

Middle East and North Africa

Struggles for freedom continued across the Middle East and North Africa in 2013, but several countries faced worsening violence as antidemocratic forces asserted themselves. Countries including Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, and Lebanon declined in this year's ratings, and many other Arab societies were under pressure. The Middle East and North Africa as a whole had the worst civil liberties scores of any region.

A Spectrum of Outcomes in North Africa

Citizens in the neighboring states of Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt all ousted their longtime rulers in 2011, but the courses of their revolutions have since diverged.

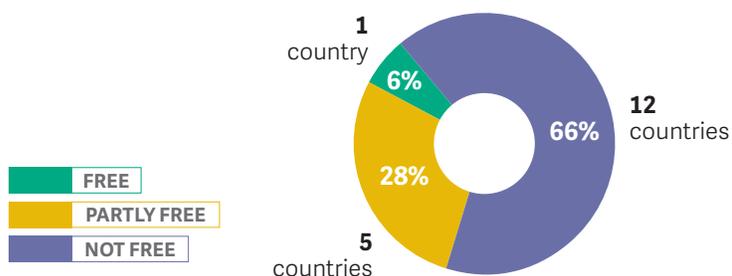
Egypt in 2013 lost nearly all of its gains from 2011, with its status declining from Partly Free to Not Free, after the military deposed Mohamed Morsi, the country's first competitively elected president. Morsi and his Freedom and Justice Party, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, had lost popularity since coming to power in 2012, seeking exclusive dominance rather than brokering workable solutions to the country's urgent economic and political problems. But the post-coup leadership took the country in a radically antidemocratic direction, killing over 1,000 demonstrators, arresting practically the entire Brotherhood leadership, coopting or intimidating the media, persecuting civil society organizations, and subverting the rule of law. The military-backed government also failed to quell a rise in Islamist militancy, including attacks on

security forces and sectarian violence in the form of arson and lynchings aimed at the Coptic Christian community. At the close of 2013, an escalating crackdown on secular activists and the extreme measure of declaring the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization demonstrated that the so-called "roadmap to democracy" laid out by the military and its allies was nothing more than a charade designed to solidify their authoritarian grip on power.

After a dramatic lurch toward greater freedom following the defeat of its former despot, **Libya** struggled in 2013 to build a foundation for democratic governance and the rule of law. The weak transitional government was severely strained by ongoing insecurity and challenges to its authority. Several foreign embassies were attacked during the year, the prime minister was briefly kidnapped in October, and a branch of the central bank was robbed. In November, militias from the city of Misrata, which have often clashed with rivals in and around Tripoli, opened fire on protesters calling on the government to disband and disarm such groups. A reported 43 people were killed and more than 450 were wounded. The southern border areas—a haven for the smuggling of arms, drugs, and human beings—were so insecure that the national government instated martial law and gave military authorities jurisdiction over provincial governments.

Tunisia stood out as a rare source of hope in the region, even after suffering the assassination of two secularist leaders and months of deadlock between the ruling Islamist-led coalition and the largely secular opposition. By year's end, the two sides managed to negotiate a path out of this stalemate, with the Islamist government agreeing to step down and make way for a technocratic caretaker

STATUS BY COUNTRY



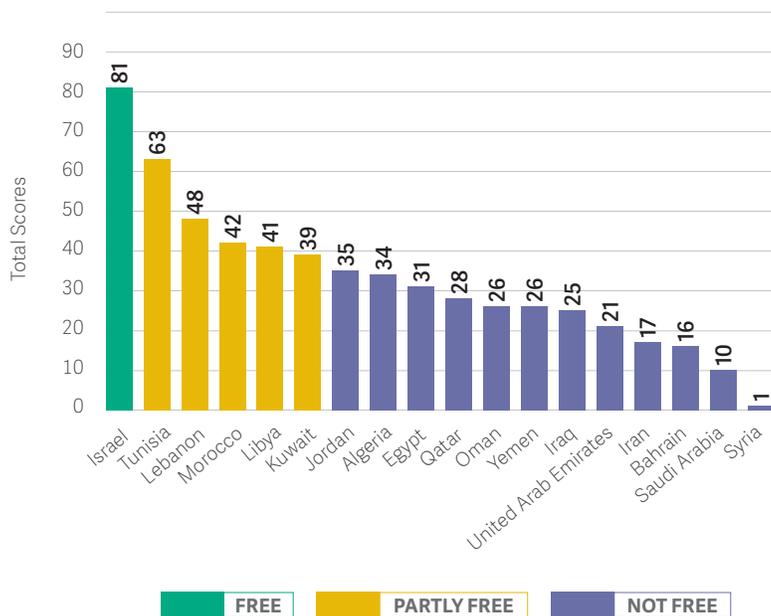
government. That interim body will be in place until new elections are held in 2014. In addition, Tunisia's civil liberties rating improved from 4 to 3 due to gains in academic freedom, the establishment of new labor unions, and the lifting of travel restrictions.

Disaster in Syria

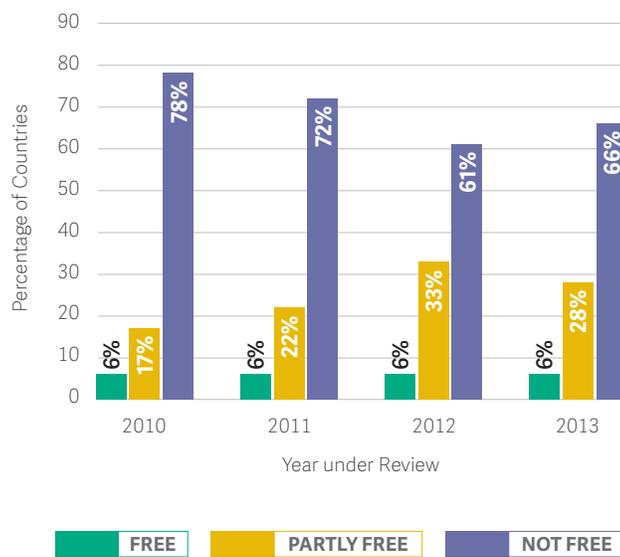
In what is by far the region's greatest tragedy, Syria descended even further into multilateral warfare and humanitarian crisis, all by-products of the government's systematic use of extreme violence against peaceful protesters in 2011, igniting an armed uprising. The country earned the lowest scores of any country in 2013 due to an ever-worsening environment for civilians, who faced both violence from combatants and acute levels of hunger, disease, and other hardships associated siege conditions and internal displacement. Declines also reflect the increased targeting of churches for destruction and the kidnapping and murder of clergy, the implementation of harsh Sharia-inspired restrictions in some areas, and unchecked violence against women, including the use of rape as a weapon of war. Meanwhile, neighboring countries, particularly Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon, struggled to manage a sharp influx of refugees and a rise in political and sectarian hostility linked to the Syrian conflict.

AGGREGATE SCORES

100 = best score
0 = worst score



TRENDS IN FREEDOM



Continued Repression in the Gulf

The Bahraini regime's long-running and brutal crackdown on protests calling for political reform earned it a downward trend arrow for 2013, especially after the government enacted a new ban on unapproved contact between Bahraini political societies and foreign officials or organizations. The leadership launched a National Dialogue in February, ostensibly to negotiate an end to the political crisis that has embroiled the country since February 2011. The dialogue stalled only a few months later, however, as the opposition boycotted the effort in the absence of concessions. The government continued to harass the majority Shiite population and squelch political dissent.

In the United Arab Emirates, peaceful political reformists were convicted of conspiring to overthrow the government and sentenced to prison terms ranging from 7 to 15 years. Moreover, the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman all continued to crack down on online dissent by imposing excessive prison sentences for violations of vaguely worded cybercrime laws.