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## GLOBAL POSITION AND FUTURE OF ALGERIA AFTER THE REVOLUTION OF SMILES

### *Abstract:*

Algeria is a country of notable history of the fight for independence. Liberated in 1962, it came a long way of civil war and instability to the current point of international significance in Africa. In 2019 the country once again encountered a turbulent point. The Revolution of Smiles led to the overthrowing of Algeria's long-term president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika. This paper analyzes the history of the country as well as the events of the protests and acts as an attempt to predict the further progression of the Revolution of Smiles.

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### *Key words:*

Algeria, revolution, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, peaceful protests, Africa

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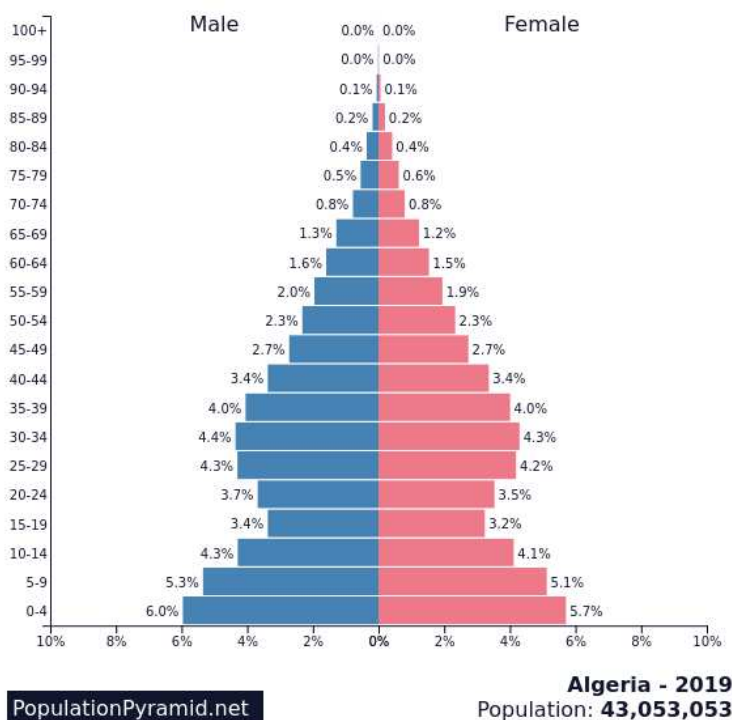
## **INTRODUCTION**

Algeria, extending from the South-West coast of the Mediterranean Sea to the Hoggar Mountains, is the largest African country. With French, Spanish, Mediterranean, Arab, and Berber influences it is a truly multicultural melting pot. Moreover, it is considered to be one of the "young countries" with a median age of 28.5 years<sup>1</sup>. Population density is highest in the northern part of the country as 80% of Algeria's territory

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<sup>1</sup> Worldometers, *Algeria Population*, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/algeria-population/>, accessed: 30.05.2020.

is covered with the Sahara sands. The most significant cities are Algiers - the capital, Oran, and Constantine. The first two are the main seaports with Oran being a container terminal too. Algeria's economy remains dependant on the export of energy resources, mainly petroleum and natural gas, which provides up to 60% of budget revenues<sup>2</sup>. Algeria's past tells a story of subordination to other nations and a constant fight for freedom – even after formally reclaiming it.



**Figure 1: Algeria's Population Pyramid**  
(source: <https://www.populationpyramid.net/algeria/2019/>)

This paper focuses on analyzing and predicting the influence of the Revolution of Smiles on Algeria. Being a significant country on the international stage and having a rich and intricate colonial past, Algeria approaches a new phase in its history. Algeria's peaceful protests were an exquisite phenomenon on a global scale. Lasting over a year, they led to overthrowing the president and the prime minister and left

<sup>2</sup>Algeria. *Przewodnik po rynku*, 2018, Polska Agencja Inwestycji i Handlu S.A.

Algeria with an opportunity to redefine its future. The succeeding pages will set the historical context, allowing to properly understand Algeria's current position, analyze the protests and their consequences, and determine possible scenarios for Algeria's further development.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND ITS REPERCUSSIONS**

From the very origins of its history, Algeria connected Europe with Africa and the Middle East. Its advantageous location, as well as resources, were the cause of six major invasions, two of which took place in ancient times. Later in time, the country has been invaded by the Vandals, the Byzantine Empire, the Arabs, and Turkey. The last conqueror has subsequently yielded his place to France, who occupied the Algerian soil until the country liberated in 1962. Furthermore, the latter two occupiers overlooked the territory of Algeria in the XIX and XX century so their impact can be discerned to the present day (McDougall, 2017).



**Figure 2: The Territory of Algeria**

(source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ag.html>)

The Ottoman Algeria was a rural society in which the agriculture generated the country's prosperity. Agricultural production was attainable in the desert climate due to specific underground canal structures and irrigation systems (McDougall, 2017). Nowadays agriculture is the source of employment for approximately 10% of Algeria's citizens and generates 10% of the country's GDP.<sup>3</sup> Despite such strong workforce engagement, this sector remains ineffective due to State interference, insufficient foreign investments, and daunting seasonal droughts. Additionally, the Ottoman period resulted in a specific legal comprehension of land property. In addition in the past rights to land use were dictated by the labor cultivating it. This legislation remains significant in the history of Algeria as it has been interpreted during the French rule as collective and communal. It allowed the heredity of the "right to labor" often financially foreclosing women who were seen as inadequate and unqualified for such work. Such legal a division of land exacerbated social stratification. In terms of economy, the Ottoman period enriched Algeria in the textile field and trade and provoked intensified development of cities. The political class was considered elite and held undivided governing and military power, inaccessible for the citizens (McDougall, 2017).

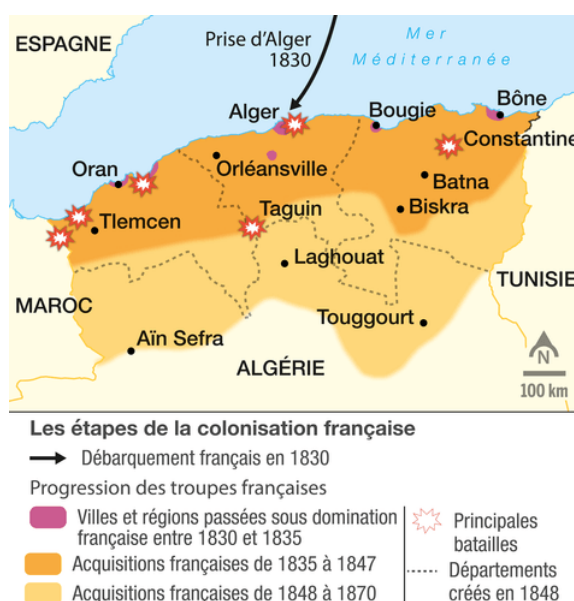
The new European order emerged from the Congress of Vienna. It not only reshaped Europe but also affected the rest of the world, especially countries which remained in tight restraints with the continent. In the name of liberation and peacemaking, the United Kingdom tried to put an end to piracy in Algeria as it was a common practice there at the time. First, through peaceful negotiations, next by bombarding the country, the United Kingdom established the new system on the African territory. These measures paved the way for future French colonialism (Bouchène, 2014).

The year 1830 marks a new chapter in the history of Algeria. French army landed on the Sidi Fredj beach in the vicinity of Algiers and therefore commenced the period of French occupation. Even though it lasted practically until the liberation in 1962, initially the occupation was not thoroughly planned by France. France was not convinced about the plans

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<sup>3</sup> *Algieria. Przewodnik po rynku*, op.cit.

for colonization until 1834, which resulted in the lack of a clear political vision and chaotic, inconsistent intentions towards the country. France participated in the colonial competition and aimed to augment its leverage in the region. Its main competitor in the Mediterranean area was the United Kingdom. France noticed a prospect in taking over the fading Ottoman influence in Northern Africa. The colonization was iterative; between 1830 and 1835 France took over main seaside cities such as Oran, Algiers, Bône, and Bougie. Further penetration of the Algerian land took place between 1835 and 1847 as well as 1848 and 1870. The profound Sahara part became occupied during the 1870 and 1930 period. Algeria's hero and religious leader, Abdelkader ibn Muhieddine al-Hasani, conducted protests against French colonization and was responsible for mediations with the occupant. Eventually, Abdelkader was compelled to surrender in 1847. Since then the French influence accelerated, leading to establishing the Ministry of Algeria and the colonies between 1858 and 1860. The situation worsened for the Algerians as France reintroduced the institution of the governor-generalship. Moreover, the country got afflicted with famine and disease between 1867 and 1868 (Bouchène, 2014).



**Figure 3: Phases of the French Colonization of Algeria**  
(source: <https://www.lelivrescolaire.fr/page/16858697>)

Such aggravation resulted in a major Algerian revolt between 1871 and 1872. These incidents were the foundation of the *Jeune Algérie* movement. It is considered a turning point in French-Algerian relations. The buoyant importance of the movement induced a significant increase in the negotiating power of the Algerians. Representatives of the movement met with French officials in Paris in 1912. Since 1919 the Clemenceau government introduced rather frugal reforms. Therefore, resistance and political opposition gradually emanated in Algeria. 1926 marks the foundation of *Étoile Nord-Africaine* – organization often called the forerunner of the *Front de Libération Nationale (FLN)* which eventually liberated Algeria. The resistance continued during the war, with the *Union Démocratique du Manifeste Algérien (UDMA)* being formed in 1946. It entailed the formation of the *Mouvement Pour le Triomphe de Libertés Démocratiques* for electoral purposes. The aforementioned events led to revolutionary activities stimulated by the *Comité Révolutionnaire d'Unité et d'Action (CRUA)* and thereby to the beginning of the war of national liberation, relevant in the context of Abdelaziz Bouteflika's subsequent presidency (Naylor, 2015).

## **THE WAR OF NATIONAL LIBERATION AND ABDELAZIZ BOUTEFLIKA'S REGIME**

Unhesitant to strive for freedom and encouraged by the defeat of the French army in Diên Biên Phu in Vietnam, the *Front de Libération Nationale* created an army and, despite internal issues in the organization, managed to promote the revolutionary environment within the country. France, with army potential as high as 80 000 soldiers, responded with indiscriminate violence by bombing the cities and forcing the Algerian citizens to seek refuge. The 1956 discovery of large oil and natural gas reserves in the Sahara put lucrative Algeria at stake for the French. The FLN organized the *Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens (UGTA)*, the union of workers) and further defined its policy for future activism. In September 1956 the battle of Algiers commenced. Its end is symbolized by the execution of one of the guerilla leaders, Ali la Pointe. The

Algerian war aggravated the political situation in the already unstable French Fourth Republic. The *Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne (GPRA)* got established as a form of the temporary Algerian government. Meanwhile, Charles de Gaulle proclaimed the Constantine Plan aiming to equalize the socio-economic disparities in Algeria. After the detonation of an atomic bomb on the Sahara desert, negotiations began. On the 20 December 1960, the United Nations recognized Algeria's right to self-determination as a country which has been later on reinforced in the French referendum in 1961. In 1962, after 132 years of occupation, Algeria ultimately became a liberated, autonomous country (Naylor, 2015).

Irrespective of the liberation, Algeria still had to endure diverse problems of internal nature such as establishing the government and defining its future as an independent country. In 1963 Algeria proclaimed its constitution and elected Ben Bella for president. Soon after, the conflict with Morocco, called the war of sands, erupted. Ben Bella got overthrown by Houari Boumedienne in 1965. The economy was state-planned and Algeria launched the nationalization of mines, companies, and banks which has noticeable consequences in modern times. Algeria thoroughly conducted both the Cultural and Agrarian Revolution, becoming a leader of the Third World countries in terms of development. The following Chadli Benjedid administration was a troubled and challenging period. The "Berber Spring", an earthquake, the petroleum prices plunge as well as reoccurring riots aggravated the country's situation. The French occupation consolidated the spirit of Arab nationalism in Algeria. Further conflicts between Islamist extremists and the government led to the Civil War in Algeria which lasted from 1992 to 1999 and resulted in the presidency of Abdelaziz Bouteflika (Naylor, 2015). The Algerian civil war left the country in a serious economic, social, and cultural crisis that the new president had to address properly (Kasznik-Christian, 2008). The new president who seemed to set the country into new, better directions, over time turned out to be yet another menace for Algeria's rule of law.





**Figure 4: President Abdelaziz Bouteflika**

(source: [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abd\\_al-Aziz\\_Buteflika](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abd_al-Aziz_Buteflika))

Abdelaziz Bouteflika emerged from the core of resistance during colonial times. Fighting on behalf of the FLN against the French rule, Bouteflika was appointed minister for youth, sports, and tourism after liberation, and a year later was made foreign minister. After becoming president in 1999 he focused on restoring the country and ameliorating its international position. His endeavors to abbreviate Islamist-driven conflicts were inefficient as the Islamist insurgents formed a branch of Al-Qaeda and operated various suicide bombings. Moreover, Islamist violence appeared in western Algeria in 2001. re-elected in 2004, Bouteflika faced grave health problems, yet remained in power until 2019 despite citizen's objections and protests. Islamist bombings intensified in the country, causing internal issues. The international situation of Algeria could be considered stable and progressive as exemplified by the arms deal and debt forgiveness with Russia and an agreement with Niger and Nigeria on a trans-Saharan gas line. 2009 was supposed to account for the last year of Bouteflika's presidency, yet after introducing a change in the Algerian



constitution, he got elected to a third term. In 2010 Algeria joined Mauritania, Mali, and Niger to collaboratively defy terrorism. 2011 designated the beginning of social dissatisfaction with escalating protests over elevated food prices and high unemployment. Despite his stroke in 2013, Bouteflika announced his candidacy for the presidency and was once again re-elected in 2014. The opposition was restrained and the re-election caused the society to undermine the legitimacy of the elections (Naylor, 2015). President Abdelaziz Bouteflika ceased to appear publicly, nonetheless, he announced his fifth presidential candidacy in 2019. The announcement gave rise to intense social dissent and resulted in one year of peaceful protests called the Revolution of Smiles.

## **PROTESTS AGAINST THE RE-ELECTION**

The protests erupted six days after Bouteflika had announced his candidacy. Unemployment as high as 25% among young people, monopoly of power lasting already 10 years, State-controlled media and economy as well as corruption and economic stagnation were, among others, the main reasons for people's outrage. Army veterans, firefighters, journalists, lawyers, students, and teachers marched in the protests. The beginning was characterized by tearing Bouteflika's posters and distributing information about the peaceful marches planned as a form of refusal to the fifth term of Bouteflika's presidency. Promoted in the social media, the protests amassed an estimated number of 800 000 people in the first and approximately 3 million in the second week. During the fourth week, the protests extended into the field of feminism with the action *Femmes Algériennes pour un Changement vers l'Égalité (FACE)* fighting for gender equality. Another group that joined the Revolution were students. Protests exerted pressure and resulted in the prime minister Ahmed Ouyahia and the Army Chief of Staff appealing to Bouteflika's resignation. On April 2<sup>nd</sup> Abdelaziz Bouteflika officially resigned from office. Therefore the constitutional procedure has been implemented and the president of the Council of the Nation, Abdelkader Bensalah, became acting

interim president until official elections. According to James McDougall, a specialist in Algeria, the military understood that it may need radical measures to hold the current system.



**Figure 5: The Revolution of Smiles**

(source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/01/world/africa/algeria-protests-bouteflika.html>)

The resignation of Bouteflika did not leave the Algerian people satisfied. They further demanded through protests the resignation of the prime minister, the acting interim president, and the Army Chief of Staff. Despite the peaceful character of the demonstrations, tear gas and water cannons were used towards the protestors. New elections were planned for the 12<sup>th</sup> of December but met another wave of society's objection being perceived by the people as staged and supportive of the old regime. The elections were held with an 8% voter turnout and detention of 1200 protestors. Further boycott and protest were interrupted by the outbreak of coronavirus in 2020.

The protests reached their goal and toppled Abdelaziz Bouteflika, present on the Algerian political scene for over 20 years. The power was temporarily held by Abdelkader Bensalah, just to be passed to Abdelmadjid Tebboune, perceived by the people as illegitimate. The protests left Algeria in a tipping point, with a realistic chance of overthrowing not only the president but also the whole obsolete regime. Suspended by the virus pandemic, the revolution cannot be

properly finished. Algeria remains on hold, not only because of COVID-19 like the rest of the world but also because of its uncertain and undefined political situation.

## **ALGERIA'S GLOBAL POSITION**

Mass civil protests always destabilize a country, especially if they last for such a long time and lead to major political changes. Algeria has been shaken from the inside. The internal stability has an influence on the global position of the country. One could argue that the sudden overthrow of Algeria's long-acting president would be a shock on the global political scene. In reality, it is worth emphasizing that Abdelaziz Bouteflika remained in position only *pro forma* as after his stroke in 2013 he was rarely seen in public and was not in full capacity to govern the country. Multiple accusations appeared throughout the years that the real power remained in the hands of other politicians, businessmen, and powerful military officials. That's why the overthrowing of Algeria's president and vice-president has not really changed the *status quo* in the country. The current political situation brings into question the further democratic development of Algeria. The rule of the military officials may worsen Algeria's global position in the field of human rights, diplomacy, and the rule of law. On the other hand, Algeria has the opportunity to finally fulfill its process of democratization which started with the war of national liberation and has been suspended by the perennial presidency of Abdelaziz Bouteflika. A reinforcement of the democratic values in the country will definitely be beneficial for the country in terms of the quality of people's lives as well as the country's international position.

Taking into consideration all the relevant factors such as Algerian past, the military power, society's desperation, and the current global situation, one can distinguish three main, most plausible scenarios for the future of Algeria.



Coronavirus Cases:

9,267

Deaths:

646

**Figure 6: Coronavirus in Algeria, May 30<sup>th</sup>**

(source: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/algeria/>)

What comes to mind first is the upholding of the status quo which is the political power lying in the hands of the military. Such a situation is rather common after societal uprisings and revolutions, which can be seen on the example of Cuba or Vietnam. Political power remaining in the hands of the military implies further restrictions considering public protestations, diminished freedom of speech, and repressions on all members of the opposition. Furthermore, the economic status quo would be upheld as well, pushing Algeria's economy into further-reaching reliance on the State. This scenario clearly does not meet the expectations of the Algerian society, which expects profound and effective reforms in the fields of economy, democratic rule, employment, international relations, security, combating terrorism, freedom of speech, human rights, and equality. Additionally, it bears a risk related to the economic deterioration caused by the lockdown of the global economy in the time of the pandemic.

Contrary to the above, it is plausible the Revolution of Smiles will take its influence even deeper, and revert even stronger after the pandemic of COVID-19. Seeing a real and tangible outcome of the protests, the young society of Algeria may strike again, mobilized more than ever, and overthrow the old regime in order to ultimately liberate the country. Such a scenario presents the image of Algeria entering a new reality in which it has to redefine itself as a country and set a new trajectory for its future development. The COVID-19 situation may enable such a process by giving enough time to the revolutionists to properly organize the interception. History has

proven the Algerians to be determined in their fight for freedom. An uprising similar to the one directed against colonial France is possible in the foreseeable future. The protests lasting over one year have truly revealed the power and the ascendancy of Algeria's society. Nevertheless, it is vital to keep in mind the disadvantageous position in terms of global interference. Algeria may not count on global support with other countries and organizations being primarily concentrated on fighting the pandemic and rebuilding their economies.

The second scenario provokes a deeper reflection on the nature of the protests. Although they were peaceful, it is worth taking into consideration the past tendencies of the Algerian society. With a wide background for nationalist tendencies, the country bears a risk of turning into an autocratic system once again and exchanging one dominant leader into another, who is going to occupy the political stage for decades despite the tremendous effort of those fighting for freedom and democracy for such a long time.

## SUMMARY

As a significant country with untapped potential, Algeria faces a tipping point in its history. It stands a chance to once and for all finally cut the ties linking it to its colonial past of dependence and weakness. Its favourable location, profitable natural resources, and a young, sturdy society are excellent conditions for enhanced development and consolidation of the international position. Furthermore, Algeria has set a profoundly inspirational and substantial pattern of the possibility of a peaceful, yet a still successful revolution. Lastly, Algeria once again can be the pioneer of progress, the same way it was in 1962 in the moment of its liberation.

The peaceful protests unraveled the inefficient system, unable to respond to the citizen's needs nor to create any form of a new social contract. The revolution of smiles created a political culture of social empowerment.

It remains unknown whether the Revolution of Smiles will entail a total political transition in Algeria. What gives such a possibility a real chance is human capital and its internal



strive for greater living conditions. Such an attitude is seen among the protestors who underline that "This is just a little victory - the biggest is still to come." (Abdelaziz..., 2020). Hopefully, Algeria will proceed with its further peaceful democratic transformation and, as stated in the national motto, will become a country shaped "by the people and for the people".

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