



Freedom in the World 2018 - Morocco

Publisher [Freedom House](#)

Publication Date 28 May 2018

Cite as Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2018 - Morocco*, 28 May 2018, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5b2cb85e4.html> [accessed 10 October 2018]

This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Aggregate Score: 39 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 5.0 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Political Rights: 5 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Civil Liberties: 5 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Ratings Change:

Morocco's civil liberties score declined from 4 to 5 and it received a downward trend arrow due to harsh state responses to major demonstrations throughout the year.

Quick Facts

Population: 34,700,000

Capital: Rabat

GDP/capita: \$2,847

Press Freedom Status: Not Free

Net Freedom Status: Partly Free

OVERVIEW

Morocco holds regular multiparty elections for Parliament, and reforms in 2011 shifted some authority over government from the monarchy to the elected legislature. Nevertheless, King Mohammed VI maintains 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 2017:

- Antigovernment protests triggered by the 2016 death of a fish vendor in Al-Hoceima continued during the year. Security forces and protesters clashed over the summer following the arrest of leading activists such as Nasser Zefzafi.
- The king appointed Saad Eddine Othmani of the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) as prime minister in March and certified a new cabinet in April. The moderate Islamist party had retained its plurality in the October 2016 elections, but coalition talks faltered for months, leading the king to use his royal prerogative. While the PJD held the premiership, technocrats loyal to the palace received most important ministries.
- In October, the king dismissed three ministers and other officials for poor performance in implementing development programs in the Rif region, which had been at the center of the recent protests.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 14 / 40 (-1)**A. ELECTORAL PROCESS: 5 / 12****A1. Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 1 / 4**

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

After the 2016 parliamentary elections, political disagreement over the composition of a new government resulting in months of fruitless coalition talks. In March 2017, the king finally used his royal prerogative to appoint Saad Eddine Othmani, a former PJD foreign minister, as prime minister, replacing Abdelilah Benkirane, also of the PJD. However, the party appeared marginalized in the new cabinet formed in April. Technocrats loyal to the palace obtained key economic portfolios, and the PJD was similarly excluded from the "strategic ministries" of interior, foreign affairs, justice, and Islamic affairs.

In another sign of the palace's dominant role, the king dismissed three ministers and other senior officials in October for poor implementation of development projects in the Rif region.

A2. 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 for 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 October 2016 parliamentary elections, the PJD placed first with 125 seats in the Chamber of Representatives, followed by the royalist Party of Authenticity and Modernity (PAM) with 102. Both increased their share of seats compared with 2011. Istiqlal fell by 14 seats to 46; the National Rally of Independents (RNI) declined by 15 seats to 37; the Popular Movement (MP) declined by 5 seats to 27; and the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) declined by 19 seats to 20. Official turnout was 43 percent of registered voters, lower than the 45 percent in 2011 and representing only 23 percent of eligible voters. Authorities placed limits on some foreign observers, and instances of vote buying and other irregularities were reported.

A3. 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 in practice. Elections are overseen by the Interior Ministry, with some participation by the Justice Ministry, rather than an independent electoral commission. Prior to the 2016 elections, then justice minister Mustapha Ramid of the PJD accused then interior minister Mohamed Hassad, a technocrat appointed by the king, of manipulating the upcoming vote, saying he was making decisions on electoral administration without consultation.

B. POLITICAL PLURALISM AND PARTICIPATION: 6 / 16 (-1)**B1. 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, but the parties are generally unable to assert themselves relative to the power of the palace. Justice and Charity, an illegal Islamist movement, does not participate in elections, though the authorities largely tolerate its other activities. Of the two largest parties, the PJD polls strongly in

urban areas, while the PAM dominates rural areas. Smaller parties tend to be unstable and are sometimes built around the personalities of their leaders.

B2. Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 2 / 4

Prior to 2011, the PJD was a vocal opposition party, and its entry into government shows that the system allows some rotation of power. However, this opportunity is permanently limited by the presence and influence of the monarchy, both formally and in practice.

B3. Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group that is not democratically accountable? 1 / 4

The constitution and informal practice give the king considerable influence over political affairs, including government formation after elections. The monarch and his associates also wield enormous private economic power that can be used to shape electoral outcomes more indirectly through patronage networks.

B4. Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 1 / 4 (-1)

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 indigenous population are not adequately addressed.

The indigenous peoples grouped under the term Amazigh or Berber have long had an uneasy relationship with the state. Some 40 percent of the population is Amazigh, and the vast majority of Moroccans have Amazigh roots. Prominent Amazigh elites enjoy access to the monarchy and also have their interests represented in Parliament, but the bulk of the indigenous population is marginalized. Unrest throughout 2017 in Al-Hoceima, the surrounding Rif region, and other cities across the country stemmed in large part from the inequities experienced by Amazigh residents.

A system of reserved seats for women is meant to encourage their participation in the electoral process at both the national and local level, partly offsetting traditional social pressures that deter such engagement. Women won a greater share of seats in Parliament in 2016, taking 21 percent of the House of Representatives, compared with 17 percent in 2011. Nevertheless, these women remain underrepresented in leadership positions.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 due to ongoing protests centered on the Amazigh population, especially in the northern Rif region, which illustrated the political system's failure to address the interests of such communities.

C. FUNCTIONING OF GOVERNMENT: 3 / 12

C1. 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 role of the king, who sets national and foreign policy and commands the armed forces and intelligence services.

C2. Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 1 / 4

Corruption is rife in state institutions and the economy. Despite the government's rhetoric about combating corruption, it has a mixed record on enforcement. The Central Authority for the Prevention of Corruption (ICPC) was strengthened under a 2015 law and renamed as the National Body for Integrity, Prevention, and the Fight against Corruption (INPPLC), but as of late 2017 its new leadership had yet to be appointed.

The government initiated plans for a National Anticorruption Strategy in 2016, but there were also delays in forming a National Anticorruption Commission to administer the strategy. In July 2017, Transparency Morocco petitioned the government to allow members of civil society groups to join the commission, and under a law adopted in September to establish the institution, the government agreed to reserve two seats for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

C3. Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 1 / 4

Overall transparency is limited. The government publishes budget and financial information online, and public officials – including parliament members, 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.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 25 / 60 (-1)

D. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND BELIEF: 7 / 16

D1. Are there free and independent media? 1 / 4

The state dominates the broadcast media, but more affluent segments of society 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 an array of financial and legal mechanisms to punish critical journalists, particularly those who focus on the king, his family, the status of Western Sahara, or Islam. The authorities also occasionally disrupt websites and internet platforms; bloggers are harassed for posting content that offends the monarchy.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) criticized the government's efforts to suppress reporting from the restive Rif region during 2017, and in November it called on the authorities to respect the rights of journalists and media workers who reported mistreatment in detention. One journalist, Hamid al-Mahdaoui of the online outlet Badil, was arrested in July while traveling to cover a protest near Al-Hoceima. He was initially sentenced to three months in prison for allegedly provocative speech, but the penalty was extended to one year after a review of his appeal in September. Al-Mahdaoui was one of four journalists arrested during the year who remained in detention as of December, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Foreign journalists and researchers investigating the protests were harassed and in some cases expelled from the country.

D2. 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 the authorities. The government operates a well-financed training program for imams and female religious counselors tasked with promoting a state-sanctioned version of Islam, which some critics charge is also intended to promote political quiescence. Despite deep societal prejudices, the small Jewish community is permitted to practice its faith.

D3. Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 2 / 4

Universities generally provide a space for open discussion, but professors practice self-censorship when dealing with sensitive topics like Western Sahara, the monarchy, and Islam. Salafists, adherents of a fundamentalist form of Islam, are closely monitored in universities.

D4. Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 2 / 4

There is some freedom of private discussion, but state surveillance of online activity and personal communications has been a growing concern in recent years, and the arrests of journalists, bloggers, and

activists for critical speech serve as a deterrent to uninhibited debate among the broader population.

E. ASSOCIATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL RIGHTS: 5 / 12 (-1)

E1. Is there freedom of assembly? 1 / 4 (-1)

Freedom of assembly is restricted. The authorities sometimes use excessive force and violence to disperse even peaceful protests, and harass activists involved in organizing demonstrations that criticize the government.

These abuses intensified during 2017 in response to continued unrest that began with the 2016 death of Al-Hoceima fish vendor Mouhcine Fikri, which was captured on video. His stock of swordfish had been confiscated by authorities because it was caught out of season; when he climbed into a garbage truck to retrieve it, the trash compactor was turned on – allegedly on orders from a police officer – and he was killed. The incident was seen as a powerful example of the daily indignities suffered by ordinary people at the hands of the state, particularly in the Rif region. The ensuing protest movement, known as Hirak Rif, gained support from activists in other parts of Morocco. For example, more than 10,000 people took to the streets of Rabat in June 2017 to express solidarity with Hirak Rif, and further protests were held in Casablanca in October.

The government reacted harshly to the movement, dispersing assemblies and carrying out hundreds of arrests during the year. Authorities arrested Hirak Rif leader Nasser Zefzafi in May, and fellow activists Najib Ahamjik and Silya Ziani in June. The king pardoned some protesters, but others received sentences of up to 20 years in prison, and many detainees alleged beatings by police.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 due to the authorities' attempts to suppress protests centered on the Rif region, which featured reports of police violence and mass arrests of organizers and participants.

E2. Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 2 / 4

Civil society organizations are quite active, but they are subject to legal harassment, travel restrictions, and other impediments to their work. The authorities routinely deny registration to NGOs with links to Justice and Charity or that assert the rights of marginalized communities. Officials also raise obstacles to events held by local human rights groups and increasingly expel or bar entry to representatives of international human rights organizations.

E3. 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 often closely affiliated with political parties.

F. RULE OF LAW: 6 / 16

F1. Is there an independent judiciary? 1 / 4

The court system is not independent of the monarch, who 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.

F2. Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 2 / 4

Due process is not consistently upheld. Law enforcement officers often violate legal and procedural safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention, and many convictions rely on confessions that may have been coerced. Pretrial detainees are reportedly held beyond a one-year limit in practice.

F3. 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. A number of the Hirak Rif protesters detained during 2017 reported being beaten and injured during arrest, and some prominent detainees – including Zefzafi, who remained in detention at year's end – were subjected to prolonged solitary confinement while awaiting trial. Prisons often suffer from overcrowding.

Terrorism remains a threat to physical security in the country, though the authorities have had some success in preventing attacks. Security forces reportedly broke up local cells of the Islamic State militant group during 2017.

F4. 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, and they and Amazigh culture have been promoted in schools. 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 seriously underrepresented in the labor force. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) 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, it had yet to adopt a law that would allow formal grants of asylum as of 2017, and authorities continued to face accusations of excessive force and other abuses against migrants seeking to enter the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.

G. PERSONAL AUTONOMY AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS: 7 / 16

G1. 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. 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 and his family. Among other assets, they have a majority stake in the National Investment Company (SNI), a massive conglomerate with businesses in virtually every economic sector, including mining, tourism, food, banking, construction, and energy.

G3. 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.

Spousal rape is not a crime, and domestic violence is rarely reported or punished due to social stigma. All extramarital sexual activity is illegal, which deters rape victims from bringing charges, among other repercussions.

G4. 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. Two incidents late in 2017 highlighted the hardships faced by some communities. In November, some 15 people in the town of Sidi Boulaalam died in the crush of a crowd that had gathered to receive food distributed by a local donor. In December, two young men died while illegally extracting coal from a defunct mine near the town of Jerada, leading to protests about local economic conditions.

Child laborers, especially girls working as domestic helpers, are denied basic rights. A 2016 labor law for household workers required written contracts, set a minimum age of 18 (with a five-year phase-in period during which those aged 16 and 17 are allowed to work), stipulated weekly rest periods, and provided minimum wage guidelines. The quality of enforcement of the law, which took effect in August 2017, remains to be seen. Separately, Parliament adopted a law in 2016 to criminalize human trafficking; existing measures had defined and banned only some forms of trafficking and left many victims unprotected.

Explanatory Note:

The numerical ratings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Western Sahara, which is examined in a separate report.

Copyright notice: © Freedom House, Inc. · All Rights Reserved

Search Refworld

by keyword

and / or country

[Advanced Search](#) | [Search Tips](#)

Countries

- [Morocco](#)

Topics

- [Community development](#)
- [Protests / Demonstrations / Riots / Civil unrest](#)