

Tunisia's press freedom in dramatic decline



Judicial, political, and economic pressure are being wielded as instruments to enforce a mass crackdown on journalism in Tunisia. President Kaïs Saïed's administration continues to repeat the errors of past regimes: no new reforms, strengthening the repressive legal framework from the era of former president Ben Ali and eroding a news media sector that is already depleted. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is very alarmed by the worrying backslide of press freedom in Tunisia.

Tunisia fell 11 places in the 2025 [RSF World Press Freedom Index](#) and now ranks 129th out of 180 countries and territories as the repression of journalism reaches new heights. Three journalists and a media worker are currently in detention, newsrooms are under increasing political pressure as legislation against the press tightens, and the media sector is at a growing risk of being suffocated under economic and administrative obstacles.

“As judicial, political, and economic pressures grow, so does self-censorship among media professionals. Fear is driving the media landscape to adhere to a uniform narrative, threatening the public’s right to reliable information from diverse independent sources. This repression must be brought to an end as a matter of urgency. The misuse of the Telecommunications Code — a relic from the Ben Ali era — and laws on terrorism and information systems to stifle the press must stop. RSF is deeply concerned by this alarming deterioration of press freedom in Tunisia.

Anne Bocandé
RSF Editorial Director

Detained journalists

On 11 May 2024, journalists **Mourad Zeghidi** and **Borhen Bsaiès** and lawyer and commentator **Sonia Dahmani** were arrested, resulting in the suspension of the programme “L’Émission impossible” on *Radio IFM*. They are still stuck in detention, serving prison sentences ranging from eight months to two years for “broadcasting false information” and other trumped-up charges.

Meanwhile, journalist **Chadha Hadj Mbarek** has been in detention since 2021 for her work with the production company Instalingo. She was charged with “conspiring against the external security of the state” and “committing an offence against the president of the republic,” and was sentenced in February 2025 to five years in prison. According to her lawyer, her health has significantly deteriorated since her imprisonment.

In 2024, several other prominent journalists were targeted through arrests and legal proceedings related to their professional work. One such journalist is **Mohamed Boughalleb**, a contributor to *Cap FM* and other news outlets who was sentenced to eight months in prison for defamation after publicly criticising the Ministry of Religious Affairs over its spending practices. Although he has since been released, he continues to face judicial harassment and is currently being prosecuted under [Decree-Law No. 2022-54](#), which addresses offences linked to information and communication systems. He was thrown behind bars on 22 March 2024 and sentenced one month later to six months in prison, a term later increased to eight months on appeal.

Increasingly repressive legislation

Decree-Law No. 2011-115 is intended to guarantee press freedom, yet remains unenforced. Meanwhile, the authorities increasingly use restrictive legal texts against journalists and media outlets, such as Organic Law No. 2015-26 on counter-terrorism, [Decree-Law No. 2022-54](#) on cyber offences, and the Telecommunications Code, a legacy from the Ben Ali era.

Meanwhile, the national media regulator, the Independent High Authority for Audiovisual Communication (HAICA), has been significantly weakened by government measures such as freezing the salaries of certain HAICA members, which have impeded the regulator’s ability to function effectively. This has created tension and uncertainty, particularly as a draft law to reform the broadcasting sector is currently under parliamentary review.

A climate of fear and self-censorship

Media professionals operate in an atmosphere of fear, facing cyber harassment — especially on social media — as well as political, judicial and economic pressures that make journalism increasingly difficult. These toxic conditions are eroding the right to reliable information, media pluralism, and editorial independence.

Coverage of certain topics has been obstructed. In April 2025, many journalists were prevented from attending one of the hearings in a trial for an alleged “conspiracy” case against state security. The case involved around forty defendants, including opposition figures and shareholders in private media outlets such as *Mosaique FM* and the online newspaper *Business News*, who were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 13 to 66 years. Among the journalists denied access were **Bochra Sellami**, a reporter for *Mosaique FM*, and **Monia Ben Hamadi**, correspondent for the French daily *Le Monde*.

Similarly, media coverage of migration-related issues is shaped almost exclusively by official propaganda. Journalists who attempt to report on these issues independently are sometimes targeted by the authorities, such as Danish freelance journalist **Jakob Plaschke**, who was banned from leaving the country for seven months after interviewing a migrant. Faced with these threats, many journalists resort to self-censorship.

Tunisian news media crumbling under economic strain

The closure of newspaper *Acharaa Al Magharibi* in October 2024 due to financial difficulties was another alarming sign of the state of the press in Tunisia. The outlet ceased publication entirely, illustrating the severe economic suffocation affecting the independent press, which was already weakened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the absence of regulations for the advertising market and fair access to public advertising, many newsrooms are struggling to survive and produce quality content. In November 2024, the Tunisian

Union of Private Radio Stations (SNRP) warned that several private radio stations could face closure. The National Union of Tunisian Journalists also condemned the wave of layoffs in certain media outlets — such as the private television channels *El Hiwar Ettounsi* and *Atessia* — and condemned the prevalence of precarious contracts and lack of social security.

In the absence of regulations for the advertising market and fair access to public advertising, many newsrooms are struggling to survive and produce quality content. In November 2024, the Tunisian Union of Private Radio Stations (SNRP) [warned that several private radio stations could face closure](#). The National Union of Tunisian Journalists also condemned the wave of layoffs in certain media outlets — such as the private television channels *El Hiwar Ettounsi* and *Atessia* — and condemned the prevalence of precarious contracts and lack of social security.