



2019 RSF Index: Harassing North Africa's journalists

With Morocco's drawn-out trials, the sometimes violent harassment by Libya's militias and Algeria's many prosecutions, journalists in North Africa work in an often hostile environment and struggle to fulfil their role as providers of objective reporting. The one exception is Tunisia, which has risen sharply in this year's Index.

In a region where journalism is sorely tested by the manifest desire of its leaders to control the media and prosecute journalists who investigate corruption or cover protests and popular uprisings, Tunisia is an exception. The only country in North Africa to pursue a transition to democracy after the Arab Spring uprisings, it has jumped 25 places in the 2019 World Press Freedom Index, from 97th to 72nd position.

This remarkable progress is due mainly to a significant decrease in the number of abuses against journalists and media. Tunisia's commitment to democratization was also manifested in its participation in the [Information and Democracy](#) initiative that RSF launched during the 2018 Paris Peace Forum. Several challenges must now be addressed to continue consolidating Tunisia's young democracy. The most immediate one is the launch in 2019 of the new broadcast media regulator, the ICA, in accordance with international standards on the freedom to inform.

Prosecutions

Elsewhere in the region, media editors and publishers are increasingly the targets of prosecutions. In Morocco (135th), two [lengthy trials](#) are indicative of a clear desire by the state to keep the media under pressure. [Ali Anouzla](#), the editor of the *Lakome2* news website, and [Maati Monjib](#), the president of the Moroccan Association for Investigative Journalism (AMJI), have to invest time and effort in defending themselves against charges of "condoning terrorism," "inciting terrorist acts" and "endangering state security" although all they did was their job as journalists. The proceedings against Anouzla began more than five years ago, those against Monjib nearly four years ago.

Growing use of the courts to harass the media has also been seen in Algeria (141st), which has fallen five places in the Index. There was an unprecedented [wave of prosecutions](#) of journalists at the end of 2018. Abdou Semmar, the editor of *Algérie Part*, Merouane Boudiab, one of Semmar's journalists, and Adlène Mellah, the publisher of the online media *Algérie Direct* and *Dzair Presse*, were arrested on charges of defamation and illegal assembly. Although released, they were given suspended prison sentences, which remain as a permanent threat hanging over journalists who could be the victims of [arbitrary arrest](#) when, for example, they cover the big demonstrations that began in January 2019.

In Libya (162nd), the defamation case brought against the journalist Mokhtar al Hallak in October 2018 cause a big stir and alarmed the media. It sent a barely veiled message to Libya's journalists, who have to live with the complete impunity enjoyed by press freedom's predators. More and more journalists are choosing to flee the country or censor themselves because of the political crisis and the security situation, both of which have worsened steadily for the past eight years. The collapse of the rule of law, undermined by the activities of Libya's many militias, makes journalism very dangerous or even impossible.

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