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Attacks on the Press in 2011 - Morocco

Key Developments

- Police assault journalists covering pro-reform protests.
- Prominent journalist imprisoned after politicized trial; blogger also held.

King Mohamed VI pledged a series of constitutional reforms in March after the region's wave of popular uprisings passed through the kingdom. But the reforms did not extend to opening up the press. Authorities took concerted measures to suppress coverage of mass protests in Casablanca's streets. During a March protest in the capital, Rabat, uniformed police assaulted several journalists covering its violent dispersal. The biggest and most controversial case in the kingdom was that of Rachid Nini, a prominent government critic, executive editor of the Moroccan daily *Al-Massae*, and owner of Al-Massae Media Group. He was detained in April and sentenced to one year in prison on charges of "denigrating judicial rulings" and "compromising the security and safety of the homeland and citizens."

[Refworld note: The sections that follow represent a best effort to transcribe onto a single page information that appears in tabs on the CPJ's own pages, which also include a number of graphics not readily reproducible here. Refworld researchers are therefore strongly recommended to check against the original report: [Attacks on the Press in 2011.](#)]

Imprisoned on December 1, 2011: 2

Nini often highlighted government corruption and criticized counterterrorism policies. The opinion piece that led to his arrest criticized Morocco's intelligence service and argued that it should be put under parliamentary oversight. In June, he was convicted and sentenced to a year in prison.

Mohamed Dawas, a critical blogger, was also imprisoned in retaliation for his work. In September, he was sentenced to 19 months on trumped-up drug trafficking charges.

Imprisoned in Morocco on CPJ's annual census:

Assaulted at single March protest: 5

On March 13, security forces used violent dispersal tactics to clamp down on protesters who took to the streets of Casablanca to call for government reforms and greater freedoms, CPJ research shows.

Journalists from two papers were assaulted:

3: From *Al-Ahdath al-Maghribia* (a private daily): Hanan Rahab, Owsy Mouh Lhasan, and Mohamed al-Adlani

2: From *Le Nouvel Observateur* (a French newsweekly): Ahmed Najim and Salah al-Maizi

Internet penetration: 49%

Morocco had the highest penetration of Internet users in North Africa, according to the International Telecommunication Union.

An Internet leader in North Africa:

Morocco: 49 percent

Tunisia: 36.8

Egypt: 26.7

Libya: 14

Algeria: 12.5

Mauritania: 3

Subjected to politicized charges: 7

The Moroccan judiciary has frequently been used as a tool to silence the independent media. From 2009 to 2011, a number of newspapers were targeted in politicized criminal proceedings for their writings on taboo subjects such as the health of the king, the royal family, or government criticism, CPJ research shows.

The targeted newspapers:

2009:

Al-Jarida al-Oula, Al-Michael, Le Journal Hebdomadaire, and Akhbar al-Youm

2010:

Akhbar al-Youm,

Le Journal

2011:

Al-Massae

Dirham fine for defamation: 100,000

Under Article 52 of the Press Law, journalists could face up to one year in jail and fines up to 100,000 dirhams (US\$11,955) if convicted on defamation charges. Authorities have used this charge to silence independent media, CPJ research shows.

Anti-press fines across the region:

Saudi Arabia: 1 million riyals (US\$270,000) for any violations of the restrictive media law.

Syria: 1 million pounds (US\$21,000) for coverage that harmed "national unity and national security."

Jordan: Under proposed legislation, 60,000 dinars (US\$84,600) for reporting on corruption without "solid facts."

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