

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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**Freedom in the World - Morocco (2006)****Polity:** No polity available**Political Rights:** 5**Civil Liberties:** 4**Status:** Partly Free**Population:**
30,700,000**GNI/Capita:**
\$1,310**Life Expectancy:**
70**Religious Groups:**
Muslim (98.7 percent), Christian (1.1 percent), Jewish (0.2 percent)**Ethnic Groups:**
Arab-Berber (99.1 percent), other (0.9 percent)**Capital:** Rabat**Additional Info:**[Freedom in the World 2005](#)[Freedom of the Press 2005](#)[Nations in Transit 2004](#)[Countries at the Crossroads 2005](#)**Overview**

In May and June 2005, the Moroccan government used force to suppress what came to be known as the Sahrawi "intifada," or uprising, involving scores of nationalist demonstrators in Western Sahara protesting the continued occupation of the territory by Moroccan forces.

Morocco was a French colony from 1912 until it gained independence in 1956. King Mohamed V died after ruling for five years, and the crown was inherited by his son, King Hassan II. The first three decades of Hassan's rule were marked by autocratic repression, which worsened following the two back-to-back failed attacks on the king's life by renegade army officers in 1971 and 1972 as part of their broader effort to overthrow the monarchy and establish a republic. Political opponents of the king were "disappeared," and torture and summary detention were routine. Hassan also oversaw Morocco's development as a modern nation, and it was under his reign that Morocco occupied the Western Sahara in 1975, soon after Spanish troops left the territory; the status of the territory remains in dispute and is a source of tension in the country. Near the end of his rule, Hassan made moves toward political reform; independent newspapers began publishing, and a bicameral legislature was established in 1997.

After Hassan's death in 1999, his oldest son, Mohammed VI, inherited the throne. While hopes were high that the young king would continue on his father's later path to political liberalization, King Mohammed inherited a country with serious social and economic problems. A high unemployment rate, weak economic growth, and a large gap between the majority of the population and the small upper class threatened the stability of the country. Islamist charitable networks quickly filled the gap, providing services and gaining support at the grassroots level.

Within months of assuming the throne, Mohammed dismissed Interior Minister Driss Basri, considered one of the most powerful men in the country and the embodiment of corruption under Hassan. Thousands of political prisoners were released, and exiled opposition figures were allowed to return home.

In 2002, Morocco held parliamentary elections that were lauded as the most representative since independence. The polls led to a legislature with a significant Islamist presence, as well as a few women members of parliament. Meanwhile, independent journalists continued to be harassed, and there were still reports of torture and summary detention of political opponents of the king.

The reform process was delivered a serious blow in May 2003, when a series of suicide bombings rocked Casablanca, killing 45 people and injuring scores of others.

The victims of the attack were mostly Moroccans, and the targets included visible symbols of Morocco's Jewish community. The perpetrators were local Islamists linked to al-Qaeda, the terrorist network. The authorities responded by adopting a harsh antiterror law, and thousands were immediately imprisoned and sentenced.

In late 2003, the king created the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER)- headed by Driss Benzikri, a former political prisoner-to document human rights abuses perpetrated under the previous regime and to compensate victims. The IER's work included public hearings where victims were able to speak publicly for the first time about the abuses that they had suffered. Critics of the IER have complained that the commission's work will not result in punishment for past violators. In October 2005, the IER announced that it had identified the burial place and remains of 50 former detainees. The IER's final report was scheduled to be released at the end of 2005.

In addition to addressing past abuses, Moroccan authorities have also turned their attention to addressing the rights of women, who have long been the victims of legal and social discrimination. In 2004, Morocco reformed its personal status law (Mudawana), raising the age of marriage to 18 and placing women in a better position in seeking a divorce. Previous attempts to amend the personal status law were thwarted by mass protests led by Islamists, who, since the 2003 suicide bomb attacks, have kept a lower profile.

The status of Western Sahara continued to be a major hurdle in Morocco's transition to a more democratic

state. In international legal terms, the status of the former Spanish territory that Morocco occupied in two successive stages in 1975 and 1979 remains undetermined. Rabat's annexation and governance over the disputed territory is challenged by an independence-minded nationalist movement headquartered in Tindouf, Algeria. In May and June 2005, Sahrawis living in the territory began to protest publicly against Moroccan occupation, leading to an excessive use of force by the authorities that human rights organizations sharply criticized.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Citizens of Morocco cannot change their government democratically. Although the 2002 parliamentary elections and the 2003 municipal elections were judged to be the most democratic since independence, King Mohammed VI and his close advisers, known collectively as the *makhzen*, still retain much of the power in Morocco. The king can issue decrees, dissolve parliament, and dismiss and appoint cabinet members. The lower house of the legislative branch is directly elected and, along with the king, can pass legislation.

Morocco adopted its fourth postindependence constitution in 1996 in which the country is described as a "democratic monarchy" with Islam as the state religion and Arabic as the official national language. Despite its democratic self-definition, *de facto* as well as *de jure* power is held by the monarch. The constitution declares the king as the "commander of the faithful," thus bestowing upon him ultimate religious authority in the country. He also has the right to appoint the prime minister and the ministers of interior, foreign affairs, justice, and Islamic affairs. The monarch has the authority to dismiss the government, dissolve parliament, impose martial law, and rule by decree. He presides over the cabinet and judiciary, sets the overall direction of national policy, appoints ambassadors, ratifies treaties, serves as the nation's commander in chief of the armed forces, and selects all *walis* (regional governors). Given this multiplicity of constitutional powers, reinforced by the loyalty of the military and support of the Moroccan ruling establishment in the cities and countryside, the king reigns as well as rules in a highly centralized, uncontested fashion.

The new constitution reintroduced a bicameral legislature, which had existed briefly after independence before being replaced by a single parliamentary chamber until 1996. The 325-member lower house (House of Representatives) is directly elected by universal suffrage for a five-year term, while the 270-seat upper house (House of Advisers) is chosen by an electoral college for a nine-year period. Both houses serve as "debating" forums, rather than as autonomous legislative bodies intended as a check on monarchical authority.

Morocco has several opposition parties, but they are mostly weak. The strongest opposition forces in the country are Islamist groups, with the Justice and Development Party (PJD) being the best organized. The PJD and Moroccan authorities have been involved in a low-profile power contest over the years, with the PJD trying to position itself as a moderate Islamist alternative to the monarchy. No political party that is given legal status can challenge the ultimate authority of the monarchy. The Justice and Charity Association—considered the country's largest, most popular, and most antimonarchical organization—has never been allowed to participate legally in the political process.

Transparency Morocco, a network of civil society organizations dedicated to ridding Morocco of bribery, proposed in 2005 the formulation of a national independent body that would combat bribery in the kingdom. Morocco was ranked 78 out of 159 countries surveyed in the 2005 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index.

Moroccan journalists have been pioneers of an independent press in the Arab world. However, in 2005, a criminal court found independent journalist Ali Lmrabet guilty of defamation and in April sentenced him to a 10-year ban on practicing journalism. The case stemmed from an article Lmrabet had written for the Spanish daily *El Mundo* that challenged the official government line on issues related to the Western Sahara. Lmrabet, who was imprisoned in 2003 after his two satirical weeklies published cartoons that mocked the monarchy and ran an interview with an opponent of the king who called for self-determination of the Sahrawi people, had been free since January 2004 after a royal pardon. Several other cases of criminal defamation were lodged against journalists, even though the minister of communications announced in March that the press law would be amended to remove the punishment of imprisonment for press cases; as of late November 2005, the law had not been changed. Foreign and local journalists who want to cover the Western Sahara are often harassed by Moroccan authorities or prevented from traveling to the region. Television and radio are dominated by the state and reflect the official government line. According to government figures, there are 3 million internet users in the country. Although there have been cases of internet sites being blocked by the authorities, there is currently no specific regulation of the internet in Morocco. Even pro-Polisario Front websites advocating independence for the Western Sahara are accessible.

Morocco is almost 99 percent Muslim, with the remaining portion of the population is composed of tiny Christian and Jewish communities. Morocco's religious minorities are able to practice their religions free of government interference.

There are some restrictions on academic freedom. The official line on the status of the Western Sahara is followed, and criticism of the monarchy and Islam are avoided. Government informers monitor the activities of Islamist groups on campuses.

Freedom of association is also somewhat limited. Morocco has a healthy number of independently functioning nongovernmental organizations, but they need government permission to operate. Protests in the Western Sahara are suppressed, and in May, Moroccan authorities detained several Sahrawis who were involved in demonstrations that turned violent in Laayoune, the main city in the Western Sahara. Many of those detained declared hunger strikes to protest their treatment.

The law allows workers to establish and join trade unions. A new labor law enforced in June 2004 prohibits antiunion discrimination and prescribes the government's authority to intervene in strikes, which are allowed by the constitution but subject to a subsequent law requiring compulsory arbitration of disputes.

Morocco's judiciary operates in a climate of corruption and pressure from above. According to groups including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, torture is still practiced in Morocco, and since the Casablanca terror attacks of 2003, authorities act in an atmosphere of impunity and lack of accountability. Trials of those arrested following the 2003 terror attacks were not conducted fairly, according to local and international human rights groups. The antiterrorism law has broadened the definition of what constitutes terrorism, gives authorities the right to hold a person for up to 12 days without charge, and increases the number of crimes that can result in the death penalty.

Although overwhelmingly Arabic-speaking and Muslim, Morocco is one of the Arab world's most open-minded societies regarding different ethnic and religious groups. The small native Jewish community feels relatively secure despite having been the target of a terrorist attack in Casablanca in May 2003. The country's large Berber population is concentrated in the mountainous northern regions in the Rif and in the Atlas. Most Berber cultural and linguistic rights and aspirations have been recognized by the government.

Moroccan women are guaranteed equal rights under the constitution. While many legal and societal limitations on the advancement of women remain, changes to the family code in 2004 gave women greater rights in the area of marriage and divorce. Physical abuse of women remains a problem. Although child labor has traditionally been a problem in Morocco, it is also now illegal to employ anybody under age 15.