



Algeria 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Burglary; Assault; Cyber; Other; Religious Terrorism; Riots/Civil Unrest; Oil & Energy; Religious Violence; Earthquakes; Drug Trafficking; Kidnapping

Near East > Algeria; Near East > Algeria > Algiers

2/15/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Medium

Crime Threats

While the government does not publish statistically valid crime reports, media reporting and anecdotal observation indicate that the frequency and intensity of criminal activity remains moderate.

A significant percentage of crimes go unreported. The most common crimes tend to be crimes of opportunity -- pickpocketing, robberies, purse-snatching, burglaries, and similar crimes -- perpetrated by criminals who primarily operate in high-traffic and high-density areas. Criminals tend to focus on persons who appear unfamiliar with their surroundings, are dressed in obviously foreign clothing, or have otherwise drawn attention to themselves. While street

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crimes (pickpocketing, robbery, assault) are not uncommon, areas frequented by foreigners are generally less vulnerable since they enjoy more robust police presence.

Algiers, like many of the larger coastal cities, is generally considered safe due to the volume of security forces deployed in the streets and at intersections. Crime has not affected expatriates to an unusual degree.

General theft and residential burglaries are commonplace in low-income neighborhoods and do occasionally occur in more affluent neighborhoods. Since most burglaries are crimes of opportunity, a well-secured home is often enough to deter criminals. With this in mind, many middle class Algerian families have taken measures to improve their residential security by installing grilles over windows and doors. Residential break-ins often occur during the day when homes are unoccupied, although break-ins while the home is occupied do occur.

While it should be assumed criminals are prepared for confrontations, most generally avoid violence.

Cybersecurity Issues

Press and government sources reported attacks on websites and social networks in Algeria increased 300 percent with over 500 cases reported in 2015. There were also 20 reported cyber attacks against members of parliament, ministries, banks, and other government institutions.

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Other Areas of Concern

Regional volatility brought about by the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and affiliated groups, the changing regional political climate, the deteriorating situation in Libya, and the growing conflict in Mali have resulted in increased security concerns especially along the vast border regions.

It is prudent to take caution when traveling outside of Algiers to include making special security arrangements and ensuring reliable and experienced transportation and logistical support. In general, mountainous regions located in less populated and less traveled areas (where security services do not have a significant presence) should be avoided. Although not required, it is a good security practice for all travelers to check in with the local authorities. Foreign employees of foreign companies or organizations based in Algeria must contact the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before engaging in any travel to the interior. The Ministry will notify local police of the planned travel, and the police may choose to assign escorts for that travel.

Kabylie, Tamanrasset, and Timimoun regions are notorious for armed engagements between terrorists and security forces. Travel to the Kabylie region and the eastern wilayas of Algeria is strongly discouraged, especially following the kidnapping and subsequent murder of a French citizen in a remote part of the Kabylie region by the Jund al-Khilafa terrorist organization.

Due to AQIM kidnappings, many governments around the world have identified the Sahel

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region as an area of concern.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road infrastructure remains insufficient for the growing number of vehicles on the roads. Traffic management resources are inadequate, and the ability to expand or create new roads to alleviate congestion within large cities is limited. Outside of the major cities, the government continues to expand the number of paved roads between major urban areas.

Local media reports that Algeria is ranked 98th in the world in terms of vehicular accidents and 12th in the Arab world. In the first 10 months of 2015, the National Association for Road Safety recorded 3,952 road-related fatalities and 48,745 vehicular injuries. Many factors play a role in traffic fatalities: poorly maintained roads, a severe lack of roadway signage, insufficient vehicle maintenance, the use of defective, pirated auto parts, driver fatigue, and reckless and unskilled drivers. New regulations have improved traffic safety in 2015, but a lack of enforcement continues to be a major contributor to overall road safety.

The government implemented stricter conditions for licensing vehicles and introduced new measures between 2012 and 2015: withdrawing older vehicles from circulation, reducing the on-road hours for public service vehicle drivers, and barring heavy transport vehicles in Algiers during daylight hours. In addition, the National Association for Road Safety has adopted a policy of intensifying awareness campaigns throughout the country and in school

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curriculum stressing the dangers of driving and not respecting traffic rules. These measures have improved road safety slightly since implementation.

Military and police checkpoints are commonplace on major roads within large cities and throughout the countryside. Security personnel at these checkpoints expect full cooperation and routinely stop vehicles to check vehicle and driver paperwork and for security related reasons. During times of heightened security, the number of vehicle checkpoints and police is increased.

Public Transportation Conditions

There are numerous taxi services in the major cities, to include several new radio-dispatch taxis in Algiers. However, it is generally a good security practice to avoid hailing taxis on the street.

An urban metro rail line in Algiers is generally well-maintained and safe, although it only runs along the coastal area of the city.

Due to the poor road infrastructure and poor driver training, serious traffic accidents involving buses and other vehicles of mass transportation occur regularly.

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Aviation/Airport Conditions

Houari Boumediene Airport (Algiers' international airport), which provides both international and national flights, is located in the southeast of Algiers. The airport adheres to international air safety standards, as does management of flight operations. While security measures are not on par with U.S. airports, security personnel are present throughout the airport. The government has taken steps to improve airport security. Since late 2014, there has been a noticeable increase in police checkpoints leading to the airport, and vehicle access to the terminals has been restricted.

Terrorism Threat

Regional instability in the years following popular uprisings in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt has led to new security concerns. Reports of arms smuggled out of Libya began in 2011, and the number of weapons seized on Algeria's eastern and southern borders has continued to increase. This flow of weapons throughout the region will likely increase the ability of terrorist and criminal organizations to threaten government security forces and commercial interests for the foreseeable future.

Post Terrorism Rating: High

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

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AQIM, the Mali-based Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and al-Murabitun (led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar) continue to be active terrorist threats. AQIM's Emir Abdelmalik Droukdel, an Algerian national, remained at-large at the end of 2015. Belmokhtar's status remains unknown, but rumors about his health and whereabouts continue to circulate. AQIM continued attacks using improvised explosive devices (IEDs), bombings, false roadblocks, kidnappings, and ambushes. These groups aspire to establish Islamic law in the region and to attack Algerian security services, local government targets, and Western interests.

Jund al-Khilafa fi Ard al-Jazayer (JAK, Soldiers of the Caliphate in Algeria), which has sworn allegiance to the Islamic State in the Levant (ISIL), claimed responsibility for a few, sporadic attacks, although efforts by the government appear to have significantly limited the group's ability to operate in 2015. During large-scale operations in May 2015, the military reportedly killed at least 21 JAK fighters in the Boumerdes region.

Three other Algerian groups have issued statements claiming allegiance to ISIL, but there is little indication that these groups contain more than a small number of fighters.

In May 2015, Katibat Ansar El Khilafa (Caliphate Supporters) in Skikda announced its support of ISIL through an audio clip posted on Twitter. This group is under the leadership of Lemloum Ammar (alias Zakaria El Jijli) from the city of Jijel.

In May 2015, Katibat Sahara announced its allegiance to ISIL through an online statement. This group is believed to be a split from al-Mourabitoun.

Seriat El Ghoraba, based in the Wilaya of Constantine, announced in July 2015 via Twitter their split from AQIM to join ISIL.

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The government continues an aggressive campaign to eliminate terrorist activity and has a large and robust security apparatus to thwart terrorist threats. In 2015, military forces and security services, primarily the Gendarmerie Nationale (GN) under the Ministry of National Defense (MND), conducted regular operations in the Kabylie area, east of Algiers, and in the expansive desert regions in the southeast. The press reported 62 terrorist acts between January-October 2015. Public information announcements from the MND provided timely reporting on incidents during which MND forces captured or eliminated terrorists and seized equipment, arms, ammunition caches, and drugs. MND reported it captured or killed 157 terrorists in 2015 as a result of operations. The private press reported 171 terrorists were killed in 2015, although the media did not always identify casualties by name and may have included armed criminals in its tally.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Medium

Civil Unrest

Sporadic social unrest continues, especially in the south. In 2015, some 2,501 protests were recorded nationwide. Issues usually revolve around specific social issues, perceived economic injustices, and more recently, shale gas and fracking projects planned in the south. Most of the unrest was seen in populations unhappy with the criteria for or pace at which the

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government has disbursed promised social benefits, particularly housing.

Local authorities are quick to bring civil unrest under control using conciliatory tactics. The government is experienced in dealing with such events and has generally been able to diffuse them. However, some protests have turned violent and resulted in deaths and injuries among protestors and security forces.

In January 2015, large protests erupted in Ain Salah over the government's decision to drill for shale gas. The protest spread to numerous cities, grew to include tens of thousands of people, and lasted roughly eight months. Protests occasionally turned violent; protestors reportedly attempted to burn vehicles, government buildings, and private international oil company facilities. Protestors used Molotov cocktails against security forces who used tear gas to disperse protestors. Algerian and international press reported that confrontations between protestors and security services resulted in over 100 injuries for protestors, 40 injuries to security forces, and the deaths of two protestors.

Although demonstrations in the capital are forbidden, in January, police using tear gas dispersed demonstrations in Algiers against Charlie Hebdo, the French satirical newspaper. It is unclear how many were arrested or injured during the clashes.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Conflict between Mozabite Ibadi Muslims and Arab Malikite Muslims – the latter ethnic-religious group representing the majority of Algerians – continued during the year in

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Ghardaia. From January-July 2015, street clashes between the two communities resulted in the destruction of large numbers of vehicles and homes, hundreds of civilian injuries, and approximately 30 deaths. The most deadly clashes occurred on July 7 when violent confrontations between the communities resulted in more than 22 fatalities, according to a statement by the Minister of Interior. Media reported that the inability or unwillingness of security forces to prevent further violence and destruction of property exacerbated the conflict. In June, the Prime Minister, Minister of Interior, Minister of Justice, head of National Gendarmerie, and head of DGSN visited and met with local leaders in attempts to ease communal tensions. In July, President Bouteflika held an emergency meeting at which he directed the military to assume responsibility for security in Ghardaia from police and gendarmes.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Some 54 earthquakes of 2.7-4.8 magnitude were recorded nationwide in 2015. According to the National Observatory (CRAAG), Algeria records 1,400 earthquakes a week in which 80 percent are not felt by the population.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Industrial accidents are not regularly reported in the media, and local authorities' resources and ability to deal with industrial accidents appear to be limited. In the oil sector, the

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government depends on resources imported by foreign oil companies and private organizations.

Drug-related Crimes

The National Office on Drugs and Drug Addiction (ONLDT) reported that 109 tons of cannabis were seized during the first 11 months of 2015. They report that over 60 percent of the cannabis seized was in the west. The quantities seized was a 36.91 percent decline compared to the same period in 2014.

In 2015, more than 23,000 people, including 120 foreign nationals, were arrested for drug trafficking, which is a 67 percent rise from the same period in 2014. Of the cases investigated, 4,159 cases are related to drug trafficking, and 13,562 cases are related to individual drug use.

Kidnapping Threat

To increase its financial resources, AQIM has kidnapped Westerners in the Sahel to obtain ransoms. Kidnappings and the threat of kidnappings have prompted foreign governments and international organizations to warn their citizens, employees, and constituents against living, traveling, or working in this region.

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Kidnapping by terrorist organizations or armed criminal groups is a significant threat in both the Kabylie and the trans-Sahara region. In September 2014, the ISIL-affiliated JAK abducted and beheaded a French citizen in the Kabylie region, east of Algiers, marking the first time an ISIL-linked group outside of Syria had abducted a Westerner.

The abduction of children has been on the rise in Algeria. The Algerian Association for Defense of the Rights of Children (NADA) recorded 278 victims of kidnapping nationwide within the first nine months of 2015. Many of the victims are rarely found. Algerian law enforcement has implemented a security plan to cope with this phenomenon by deploying plain-clothes policemen at schools and in the neighborhoods where disappearances are more common.

Police Response

Police are generally professional and responsive to calls for assistance but can be slow when it comes to notifying embassies or consulates following the arrest of a foreign national.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Americans may request permission to communicate with the Consular Section at the U.S. Embassy in Algiers but should not expect Algerian police to proactively contact the Embassy.

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Crime Victim Assistance

The emergency line is “17” for the police and “14” for fire. These numbers may only be dialed from landline phones. From a mobile phone, dial 021-73-53-50 for the police; 021-71-14-14 for fire; 021-23-63-81 for an ambulance. Reliability and response time of emergency services varies but is not to U.S. standards. Emergency operators may speak French and normally do not speak English.

Police/Security Agencies

The Directorate General for National Security (DGSN) is the civil police and is largely responsible for larger cities and urban areas. The DGSN falls under the Ministry of Interior and is responsible for maintaining law and order, conducting criminal investigations, and other routine police functions, including traffic control.

The Gendarmerie Nationale falls under the Ministry of National Defense and is responsible for maintaining law and order in rural areas. They play an active role in Algeria’s internal security efforts in combating terrorism and organized crime.

Medical Emergencies

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Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

In Algiers, the police will likely be the first agency informed in the event of an emergency. The police will advise the local hospital to send an ambulance. Medical expertise and resources vary. The best hospitals are the military ones, but these are not open to the general public. If a visitor does not have contacts or established medical resources, s/he will likely be taken to the medical facility closest to the location of the emergency.

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

The Department of State maintains a list of Air Ambulances for medical evacuation. For those in the south of Algeria (Sahara desert), the RedMed group (Tel: +213 (0) 21 376583, +213 (0) 297 39 400, and +213 (0) 770 27 80 10 / 20 / 30) offers air ambulance services based in Hassi Messaoud.

Recommended Insurance Posture

It is advisable to take out comprehensive travel and medical insurance before you travel. Consider purchasing medical evacuation insurance.

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CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/algeria>.

OSAC Country Council Information

The Embassy has an OSAC Country Council managed by the Regional Security Office (e-mail: Algiers_RSO@state.gov). To reach the OSAC Near East Team, email OSACNEA@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

5 Chemin Cheikh Bachir El-Ibrahimi

El Biar district of Algiers

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The U.S. Embassy in Algiers operates Sun-Thurs, with services for American citizens by appointment. A duty officer is available for after-hours emergencies.

Embassy Contact Numbers

Phone number (including after hours): +213 (0)770-08-2000

Regional Security Office: +213-(0)770-08-2168

Website: <http://algiers.usembassy.gov/>

Embassy Guidance

U.S. citizens are encouraged to enroll in the Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to receive the latest travel security information for Algeria. By registering, U.S. citizens make it easier for the Embassy to contact them in case of emergency.

You may obtain up-to-date information on security conditions by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the United States and Canada or, outside the United States and Canada, on a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444.

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For further information on general crime and security issues, U.S. citizens should also consult the Department of State's Travel Warning for Algeria, Country Specific Information on Algeria as well as the Worldwide Caution.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Visitors are advised to guard their possessions carefully if riding on public transportation. Leaving any item of value unattended in a public place or in a vehicle in plain sight can make that item the target of petty theft.

It is best to keep doors and windows locked even when home.

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