

SPERRFRIST bis 3. Mai 2023 // 6 Uhr MESZ

Middle East and North Africa

Under the yoke of authoritarian regimes

Whether suppressed by authoritarian rulers or violently censored by rebel militias, the freedom to report the news is heavily curtailed in the Middle East, where the situation is classified as “very bad” in more than half of its countries. They include [Iran](#) (177th), which stepped up its persecution of journalists, arresting more than 70 of them in the months following Kurdish student Mahsa Amini’s death in police custody. [Saudi Arabia](#) (170th) is also near the bottom of the Index. Encouraged by the impunity enjoyed by the crown prince in connection with the Khashoggi murder, the Saudi kingdom continues to give journalists long prison sentences, ban them from travelling, or keep them under close surveillance, even when abroad.

The Gulf monarchies also resort to surveillance and censorship to control the media, a practice that even extends to the Mediterranean and to [Jordan](#) (down 26 at 146th), where courts continue to impose “publication bans.” Censorship has also not let up in [Egypt](#) (166th), where the military dictatorship persists in jailing reporters instead of keeping its reform promises.

[Syria](#) (175th) continues to be one of the world’s most dangerous countries for journalists, who are caught in the crossfire between Bashar al-Assad’s deadly army, the various rebel militias and Turkey’s interventions. And it is still the country where the most journalists are held hostage, followed by [Yemen](#) (168th) and [Iraq](#) (167th). In [Palestine](#) (156th), despite a 14-place rise, the security indicator has unsurprisingly suffered a sharp fall after two more journalists were killed and Israeli security forces carried out more attacks against the media with complete impunity.

[Qatar](#) (up 14 at 105th) is one of the region’s few countries to have risen in the Index. It was the effect of the FIFA World Cup. Under an international spotlight and trying not to tarnish the country’s image, the authorities loosened some of the rules obstructing the media, even if some subjects are still hard to cover.

Increasingly authoritarian Maghreb

The environment for journalism also continues to worsen in North Africa, where President Saied’s [Tunisia](#) (121st) and President Tebboune’s [Algeria](#) (136th) have continued their descent into greater authoritarianism. After suspending and then dissolving parliament, Tunisia’s president is reversing the press freedom gains made after the 2011 revolution and journalists are being prosecuted for investigative reporting. In Algeria, although article 54 of the constitution guarantees press freedom, more and more journalists are being brought before the courts in connection with their reporting, and a new, much criticised media law



was adopted with no prior consultation. In [Morocco](#) (down 9 at 144th), journalists Omar Radi and Souleiman Raissouni are still held arbitrarily and judicial harassment of other outspoken journalists has not let up.