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Morocco

37
/100

PARTLY FREE

<u>Political Rights</u>	13 / ₄₀
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	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. It is examined in a separate report. Morocco claims sovereignty over the territory, while the United Nations considers it to be a “non-self-governing territory.” *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, informal lines of influence in state and society, and ownership of crucial economic resources. Many civil liberties are constrained in practice.

Key Developments in 2023

- Massive anti-Israel demonstrations erupted across Morocco after the Israeli military’s invasion of Gaza and the bombing of a Gazan hospital in mid-October.
- In September, a catastrophic earthquake struck remote villages in the High Atlas mountain range. Nearly 3,000 people died, and hundreds of thousands were affected. Providing relief to the underdeveloped and inaccessible region proved challenging.

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 Party of Justice and Development (PJD) was trounced in September 2021 elections, and the National Rally of Independents (RNI) and the Istiqlal Party, both closely aligned with the palace, were the primary victors. The king appointed Aziz Akhannouch of the RNI as prime minister. Akhannouch's oil-and-gas fortune is reportedly worth \$1.5 billion as of early 2023, making him the second-richest person in Morocco after the king, whose wealth is estimated at \$6 billion.

In keeping with royal prerogative, after the 2021 election, the king announced the new 24-member cabinet, with key positions going to technocrats loyal to the palace.

A2 0-4 pts

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

2 / 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 September 2021 parliamentary and municipal elections, the PJD won only 13 seats, down from 125. The RNI and the Istiqlal Party, both closely aligned with the palace, took 102 and 81 seats respectively; the Authenticity and Modernity Party

(PAM) won 87. Voter turnout was low, at 50.4 percent, but was an improvement over the 43 percent turnout seen in the 2016 elections.

A3 0-4 pts

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

2/4

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 body. Approximately three million Moroccans live abroad, and electoral laws make it exceedingly difficult for citizens outside of Morocco to cast their ballots.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

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

2/4

Morocco has a multiparty system in which new parties frequently 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 the widespread understanding that the palace ultimately makes major decisions.

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.

In March 2023, the palace reproached the PJD following the party's criticism of relations with Israel, suggesting an attempt by the palace to limit its ability to mobilize support around the issue.

B2 0-4 pts

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

1/4

Although the PJD was replaced by a new coalition led by the RNI, Istiqlal, and PAM in the September 2021 elections, the shift did not presage a significant change in policy or power. The cabinet, announced by the king following the election, maintained continuity—with technocratic, unaffiliated ministers appointed to strategic ministries.

In February 2022, former human rights minister and prominent lawyer Mohammed Ziane was convicted on 11 charges, including insulting the judiciary, adultery, and sexual harassment. Rights groups repeatedly expressed concern that the charges against Ziane—a government critic who has frequently defended opposition figures, rights activists, and journalists in court—were politically motivated. Ziane was arrested in November 2022 after a court of appeal upheld his conviction and ordered that his three-year prison sentence and a fine of 5,000 Moroccan dirhams (\$480) be imposed immediately. Ziane remained in prison in 2023.

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 colloquially in Morocco as the *Makhzen* (“central

storehouse”)—wield enormous private political and economic power that can be used to shape political outcomes through patronage networks.

Foreign policy is a prerogative of the palace, and parliamentary parties have little power regarding foreign affairs. Popular discontent with a 2020 agreement that normalized relations with Israel remains exceedingly high. The palace and the government offered regular condemnation of the Israeli government’s position on Palestinians and the conduct of the war in Gaza, but the 2020 accord remains in effect.

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; 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 the Rif region and other cities across Morocco, grouped under Hirak Rif, stem 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 discourage their engagement. Electoral laws passed in 2021 helped facilitate an increase in women candidates for that year’s local and municipal elections: 27 percent of candidates were women, compared to 12 percent in 2015. Despite this, women lead only 1 percent of districts. In national elections, 60 of the 395 seats in the Chamber of Representatives are reserved for women, as well as half of the 30 seats reserved for youth. The cabinet formed in October 2021 included a record seven women.

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, and commands the armed forces and intelligence services. Royal commissions are formed ad hoc, have a parastatal immunity to popular accountability, lack transparency, 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, the economy, and day-to-day life. 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 2021, the parliament broadened the definition of corruption and gave an anticorruption body greater investigatory powers; the results of this reform remain to be seen. In 2022, Morocco was implicated, along with Qatar and Mauritania, in “Qatargate”—the enlisting and bribing of a member of the European Parliament, Pier Antonio Panzeri, to influence policy debates in Strasbourg.

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 business activities is inscrutable. An investigation released in October 2021 by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) discovered that the king’s sister, Princess Lalla Hasnaa, owned property in London using a shell company. 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
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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, authorities use a number of financial, legal, and social mechanisms to punish critical journalists who focus on the king, his family, the status of Western Sahara, relations with Israel, and/or political Islam. Authorities also occasionally disrupt websites and internet platforms.

In recent years, several independent journalists have faced prosecution on dubious charges of sexual assault or financial misconduct. In 2021, *Akhbar al-Youm* editor in chief Soulaïmane Raïssouni was sentenced to five years in prison on

sexual assault charges that the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and other rights groups described as fraudulent.

In April 2023, journalist Hanane Bakour was put on trial for a Facebook post she made criticizing the conduct of the 2021 municipal elections in Guelmim-Oued Noun. In October, journalist Abdelmajid Amyay was charged with defaming a regional prefecture. Other journalists, including Rida Benotmane and Taoufik Bouachrine, were held in solitary confinement in 2023.

In September 2023, two journalists from the French magazine *Marianne* were expelled from the country, reportedly for meeting with the families of political prisoners.

According to a September 2022 report by the international media rights group Global Voices, Moroccan authorities have used Pegasus mobile phone spyware to surveil journalists in Morocco.

D2 0-4 pts

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

2 / 4

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 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 of approximately 50,000 also experiences prejudice, and Christian marriages are not legally recognized.

D3 0-4 pts

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

2 / 4

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 without fear of surveillance or retribution?

2/4

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, especially Pegasus, by the government is widespread, and partly responsible for increasing self-censorship by journalists and fears of retaliation for investigative work.

In July 2022, Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a report detailing how Moroccan authorities have developed an “ecosystem of repression” to silence dissidents and potential critics. Pro-Makhzen media outlets frequently deploy digital smear campaigns to intimidate government critics and activists, flooding the internet with content that reveals dissidents’ intimate and private information.

In January 2023, the minister of justice announced the draft of a new law that would punish the dissemination of fake news on social media. Violators would face strict penalties, including imprisonment.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?

1/4

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

Since 2016 the government has suppressed the Hirak Rif movement, which has protested 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*, the loss of dignity due to perceived official indifference or contempt.

Economic disruption continued to spur unrest in 2023, as Morocco experienced high rates of inflation and unemployment, as well as poor agricultural production. In April and June, the Moroccan Social Front (FSM) organized largely peaceful protests throughout the country in response to the high cost of living.

Diplomatic, trade, and security relations with Israel are a source of popular discontent and protest, which only increased after renewed conflict broke out between Israel and Hamas in October 2023. Pro-Palestinian demonstrations are regularly held outside of parliament, and sharply increased in October and continued apace until the end of 2023. These demonstrations were allowed by the palace and the government, which issued regular condemnations of the assault on Gaza and expressions of solidarity with Palestinians.

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. Authorities have

canceled numerous AMDH events in recent years and are known to impede its efforts to rent space and open bank accounts.

According to Amnesty International, Pegasus spyware has been used to monitor Aminatou Haidar, a Sahrawi human rights activist.

Amnesty International has been prohibited from carrying out research in Morocco since 2015. Additionally, in the aftermath of the September earthquake Moroccan authorities initially spurned offers of international assistance for recovery.

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 trade unions, and the 2004 labor law prevents employers from punishing workers who do so. Nevertheless, 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 legal provisions 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.

Terrorism remains a threat to physical security in Morocco. In July 2023, 50 people were arrested in measures meant to counter terrorism. The apprehended suspects were reported to belong to the Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda.

In August, four Moroccans on jet skis were shot at, two of whom were killed, after they strayed from Moroccan to Algerian coastal waters, a symptom of tensions between the two countries.

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.

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

Over a third of Morocco's land is collectively owned by tribes and managed by the Interior Ministry. 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 this land, leaving them more vulnerable to displacement. Ordinary inheritance rules also disadvantage women, 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, but inequities and restrictions remain, and implementation of the code has been uneven. A 2018 law criminalized domestic violence and forced marriage, and imposed more stringent penalties on those convicted of rape. 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.

All extramarital sexual activity is illegal, which deters rape survivors from bringing charges. In March 2023, three men accused of raping and impregnating an 11-year-old girl were sentenced to only two years in prison, sparking protests. The following month, an appeals court increased the sentence of one man to 20 years and of the other two to 10 years.

Domestic violence is rarely reported or punished due to social stigma, though Moroccan NGOs offer support to domestic-violence survivors.

Abortion is legal only when the mother's life is at risk. In September 2022, a 14-year-old girl died following a clandestine abortion performed at the house of a man accused of sexually assaulting her, leading to protests calling for abortion to be decriminalized.

The UN Human Rights Council adopted its Universal Periodic Review of Morocco in March 2023. Morocco accepted some of its recommendations on combating violence against women and promoting gender equality, but rejected recommendations on guaranteeing equality in inheritance, criminalizing marital rape, combatting discrimination against LGBT+ people, and decriminalizing consensual same-sex sexual relations between adults.

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 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, mandates a day off each week, and establishes 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. Immigrant laborers, especially from sub-Saharan Africa, are often employed informally and subject to significant exploitation.



On Morocco

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

37/100 **Partly Free**

Internet Freedom Score

53/100 **Partly Free**

Other Years

2023

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