

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	303
Land:	Marokko-Vestsahara
Kilde:	Freedom House
Titel:	Freedom in the World 2022
Udgivet:	28. februar 2022
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	24. maj 2022

Freedom in the World 2022 - Morocco

Partly Free

37

/ 100

[Political Rights](#) 13 / 40

[Civil Liberties](#) 24 / 60

Last Year's Score & Status

37 / 100 Partly Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

Note

The numerical scores and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Western Sahara, which is examined in a separate report. *Freedom in the World* reports assess the level of political rights and civil liberties in a given geographical area, regardless of whether they are affected by the state, nonstate actors, or foreign powers. Disputed territories are sometimes assessed separately if they meet certain criteria, including boundaries that are sufficiently stable to allow year-on-year comparisons. For more information, see the report methodology and FAQ.

Overview

Morocco holds regular multiparty elections for Parliament and local bodies. Reforms in 2011 shifted some authority over government from the monarchy to the national legislature. Nevertheless, King Mohammed VI and his palace maintain full dominance through a combination of substantial formal powers and informal lines of influence in the state and society. Many civil liberties are constrained in practice.

Key Developments in 2021

- The ruling Party of Justice and Development (PJD), a moderate Islamist party, was trounced in the September elections. The National Rally of Independents (RNI) and the Istiqlal Party, both closely aligned with the palace, were the primary victors. Pro-palace parties and technocrats dominated the subsequently formed government and are unlikely to pose any challenge to the king.
- In April, Ibrahim Ghali, the leader of the Polisario Front—which calls for independence in the Western Sahara—was allowed into Spain to seek treatment for COVID-19. In May, Moroccan authorities reportedly retaliated by allowing thousands of migrants to enter the Spanish enclave of Ceuta.
- In July, *Akhbar al-Youm* editor in chief Soulaïmane Raïssouni was sentenced to five years in prison on sexual assault charges that rights groups described as fraudulent. His was the latest in a series of prosecutions against journalists based on dubious claims of improper personal behavior.

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 1 / 4

Constitutional reforms in 2011 require the king to appoint the prime minister from the party that wins the most seats in parliamentary elections. However, the reforms preserved nearly all of the king's existing powers: the monarch can disband the legislature, rule by decree, and dismiss or appoint cabinet members.

The ruling PJD was trounced in September 2021 elections, and the RNI and the Istiqlal Party, both closely aligned with the palace, were the primary victors. The king tapped Aziz Akhannouch of the RNI as prime minister. Akhannouch, whose oil-and-gas fortune is reportedly worth \$2 billion according to *Forbes*, is the second-richest person in Morocco after the king, whose wealth is estimated at \$5.7 billion.

In October, in keeping with royal prerogative, the king announced the new 24-member cabinet, with key positions going to technocrats.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair 2 / elections? 4

The lower house of Parliament, the Chamber of Representatives, has 395 directly elected members who serve five-year terms. Of these, 305 are elected from 92 multimember constituencies. The remaining 90 are elected from a single nationwide constituency, with 60 seats reserved for women and 30 for people under the age of 40. Members of the 120-seat upper house, the Chamber of Counselors, are chosen by an electoral college—made up of professional, labor, and business organizations as well as local and regional officials—to serve six-year terms.

In the much-anticipated September 2021 parliamentary and municipal elections, the PJD won only 13 seats, down from 125 previously. The PJD performed more poorly than preelectoral forecasts, which predicted a fall in support, had suggested. The RNI and the Istiqlal Party, both closely aligned with the palace, were the effective winners, taking 102 and 81 seats respectively; the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM) took 87. The low turnout figure of 50.4 percent was nevertheless an improvement over the 43 percent figure seen in the 2016 elections. Turnout was likely higher in 2021 because the parliamentary elections were held simultaneously with local and municipal elections.

The PJD claimed fraud and irregularities, but offered little evidence. A more plausible explanation for the party's electoral misfortune is that it had delivered poorly on past electoral promises—though follow-through is difficult in a political system dominated by the monarchy, which regularly gives key ministries to other parties. The PJD was also blamed for the December 2020 normalization of relations with Israel, an unpopular policy among many Moroccans.

The 2021 election results effectively solidified the power of the monarchy, since pro-palace parties and technocrats dominate the new government and are unlikely to challenge the king.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the 2 / relevant election management bodies? 4

The constitutional and legal framework allows for competitive legislative elections, but the transparency of the process is not guaranteed. Elections are overseen by the Interior Ministry, with some participation by the Justice Ministry, rather than an independent electoral commission. Approximately three million Moroccans live abroad, and electoral laws make it exceedingly difficult for voters outside of Morocco to cast their ballots.

Changes in the electoral law made in March 2021 made it less likely for one party to win decisively.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive 2 political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise / and fall of these competing parties or groupings? 4

Morocco has a multiparty system in which new parties frequently organize and emerge but are generally unable to assert themselves relative to the power of the palace. There remains significant cynicism toward electoral politics—a combination of distrust of party leadership, which is generally seen as corrupt and co-opted, and a belief that the palace ultimately makes major decisions instead of elected leaders.

Justice and Charity (Al-Adl wa al-Ihsan) is an illegal Islamist movement that does not participate in elections. Nevertheless, it enjoys widespread support, and authorities largely tolerate its activities. The reformist February 20 Movement, which emerged from the 2011 Arab Spring protests, and *Hirak Rif*, a campaign that began in Morocco's largely Amazigh (Berber) Rif region in 2016, enjoy considerable popular support, but both movements also face severe government repression.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 1 / 4

Although there was a significant change in the government with the September 2021 election—with the PJD replaced by a new coalition led by the RNI, Istiqlal, and PAM—the shift does not presage a significant change in policy or power. The cabinet (announced by the king in October) maintains fundamental continuity, with technocratic, unaffiliated ministers appointed to strategic ministries.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means? 1 / 4

The constitution and informal practice give the king overwhelming influence over political affairs, including government formation. The monarch and his circle of advisers and associates—known in Morocco as the *Makhzen* (“central storehouse”)—wield enormous private economic power that can be used to shape political outcomes through patronage networks.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 1 / 4

The political system features universal suffrage, but parties based on religious, ethnic, or regional identity are prohibited, and the concerns and interests of women and the Amazigh population are not adequately addressed.

At least 40 percent of the population is Amazigh, and the majority of Moroccans have Amazigh roots. Amazigh elites enjoy access to the monarchy and have their interests represented in Parliament, but the bulk of the Amazigh population is socially, economically, and politically marginalized. Recent unrest in Al Hoceïma, the surrounding Rif region, and other cities across Morocco stemmed in large part from inequities experienced by many Amazigh residents and their inability to obtain redress for their grievances through the political system.

A system of reserved seats for women is meant to encourage their participation in the electoral process at the national and local levels, partly offsetting traditional social pressures that deter such engagement. Recent electoral laws helped facilitate an increase in women candidates for the September 2021 local and municipal elections: 27 percent of candidates were female, compared to 12 percent for the last municipal elections in 2015. Despite this, women lead only 1 percent of districts. For the national elections, 60 of the 395 seats in the Chamber of Representatives are reserved for women; additionally, half of the 30 seats reserved for youth are to be filled by women. The cabinet formed in October included a record 7 women.

The 2019 conviction of journalist Hajar Raissouni, for supposedly having an illegal abortion and engaging in extramarital sex, continues as a *cause célèbre*; it underscores the increasing political mobilization on behalf of women's rights and contributed to a nationwide petition calling for an end to outmoded and discriminatory laws. The ongoing “outlaws” campaign continued to gather signatures in its efforts to prompt criminal-code changes.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 1 / 4

While elected officials are duly installed in government, their power to shape policy is sharply constrained by the king, who determines the composition of the cabinet, sets domestic and foreign policy, commands the armed forces and intelligence services, and is at the heart of the *Makhzen*. Royal commissions are formed ad hoc and tend to wield more power than ministries.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 1 / 4

Corruption is rife in state institutions and the economy. Despite official rhetoric about combating corruption, the palace and government have a mixed record on enforcement and progress has been slowed by a lack of political will, low institutional capacity, and the influence of elites who benefit from the status quo. In March 2021, Parliament strengthened the National Commission on Probity, Prevention and Fight against Corruption by broadening the definition of corruption and giving the body greater investigatory powers, though the results of this reform remain to be seen.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 1 / 4

Overall transparency is limited. Civil society leaders have faulted a controversial 2018 access to information law for provisions that criminalize “misuse” of government information or “distortion of content.” The government publishes budget and financial information online, and public officials—including parliamentarians, judges, and civil servants—are required to declare their assets.

However, the monarchy itself, with its vast array of economic interests, is not subject to these rules, and the extent of its activities is opaque. In October 2021, the king’s sister, Princess Leila Hasnaa, was revealed to own property in London using a shell company when the Pandora Papers—an investigation by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) that revealed the secretive financial conduct of rich and powerful actors around the world—were released. The property was reportedly acquired using royal funds.

Transparency is lacking with respect to the king’s health, a subject considered taboo.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 1 / 4

The state dominates the broadcast media, but affluent Moroccans have access to foreign satellite television channels. Although the independent press enjoys a significant degree of freedom when reporting on economic and social policies, the authorities use a number of financial and legal mechanisms to punish critical journalists who focus on the king, his family, the status of Western Sahara, or political Islam. The authorities also occasionally disrupt websites and internet platforms.

Since 2018, several independent journalists have faced prosecution on dubious charges of sexual assault or of financial misconduct. Most notably, *Akhbar al-Youm* editor in chief Soulaïmane Raïssouni in July 2021 was sentenced to five years in prison on sexual assault charges the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and other rights groups described as fraudulent.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public 2 / 4 and private?

Nearly all Moroccans are Muslims, and the king, identified as “commander of the faithful” in the constitution, has ultimate authority over religious affairs. Imams are required to obtain state certification, and mosques are monitored by the authorities. The government operates a well-financed training program for imams and female religious counselors tasked with promoting a state-sanctioned version of “moderate Islam,” which some critics charge is also intended to promote political quiescence.

Despite deep societal prejudices, a 3,000-person Jewish community is permitted to practice its faith, though many synagogues are unmarked. The Christian community, which numbers approximately 50,000, also experiences prejudice. Christian marriages are not legally recognized by the government.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political 2 / 4 indoctrination?

Universities provide a relatively open space for discussion, but professors practice self-censorship when dealing with sensitive topics. Salafists—adherents of a fundamentalist form of Islam—are closely monitored in universities. Periodic violence between university student groups, often stoked by Morocco’s political, ethnic, and sectarian differences, inhibits the right to peaceful student activism.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics 2 / 4 without fear of surveillance or retribution?

State surveillance of online activity and personal communications is a serious concern, and the arrests of journalists, bloggers, and activists for critical speech serve as a deterrent to uninhibited debate among the broader population. The use of spyware and surveillance technologies by the government is widespread. In December 2020, the Citizen Lab named the Moroccan government as a likely customer of Circles, a company that allows customers to monitor mobile phone users by exploiting weaknesses in telecommunications infrastructure.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 1 / 4

Freedom of political assembly is sharply restricted. The authorities sometimes use excessive force and violence to disperse protests.

The government suppressed the 2016–17 Hirak Rif protest movement against corruption and economic deprivation. Nasser Zefzafi and other protest leaders received 20-year prison sentences in 2018, while 50 other activists received shorter sentences. Authorities also harass activists involved in organizing antigovernment demonstrations that protest *hogra*, an Arabic term referring to the loss of dignity due to perceived official indifference or contempt.

Ongoing economic dislocation stemming from structural inequities in the economy and COVID-19 prompted unrest in 2021. Most significantly, protests emerged after the August death of Yassine Lekhmidi, a 25-year-old man in Sidi Bennour. Lekhmidi's food cart was confiscated in July because he was not wearing a face mask; he paid a fine, but authorities did not return the cart. Lekhmidi then self-immolated, dying of his injuries in August. Hundreds subsequently protested in Sidi Bennour, while Moroccans nationwide followed events closely. However, in an apparent sign of the Makhzen's power, the protests did not have clear nationwide consequences.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 2 / 4

While civil society organizations are active, they are subject to legal harassment, travel restrictions, intrusive surveillance, and other impediments to their work. The authorities routinely deny registration to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with links to Justice and Charity or that assert the rights of marginalized communities.

The Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH), one of Morocco's most prominent NGOs, is frequently targeted by the government. The authorities have cancelled numerous AMDH events in recent years and are known to impede its efforts to rent space and open bank accounts. In 2020, its vice president was charged with defamation for criticizing the COVID-19-related confiscation of street merchants' goods in the city of Nador but was later acquitted.

Amnesty International has been prohibited from carrying out research in Morocco since 2015.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 2 / 4

Workers are permitted to form and join independent trade unions, and the 2004 labor law prevents employers from punishing workers who do so, but there are undue legal and employer restrictions on collective bargaining and strikes. The authorities sometimes forcibly break up labor-related protests. Unions are closely affiliated with political parties.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 1 / 4

The court system is not independent of the monarch; the king chairs the Supreme Council of the Judiciary. In practice, the courts are regularly used to punish perceived opponents of the government, including dissenting Islamists, human rights and anticorruption activists, and critics of Moroccan rule in Western Sahara. Local courts are perceived as corrupt and serving powerful interests.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 1 / 4

Police frequently violate legal and procedural safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention, and many convictions rely on confessions that are coerced. Pretrial detainees are reportedly held beyond a one-year limit, and there are no provisions in the law allowing for pretrial detainees to challenge their detentions in court. Some suspects, particularly those accused of terrorism, are held in secret detention for days or weeks before formal charges are filed.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 2 / 4

Cases of excessive force by police and torture in custody continue to occur. Prisons often suffer from overcrowding, and prisoners faced heightened risks of contracting COVID-19.

Terrorism remains a threat to physical security in Morocco.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 1 / 4

Constitutional reforms in 2011 granted official status to Tamazight languages, which have been promoted in schools along with Amazigh culture. Nevertheless, Amazigh and other communities that do not identify with the dominant Arab culture tend to face educational and economic disadvantages. Civil society groups that promote Amazigh rights have faced government interference.

Gender equality was also recognized in the 2011 constitution, but women continue to face significant discrimination at the societal level and are underrepresented in the labor force.

LGBT+ people face harsh discrimination and occasional violence. Same-sex sexual relations can be punished with up to three years in prison.

The government has granted temporary residency permits to refugees and migrants as part of an effort to regularize their status and provide them with basic services. However, many registered refugees living in Morocco still do not possess residency or work permits.

The decision of the United States in December 2020 to recognize Morocco's claims to Western Sahara emboldened Rabat to press other countries—especially Spain—to take similar steps. In May 2021, the government “weaponized” migration to protest Spain's April admission of Polisario Front leader Ibrahim Ghali for COVID-19 treatment: Moroccan authorities reportedly allowed several thousand migrants to enter the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, though Spain returned many of the migrants to Morocco.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 2 / 4

Moroccan law guarantees freedom of movement and the ability to change one's place of employment or education, but in practice poor economic conditions and corruption limit these rights. Widespread bribery, nepotism, and misconduct within the educational sector constrain merit-based advancement.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 2 / 4

Well over a third of the land is collectively owned by tribes and managed by the Interior Ministry, and in recent years it has been subject to private development without fair compensation to previous occupants. Moreover, under tribal rules of inheritance, women cannot hold the rights to occupy and use such lands, leaving them more vulnerable to displacement. Ordinary inheritance rules also put women at a disadvantage, generally granting them half the property of an equivalent male heir.

Private business activity is hampered in part by the dominant role of the king, his family, and the Makhzen. Among other assets, Mohammed VI has a majority stake in Al Mada, a massive holding company with stakes in virtually every economic sector, including mining, tourism, food, banking, construction, and energy.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 2 / 4

The 2004 family code granted women increased rights in the areas of marriage, divorce, and child custody, though a number of inequities and restrictions remain, and implementation of the code has been uneven.

All extramarital sexual activity is illegal, which deters rape survivors from bringing charges, among other repercussions.

Domestic violence is rarely reported or punished due to social stigma, though Moroccan NGOs offer support to domestic-violence survivors. A 2018 law criminalized domestic violence and forced marriage, and imposed more stringent penalties on those convicted of rape. Although the law was considered a step forward, critics faulted the legislation for failing to outlaw spousal rape, not providing a clear definition of domestic violence, and not mandating the government to provide greater support for survivors. In July 2020, a network of NGOs reported that domestic violence increased during the country's COVID-19 lockdown.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 1 / 4

Poverty is widespread, and economic opportunities are scarce for a large portion of the population.

Child laborers, especially girls working as domestic helpers, are denied basic rights and are frequently abused by their employers. A 2018 labor law meant to protect young women employed as household workers requires employers to use written contracts, sets a minimum working age of 18 (after a five-year phase-in period during which 16- and 17-year-olds are allowed to work), mandates a day off each week, and sets a minimum wage. Rights groups criticized the legislation for failing to provide support to reintegrate domestic workers into society, and for permitting girls under 18 to work until 2023.

A 2016 law criminalized human trafficking; existing measures had defined and banned only some forms of trafficking and left many victims unprotected. Immigrant laborers, especially from sub-Saharan Africa, are often employed informally and subject to significant exploitation.

ecoi.net summary:



Annual report on political rights and civil liberties in 2021

Country:

Morocco

Source:

[Freedom House](#)

Original link:

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/morocco/freedom-world/2022>

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

28 February 2022

Document ID:

2071890

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ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

