FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2017

Mauritania

NOT FREE

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<th>Score</th>
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<td>Political Rights</td>
<td>9/40</td>
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<td>Civil Liberties</td>
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LAST YEAR’S SCORE & STATUS

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.
Overview

The current leadership in Mauritania came to power in 2008 through a military coup. It has since confirmed its position in flawed elections that were boycotted by the main opposition parties. The government has adopted a number of laws ostensibly meant to address the problem of institutionalized slavery and discrimination, but it continues to arrest antislavery activists and threaten bloggers who criticize the system with punishments including the death penalty. Corruption linked to extractive industries also remains a concern.

Key Developments in 2016

- In April, an appellate court upheld a 2014 death sentence against Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mohamed M’Kheitir, a blogger who was convicted of apostasy for posting an article in which he criticized the use of Islam to justify social discrimination in the country. An appeal to the Supreme Court was pending at year’s end.
- In May, Biram Dah Abeid and Bilal Ramdhane, two leaders of the antislavery Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement in Mauritania (IRA Mauritania), were released from prison after serving 20 months of a two-year sentence.
- Thirteen other antislavery activists were arrested after a protest and sentenced to prison terms of up to 15 years in June and July. The sentences, for offenses such as rebellion and membership in an unregistered organization, were significantly reduced on appeal in November, and all but three were released by the end of the year. Protests demanding the release of the activists had been violently dispersed by police.

Executive Summary

In September and October 2016, the government organized a dialogue with political parties and civil society groups to discuss major institutional reforms as well as social
and political grievances. Mainstream opposition parties refused to participate in the event, adhering to a boycott strategy that had led them to sit out parliamentary and presidential elections in 2013 and 2014. The opposition considered President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz’s regime to be illegitimate due to its origins in the 2008 coup and its disrespect for civil liberties and the rule of law. Nevertheless, the dialogue produced plans for constitutional amendments that would eliminate the indirectly elected Senate and create elected regional councils, among other changes.

While many Mauritanians welcomed the proposed reforms, others voiced concern that the real motive behind the constitutional initiative was to lift presidential term limits and allow Abdel Aziz to seek a third term.

Restrictions on civil liberties persisted throughout 2016, as the authorities continued to jail antislavery activists and harass journalists and bloggers who reported on politically sensitive topics.

**Political Rights**

**A. Electoral Process**

**B. Political Pluralism and Participation**

**C. Functioning of Government**

**Civil Liberties**

**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief**
E. Associational and Organizational Rights

F. Rule of Law

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

*This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2017. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Mauritania, see Freedom in the World 2016.*

On Mauritania

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**Country Facts**

Global Freedom Score

34/100 Partly Free

**Other Years**

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