

You are in: [World: Middle East](#)

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[World](#)[Africa](#)[Americas](#)[Asia-Pacific](#)[Europe](#)[Middle East](#)[South Asia](#)[From Our Own Correspondent](#)[Letter From America UK](#)[UK Politics](#)[Business](#)[Sci/Tech](#)[Health](#)[Education](#)[Entertainment](#)[Talking Point](#)[In Depth](#)[AudioVideo](#)

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Algeria violence returns after lull



Algeria has been rocked by massacres since 1992

Reports from Algeria say 13 people have been killed in attacks near the capital, Algiers, by suspected Islamic rebels.

The attacks bring the number of people killed since the beginning of September to more than 70 - including about 20 insurgents - according to figures issued by the press.

The spate of murders this month has raised fears that armed violence is again on the increase after a lull.

In the village of Bougarra south of the city, three gunmen were reported to have sprayed a house with automatic weapons, killing seven people and wounding two.

Men who mounted a fake roadblock on a main road in the same area cut the throats of five people who stopped in two cars.

The group cut the throats of three men in one vehicle and injured a two-year-old girl before setting the car on fire and kidnapping a young woman, it was reported.



Violence has continued around Algiers despite tight security

No respite

Attacks on Algerian civilians have continued since a six-month amnesty ended early in 2000 for Islamist rebels to lay down their arms.

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▀ The BBC's Frank Gardner
"The country is still deeply immersed in violence"
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Although most of the Islamist rebels surrendered earlier, many are reportedly taking up arms again.

More than 100,000 people, mostly civilians, have died in the civil strife which broke out in 1992 after elections which Islamists were poised to win were suspended.



Mbeki visit hopes to improve economic conditions

The attacks come during the visit of South African President Thabo Mbeki at the head of a high-level government and business delegation.

South Africa and Algeria already share strong military ties and have now signed an economic agreement to co-operate on privatisation plans to replace Algeria's crumbling industrial sector.

Earlier in September, Mr Mbeki's security minister warned that South Africa could face a similar insurgency as Algeria if the authorities did not take tough action against an upsurge of suspected Islamist urban terror.

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