, and political context is paramount for entities wishing to engage with Algeria successfully. Algeria values its sovereignty and autonomy, emphasising partnerships founded on mutual respect and benefit. Therefore, potential collaborators should approach engagements sensitively to Algeria's aspirations for self-determination. Demonstrating a commitment to sustainable development and environmental stewardship can further strengthen partnerships with Algeria, aligning with the nation's long-term objectives. Moreover, fostering open communication channels and building trust-based relationships is crucial for effectively navigating Algeria's dynamic and evolving landscape.

As Algeria shapes its future, several key considerations will influence its trajectory. Firstly, Algeria must prioritise economic diversification to reduce reliance on hydrocarbon exports and foster sustainable growth. Investing in renewable energy, agriculture, and manufacturing sectors can create job opportunities, enhance resilience to global market fluctuations, and spur innovation. Secondly, addressing social and political reforms is essential for fostering inclusive development and addressing grievances among the population. This includes improving governance, tackling corruption, and promoting transparency and accountability in public institutions. But perhaps the most inspiring aspect of Algeria's future is its youth. Algeria needs to invest in education and skill development to harness the potential of its youthful population and foster a knowledge-based economy. This investment is not just in infrastructure but in the future of Algeria itself.

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