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Freedom on the Net 2018 - Morocco

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Status:	Partly Free
Total Score:	45/100 (0 = Best, 100 = Worst)
Population:	35.7 million
Internet Penetration:	62 million
Bloggers/ICT Users Arrested:	Yes
Freedom in the World Status:	Partly Free

Key Developments, June 1, 2017 – May 31, 2018

- Digital advertisers were obliged to pay a 5 percent tax starting in January 2018, stifling an already fragile media sector (see Media, Diversity, and Content Manipulation).

- A group of online activists launched a campaign in April 2018 to boycott products from three major companies to protest increases in the cost of living, affecting the companies' stock prices (see Digital Activism).

- Hundreds of people, including several citizen and online journalists, were arrested in connection with the "Hirak Rif" protests. Several were later sentenced to prison for their reporting on the movement (see Prosecutions and Arrests for Online Activities).

Introduction:

Internet freedom in Morocco remained tenuous over the past year due to a crackdown on online journalists and activists who had covered protests, trained reporters, and voiced dissent online.

Unlike traditional news outlets, social media platforms were filled with debate on the outbreak of protests in al-Hoceima, a coastal town located in the marginalized Rif region. The protests erupted after video footage circulated online in October 2016 of fish vendor Mouhcine Fikri being crushed in a trash compactor while trying to recover his confiscated goods. Known as al-Hirak Rif (the Rif Movement), the protests spread to other cities until June 2017, with demonstrators denouncing chronic neglect and harassment by the state and ruling elites. Hundreds of people, including several citizen and online journalists, were arrested as part of the government response to the protests.[1]

A similar pattern of protests and repression emerged in December 2017 in the northeastern town of Jerada, after two brothers, aged 23 and 30, died while illegally extracting coal from a defunct mine.[2] The incident drew attention to economic deprivation in the area, and online campaigns were effective in helping to coordinate activists' actions and keep information

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flowing from the remote region.

Several online journalists and activists were later convicted and sentenced to prison for their involvement with the Hirak Rif protests. In February 2018, the founder of the online news site *Rassd Maroc* was sentenced to four years in prison on charges of condoning terrorism and inciting illegal street protests through the outlet's coverage of the protests. In June 2018 (after this report's coverage period), editor-in-chief of the news site *Badil*, Hamid Mahdaoui, was sentenced to three years in prison; he was first arrested in July 2017 while attempting to cover demonstrations in al-Hoceima and had become well known for uploading YouTube videos that expressed support for the Hirak Rif protests. At least three other journalists were given prison sentences in June 2018 ranging between two and five years for covering the protests.

Meanwhile, Moroccan authorities use nuanced means to limit online content and violate users' rights. For example, while websites are rarely blocked, problematic press and antiterrorism laws place heavy burdens on intermediaries and result in the shutting down of news sites. The unfair disbursement of advertising money, strict self-censorship, and ongoing trials of prominent journalists have prevented the emergence of a vibrant online media sphere. In January 2018, the government imposed a 5 percent tax on digital advertising, placing a new financial burden on the fragile media sector.[3] Though digital media remain freer than television or newspapers, restrictive provisions in the penal code continue to present a clear danger to internet freedom in the country.

Obstacles to Access:

While internet access continues to increase overall, the disparity between urban and rural connectivity is also widening. Morocco's regulator has failed to uphold the principle of internet access as a public service by encouraging or requiring the three main telecommunications companies to invest more in rural areas.

Availability and Ease of Access

Internet access in Morocco has slowly increased in recent years, though obstacles remain in certain areas of the country. The internet penetration rate grew from 52 percent in 2010 to nearly 62 percent in 2017, according to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).[4] Meanwhile, there are 1.23 mobile subscriptions for every individual, indicating high mobile penetration.

Network coverage is highly uneven between urban and rural areas. Telecommunications companies do not abide by the ITU principle of telecommunications as a public service, instead preferring to invest in more lucrative urban areas. According to Morocco's regulator, urban dwellers are more likely to have internet access than rural inhabitants, with penetration at 67 percent versus 43 percent, respectively. Some 55 percent of individuals possessed a smartphone by the end of 2015, up from 38 percent in 2014. Smartphone uptake in rural areas almost doubled from 2014 to 2015, reaching 43 percent of individuals aged 12-65.[5] Rural inhabitants constitute 39.7 percent of the overall population,[6] and while many have access to electricity, television, and radio, most do not have access to phone lines and high-speed internet. The high rate of illiteracy, especially among rural women, is another major obstacle to internet access. Some 47.5 percent of rural Moroccans are illiterate, and 60.1 percent of those are female.[7]

The government has undertaken several programs over the years to improve the country's information and communication technology (ICT) sector. The General Guidelines for the Further Development of the Telecommunications Sector by 2018 provides the latest framework for the development of ICTs.[8] The program aims to increase fiber-optic and other high-speed connections throughout the country, reinforce the existing regulatory framework, and provide universal access.

As a result of previous government efforts, internet use remains relatively affordable. For a 3G or 4G prepaid connection speed of up to 225 Mbps, customers pay MAD 59 (US$6) in initial connectivity fees for the first 10 days with 4 GB of download capacity, and then recharge the account with a minimum of MAD 5 (US$0.50).[9] Internet users pay on average MAD 3 (US$0.30) for one hour of connection in cybercafés.

Restrictions on Connectivity

Authorities did not impose any restrictions on connectivity over the past year.

However, the centralization of Morocco's internet backbone facilitates the potential control of content and surveillance. Maroc Telecom, a partially state-owned company, owns and controls a fiber-optic backbone of more than 10,000 km. The national railroad company, Office National des Chemins de Fer (ONCF), and the national electricity and water utility, Office National de l'Electricité et de l'Eau Potable (ONEE), have also built 2,000 km and 4,000 km fiber-optic infrastructures, respectively. The state controls both entities. Morocco's national and international connectivity has a combined capacity exceeding 10 terabits per second.[10] The three main telecom operators – Maroc Telecom, Medi Telecom, and INWI – have varying access to international connectivity.

ICT Market

Internet service providers (ISPs), cybercafés, and mobile-phone companies do not face major legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles.[11] Maroc Telecom, Medi Telecom, and INWI are licensed ISPs and mobile carriers. Maroc Telecom is a former state company that held a monopoly over the telecom sector until 1999, when licenses were granted to Medi Telecom and INWI.[12] Maroc Telecom is owned by Etisalat of the United Arab Emirates, which bought a 53 percent stake from France's Vivendi in 2014, and the Moroccan state, which maintains 30 percent ownership.[13] Medi Telecom is a private consortium led by Spain's Telefónica, while INWI (formerly WANA, Maroc Connect) is a subsidiary of Omnium North Africa (ONA), the Moroccan industrial conglomerate owned by the royal family. Three 4G licenses were granted to the three telecom companies, and 4G utilization started in April 2015.[14]

Regulatory Bodies

The National Agency for the Regulation of Telecommunications (ANRT) is a government body created in 1998 to regulate and liberalize the telecommunications sector. Its board of directors is made up of government ministers, and its head is appointed by the king. The founding law of the ANRT extols the telecommunications sector as a driving force for Morocco's social and economic development, and the agency is meant to create an efficient and transparent regulatory framework that favors competition among operators.[15]

While Maroc Telecom effectively controls the telephone cable infrastructure, the ANRT is tasked with setting the prices at which the company's rivals (such as Medi Telecom and INWI) can access those cables. Thus the ANRT makes sure competition in the market is fair and leads to affordable services for Moroccan consumers.[16] Some journalists have argued that the ANRT is a politicized body and lacks independence, citing the fact that its director and administrative board are appointed by a *dahir* (royal decree). However, international organizations such as the World Bank and the ITU have not expressed any major criticism regarding the ANRT's neutrality.[17]

The allocation of digital resources, such as domain names, is carried out in a nondiscriminatory manner. The ANRT manages the top-level country domain ".ma" through various private providers, some of which are affiliated with the three telecom companies. As of May 2018, there were 69,115 registered Moroccan domain names.[18]

Limits on Content:

While websites are rarely blocked, authorities limit online content through a variety of nuanced mechanisms. Problematic press and antiterrorism laws place high burdens on intermediaries and allow for shutdowns of online news sites. Discriminatory allocation of advertising and the repeated prosecution of online news editors impedes the diversification of Morocco's digital media landscape. Digital advertisers were obliged to pay a 5 percent tax starting in January 2018, stifling an already financially fragile media sector.

Blocking and Filtering

The government did not block or filter any political, social, or religious websites during the coverage period. Social media and communication services including YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are available in the country, as are international blog-hosting services. Websites that discuss controversial views or minority causes – such as the disputed territory of Western Sahara, the Amazigh minority, or Islamist groups – are also accessible.

The last instance of government blocking of online content occurred in 2013, when the attorney general ordered the ANRT to block the Arabic- and French-language websites of

the investigative news outlet *Lakome* for allegedly condoning terrorism.[19] An article on the sites had reported on a video attributed to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) but did not itself incite violence or promote terrorism.[20] An Arabic-language version of the outlet has been relaunched using the address lakome2.com.

Content Removal

While the government does not block online content, it maintains control over the information landscape through a series of restrictive laws that can require the closure of outlets and the removal of online content. Under the press law, the government has the right to shut down any publication "prejudicial to Islam, the monarchy, territorial integrity, or public order," and it can seek heavy fines – or prison sentences under the penal code – for the publication of offensive content (see Legal Environment). Intermediaries must block or delete infringing content when made aware of it or upon receipt of a court order.[21]

The antiterrorism law, adopted in 2003,[22] gives the government sweeping powers to filter and delete content that is deemed to "disrupt public order by intimidation, force, violence, fear, or terror."[23] Article 218-6 assigns legal liability to the author and anyone who in any way helps the author to disseminate a justification for acts of terrorism, which would include site owners and ISPs. While the law was ostensibly designed to combat terrorism, authorities retain the discretion to define vague terms such as "national security" and "public order" as they please, opening the door for abuse. Many opposition news sites are hosted on servers outside the country to avoid being shut down by the authorities.

The government also resorts to more ad hoc, extralegal means to remove content that is deemed controversial or undesirable. For example, *Hespress*, which in the past featured content that was both supportive and critical of the government, has deleted videos of street protests and interviews with opposition figures due to anticipated or actual pressure from authorities.[24]

Media, Diversity, and Content Manipulation

Moroccans openly discuss controversial social issues and political events on social media, though online news media continue to lack in diversity and investigative journalism. In the words of award-winning journalist Aboubakr Jamai, "many otherwise good journalists prefer the financial rewards [that come with obeying the state] over the risky duties of watchdogs."[25] Online news outlets receive unofficial directives not to report on controversial issues, or not to allow certain voices to be heard. Many online journalists have been jailed, while others have been investigated on serious charges in a bid to silence them, with court proceedings often repeatedly postponed in order to maintain the threat of jail time (see Prosecutions and Detentions for Online Activities).[26] In a state that punishes investigative reporting and whistle-blowing, people with sensitive information tend to stay quiet to avoid possible retribution.

Compounding self-censorship and fear are the personal attacks and derogatory comments received by activists and opinion makers online for openly criticizing government policies.[27] Numerous accounts are created on Twitter and Facebook with the sole purpose of harassing, intimidating, and threatening activists. Activists believe that these progovernment commentators are also equipped with direct or indirect access to surveillance tools, since they have often obtained private information about other users.[28] There is no clear indication of the identities behind the accounts or whether they are state-sponsored agents or simply overzealous private individuals. However, given the amount of time and energy needed to engage in such activity, and the access they have to private information, there are serious doubts that these are ordinary citizens acting on their own personal impetus.

The government uses financial pressure to push the most outspoken print-based media outlets into closure or bankruptcy. Advertising revenue provided by the government or government-linked companies is not split fairly between independent and progovernment publications.[29] The Moroccan media sector includes a variety of "shadow" outlets, nominally independent but editorially supportive of the state.[30] They exist primarily to divert attention from other news portals and to compete for online advertising money and audience share. There is no evidence linking these outlets to a larger state strategy to counter the growth of voices of dissent. However, they receive large amounts of advertising, possibly in return for their progovernment bias. Powerful business entities, such as the three

telecommunication companies, are known to adhere to state pressure to withdraw advertising money from news outlets that run counter to the state-owned media narrative.[31] In an interview, prominent journalist Aboubakr Jamai explained that "the carrot in Morocco is bigger than the stick; the state would rather reward you for obedience than punish you for dissent."[32]

Creating a news website today in Morocco has become a very complicated matter.[33] The Ministry of Culture and Communication long refused to grant press cards to the directors of two important French-language online news sites, Yabiladi and Le Desk.[34] It took seven months before Mohamed Ezzouak and Ali Amar received their cards in May 2018. Without such cards, based on the new 2016 press code, it is illegal to practice journalism in Morocco.

Digital advertisers were obliged to pay a 5 percent tax starting in January 2018, after the General Tax Administration issued a memo calling for the new levy and the government duly modified Articles 251-b, 254, and 183-B of the general tax code in its annual budget bill.[35] The memo stipulates "an enlargement of the stamp tax duty for all advertising broadcast on all types of digital screens."[36] This tax will stifle an already financially fragile media sector. An estimated 70 to 80 percent of Moroccan advertisers use global online platforms such as Google and Facebook, and since these platforms do not pay any taxes to the Moroccan government, their market share will grow at the expense of local websites.[37] The Association of the Moroccan Digital Press and the Moroccan Federation of Newspaper Editors both denounced the decision.

Debates on issues related to the monarchy do not make news, though social media users openly tackle such taboo subjects. For example, users speculated on the role of the king's advisers in the formation of a coalition government after the October 2016 elections. Users also questioned the king's public support for a Moroccan pop singer jailed in Paris in October 2016 over accusations of rape,[38] even as online news outlets refrained from mentioning the king when reporting on the topic.[39]

The most remarkable change in internet use among Moroccans continues to be the growing interest in domestic portals. In 2010, the country's top 10 most visited websites did not include any Moroccan news sites.[40] By 2018, the list included six Moroccan websites – three news sites, two classified ad platforms (Avito and Jumia), and one sports site. One of the news outlets, *Hespress*, has an estimated 600,000 unique visitors per day and ranked fourth after Google, YouTube, and Avito. The others, *Chouftv* and *Le360*, are now ranked sixth and tenth, respectively. The Moroccan sports site Elbotola is ranked seventh, bypassing the pan-Arabic sports site Kooora.[41]

Digital Activism

Internet users take advantage of various social media tools to educate, organize, and mobilize people on a wide variety of issues. In April 2018, a group of online activists launched a campaign to boycott products from three major companies to protest increases in the cost of living. The boycott targeted Centrale Danone (dairy products), Sidi Ali (mineral water), and Afriquia (gas stations). The companies control 60 percent, 55 percent, and 29 percent of their respective national markets.[42] Related hashtags in Arabic – #Ù…Ù ‚Ø·Ø¹ÙˆÙ† and #Ø®Ù„ÙŠÙ‡ Ø¥Ø±ÙŠØ¨ (#boycotting and #let it spoil, in reference to milk) – trended online. The economic impact of the boycott was evident 10 days after it started. On April 30, Afriquia and Centrale Danone recorded major drops in market value on the Casablanca Stock Exchange, with shares in each falling by nearly 6 percent.[43]

Another recent instance of online activism was a campaign surrounding the death of two miners in Jerada, a small town in northeastern Morocco. The protests, which focused on the area's lack of economic opportunities, erupted after the two brothers died while illegally extracting coal from a defunct mine in December 2017.[44] Facebook pages such as Jerada 24/24 and Jerada Hassiblal were effective in helping to coordinate activists' actions and keeping information flowing from a remote and marginalized region.

Digital activists continue to provide a platform for the Hirak Rif protests centered on the northern coastal city of al-Hoceima. The ongoing demonstrations began in October 2016 after fish vendor Mouhcine Fikri was crushed in a trash compactor while trying to recover fish that the authorities had confiscated because it was allegedly caught illegally.[45] Two hashtags in Arabic – #Ø·Ø·Ù†_Ù…Ùˆ ("grind him") and #ÙƒÙ„Ù†Ø§_Ù…Ø³Ù†_Ù?ÙƒØ ±ÙŠ ("We are all Mouhcine Fikri") – trended online and mobilized the initial street

demonstrations.[46] The Hirak Rif protests are now focused on the release of the leader of the movement, Nasser Zefzafi, and other prominent activists. Zefzafi was arrested in May 2017 and sentenced to 20 years in prison in June 2018 (after this report's coverage period).[47]

Violations of User Rights:

Moroccan laws on criminal defamation and terrorism continue to pose a threat to free speech. Several online journalists and activists were arrested and imprisoned as part of a crackdown on the Hirak Rif protests.

Legal Environment

The Moroccan constitution contains provisions designed to protect freedom of expression, but these principles are not defended by the judiciary. According to the 2011 constitution, passed by referendum to curtail public protests at the onset of the Arab Spring, all Moroccan citizens are equal before the law, and Article 25 guarantees all citizens "freedom of opinion and expression in all its forms."[48] Although the constitution strengthened the judiciary as a separate branch of government, the judicial system in Morocco is far from independent. The king chairs the Supreme Council of the Judiciary and appoints a number of its members; at least half are elected by fellow judges.[49] In practice, the courts often fail to produce fair and balanced rulings, frequently basing their decisions on recommendations from security forces.[50]

Moroccan users may be punished for their online activities under the penal code, the antiterrorism law, and the press code. Article 218-2 of the antiterrorism law prescribes prison terms of two to six years and fines of MAD 10,000 to 200,000 (US$1,000 to 21,000) for those convicted of condoning acts of terrorism through offline or online speech.[51]

A new press code passed in June 2016 received mixed reactions among free speech activists.[52] Unlike the previous press code from 2002, the new code contains provisions that specifically apply to online media.[53] Most significantly, the code eliminated jail sentences for press offenses and replaced them with steep fines. Articles 71 and 72 authorize fines of up to MAD 200,000 (US$21,000) for publishing content seen as disruptive to public order. The maximum fine is MAD 500,000 (US$52,000) if the content offends the military. The fines are largely unaffordable for Moroccan journalists, who may be imprisoned for failure to pay.[54] Most importantly, under the unreformed penal code, journalists can still be jailed for speech offenses related to the monarchy, Islam, and Western Sahara, as well as threats to national security, which has occurred in the past. Defamation also remains a criminal offense.

Articles 33 and 34 of the press code stipulate that to obtain press cards and benefit from state financial support, online news portals must acquire two types of authorizations from two different bodies, valid for one year at a time: from the Moroccan Cinema Center (CCM) to produce video content,[55] and from ANRT to host domain names under press.ma.[56] While these measures are in line with international practices, press freedom advocates have warned that the regulators may be subject to political pressure to deny authorizations based on the editorial policies of outlets.

Prosecutions and Detentions for Online Activities

Moroccans, particularly prominent journalists and activists, continue to face arrest and prosecution for their peaceful online activities. Although the press code ostensibly protects journalists from being jailed for their work, the government has found other ways to punish them. Court cases are often repeatedly postponed, allowing authorities to avoid international condemnation while instilling self-censorship.

Police arrested Taoufiq Bouachrine, publisher of the newspaper *Akhbar al-Yaoum* and its website, Alyaoum24, in February 2018.[57] He was charged with offenses including human trafficking, rape, and sexual assault and faced up to 20 years in prison. The prosecutor claimed to possess more than 50 video recordings as evidence, while the defense argued that the case was fabricated by the authorities to silence Bouachrine's critical editorials. Court proceedings were ongoing at the end of the coverage period.

Several online journalists and activists were arrested and imprisoned as part of a crackdown on the Hirak Rif protests centered on al-Hoceima:

- In February 2018, the Court of Appeal in Rabat sentenced Abdelkabir al-Hor to four years in prison. Al-Hor, founder of the news site Rassd Maroc, was charged with condoning terrorism and inciting illegal street protests.[58] According to his lawyer, the charges stem from his coverage of the Hirak Rif protests.[59]

- Hamid Mahdaoui, editor in chief of the news site *Badil*, was arrested while attempting to cover demonstrations in al-Hoceima in July 2017 and was initially sentenced to three months in jail for unspecified speech offenses, extended to one year on appeal in September.[60] He was separately charged with "failure to report a threat to state security," based on a wiretap recording in which he reportedly received an unsolicited call from an individual who said he was planning to smuggle weapons to the country. In June 2018 (after the end of the coverage period), Mahdaoui was sentenced to three years in prison and a fine of MAD 3,000 [US$300].[61] Mahdaoui had become well known for uploading YouTube videos that expressed support for the Hirak Rif protests.

- Other journalists arrested in June 2017 for covering the protests included Mohamed al-Asrihi and Jawad Sabiri (Rif24 news site), Abdelali Haddou (Araghi TV Facebook page), Rabiaa al-Ablaq (*Badil* news site), Alhussain al-Idrissi (Rifpress), and Fouad Essaidi (Awar TV Facebook page).[62] In June 2018, after a year in custody, Haddou, al-Asrihi, al-Ablaq, and al-Idrissi were sentenced to five years in prison and a fine of MAD 2,000 [US$200], Essaidi was sentenced to three years, and Sabiri was sentenced to two years in prison and a fine of MAD 2,000.[63]

In August 2017, a court sentenced video blogger Mohamed Taghra to 10 months in jail on charges of criminal defamation.[64] Taghra, who uses the pseudonym Hamza Lhazin, published a YouTube video denouncing local police corruption in the Souss-Massa region.

A group of seven prominent online journalists and activists continue to face serious charges in retribution for their work. Maria Moukrim, editor in chief of Febrayer.com, and Rachid Tarik, a member of the Moroccan Association of Investigative Journalism (AMJI), could be forced to pay fines for "receiving foreign funding without notifying the General Secretariat of the government." In addition, the following five individuals face possible five-year prison terms for "threatening the internal security of the state":

- Maati Monjib, university professor and president of Freedom Now,

- Samad Ayach, online journalist and member of Freedom Now,

- Hicham al-Mansouri, AMJI member,

- Hicham al-Miraat, former advocacy director for Global Voices and former head of the Digital Rights Association, ADN, and

- Mohamed Essabeur, head of the Moroccan Education and Youth Association (AMEJ).[65]

The charges are apparently related to a June 2015 training session run by the Dutch nongovernmental organization Free Press Unlimited and AMEJ in the city of Marrakesh.[66] According to Free Press Unlimited, plainclothes police officers raided the session and confiscated all participants' smartphones, later transferring them to a police office in Casablanca.[67] After an initial court date was set for November 2015 in Rabat, it has been repeatedly postponed.[68] Three of the defendants have fled the country, including al-Miraat, who noted that their depositions had been falsified to include incriminating details.[69] The judge set to hear the case had previously sentenced journalist Hisham al-Mansouri to 10 months in jail for adultery in a case that press freedom activists saw as politically motivated.[70]

Ali Anouzla, editor in chief of the *Lakome* news site's Arabic version, continues to face charges of "advocacy of acts amounting to terrorism offenses" and "providing assistance to perpetrators or accomplices of acts of terrorism" after his arrest in 2013. He was targeted for an article he had written on jihadist threats to Morocco in which he provided a link to a Spanish site, which in turn had embedded a jihadist video. He was released on bail, but his trial has been repeatedly postponed.[71] In May 2016, Anouzla was acquitted of separate charges related to an interview he gave to the German newspaper *Bild*.[72]

Surveillance, Privacy, and Anonymity

Given the absence of blocking and filtering, Moroccan activists have identified surveillance as the most dangerous instrument in the hands the state.[73]

The awareness of being systematically monitored affects the way activists perceive the risks they take and the margin of freedom they have. Hisham Almiraat, cofounder of the website Mamfakinch and one of the leaders of the February 20th Movement of 2011, explained that the state's capacity to own and reconstruct one's personal story, based on surveillance and monitoring, allows authorities to "assassinate your character and use your own information to hurt you."[74] According to activist Zineb Belmkaddem, "surveillance entails the stealing of data and data is private property . . . . It's like the state coming to my home every day to steal my belongings."

Reports, leaks, and interviews have revealed the use of malware products from the Italian company Hacking Team to target activists.[75] Previously, French news site Reflets.info had published an investigation on the purchase of spyware from the French company Amesys for use in Morocco.[76] Activists have demanded that the state be more transparent about who conducts surveillance, who is targeted, and to what end.[77] Instead, authorities have retaliated against the activists who voice their concerns. After the publication of interviews and investigations into surveillance practices in Morocco by Privacy International and Morocco's Digital Rights Association (ADN), the Interior Ministry announced that a criminal complaint had been filed against "persons who distributed a report containing grave accusations about spying practices."[78]

Purchasers of SIM cards must register their names and national identity numbers with telecommunications operators under a 2014 decision by the ANRT.[79] Unregistered SIM cards are shut down after one month. At cybercafés, however, internet users still do not need to register or provide identification.

Some ambiguity remains regarding the purchase and use of encryption software.[80] Article 13 of Law 53-05 of 2007 states that the "the import, export, supply, operation or use of means or cryptographic services" are subject to prior authorization and outlines harsh penalties for noncompliance. However, the law does not specify whether the restrictions apply only to businesses or to private persons as well.[81] Decree 2-13-88137, adopted in 2015, shifted authority for authorizing and monitoring "electronic certifications," including encryption, from the civilian ANRT to the military's General Directorate for the Security of Information Systems. Civil society advocates saw the move as problematic, given the lack of accountability and oversight at military institutions.[82]

Intimidation and Violence

There were no incidents of violence against users for their online activities during the coverage period, but harassment and extralegal intimidation remain a major concern in the country, particularly during police interrogations.[83]

Technical Attacks

In addition to surveillance and malware attacks, online news portals that carry dissenting views are subject to continuous cyberattacks.[84] Reports and interviews with prominent activists point to an ongoing campaign by anonymous hacking groups to target perceived opponents of the establishment. Groups such as the Monarchist Youth, the Moroccan Repression Force, the Moroccan Nationalist Group, and the Royal Brigade of Dissuasion have hacked into activists' email and social media accounts, often publishing offensive content in a bid to harm their reputation.[85]

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11 Interview with Dr. Tajjedine Rachdi, computer science professor and former director of Information Technologies Services of Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, conducted on March 11, 2018.

12 The State owns 30% of Maroc Telecom shares, 53% is owned by the Emirate telecoms company Etisalat, and 17% is public. "Key facts and figures," Maroc Telecom, http://www.iam.ma/Lists/Publication/Attachments/50/Maroc%20Telecom%20en%20%20Bref%20S1%202015%20Version%20anglaise_EN.pdf.

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