

Algeria



OpenNet Initiative

Overview

Although Internet access in Algeria is not restricted by technical filtering, the state controls the Internet infrastructure and regulates content by other means. Internet users and Internet service providers (ISPs) can face criminal penalties for posting or allowing the posting of material deemed contrary to public order or morality, for example, and there are cases of government surveillance on Internet cafés and journalists.

Background

Press freedom in Algeria remains fragile, especially after a February 27, 2006 decree that provides for fines and prison terms of up to five years for those who speak or write to “exploit the wounds of the national tragedy, tarnish the country's international image or its officials' reputation.”¹ The law also provides for jail terms and fines for offending religion, parliament, officials, judiciary authorities, armed forces, and the president.² Reported violations of press freedom include restriction of freedom of

movement of journalists,³ withdrawal of accreditation from journalists, fining publications, lack of tolerance for outspoken journalists, closing the bureau of the Qatar-based satellite TV station al-Jazeera in 2004,⁴ and banning the distribution of publications.⁵

Internet in Algeria

Over the past decade, the number of Algerian Internet users has increased more than 20-fold, from 150,000 in 2000⁶ to approximately 3.5 million users in 2008.⁷ Still, the penetration rate is low, at 10.3 percent of the population. According to a 2007 UNDP survey that covered the Maghreb, this is due to high costs of computers and Internet connection and a lack of interesting Web content.⁸ The ISPs in Algeria themselves complain of the sector's underdevelopment and blame the authorities for not encouraging the development of the IT sector.⁹ During a September 2007 forum in Algiers, ISPs specifically complained that Algeria lags behind other north African countries in

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Filtering	No evidence of filtering	Suspected filtering	Selective filtering	Substantial filtering	Pervasive filtering
Political	●				
Social	●				
Conflict/security	●				
Internet tools	●				
Other factors	Low	Medium	High	Not applicable	
Transparency				●	
Consistency				●	

KEY INDICATORS		worst	best
GNI per capita, PPP (current international \$).....	7,062		
Life expectancy at birth (years).....	71.7		
Literacy rate (% of people age 15+).....	69.9		
Human development index (out of 177).....	104		
Rule of law (percentile).....	26		
Voice and accountability (percentile).....	20		
Digital opportunity index (out of 181).....	83		
Internet users (% of population).....	10.34		

terms of the number of domain names registered (at the time Algeria had 5,000, compared to Tunisia's 16,000), that ASDL subscription is low, and that many state institutions do not have Web sites.¹⁰

To improve the ICT penetration rate, the government has started a number of initiatives, including its approval in January 2008 of an EUR100 million plan to implement Internet networks in every high school in the country.¹¹

Algeria's main operator of Internet services and fixed and mobile telephone services, Algerie Telecom, has been slated for privatization, but the process has been repeatedly delayed. The firm's chief executive said in 2008 that the company will be ready for privatization by 2011.¹²

The number of Internet cafés in Algeria has jumped from 100 in 2000 to more than 5,000 in 2008.¹³ Many users reportedly frequent these cafés to view pornography, and as a result, a women-only Internet café opened in March 2008 to accommodate conservative female Internet users.¹⁴ Chatting and searching for job opportunities online are among the popular activities in Internet cafés.¹⁵

Legal and regulatory frameworks

In July 2006, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika pardoned all journalists convicted of defamation offences, a move welcomed by local journalists and by both

the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF). However, both IFJ and RSF demanded longer term reforms to protect press freedom, including abolishing the country's criminal defamation laws which, in addition to government dominance over broadcasting, economic constraints, and journalists' lack of access to official information, restrict freedom of expression in Algeria.¹⁶ In addition, in January 2008 the government reinforced its surveillance of the press by placing state-owned printing companies, which print half of Algeria's privately-owned newspapers, under direct government control.¹⁷

Algerian authorities continue to ignore journalists' repeated calls for revision of the press law to eliminate prison sentences for press offenses.¹⁸ Blogger Abd el Salam Baroudy, administrator of the Bilad Telmesan blog (<http://bilad-13.maktoobblog.com>), was charged with criminal defamation for criticizing a government official on his blog in June 2007.¹⁹

In May 2008 the government introduced a new cybercrime bill amid reports that government Web sites receive about 4,000 hacking attempts per month and that Web sites of financial institutions are also targeted by hackers. The bill criminalized online activities such as hacking, stealing of personal data,

promoting terrorism and crimes online, blackmailing, and copyright infringement.²⁰ The bill was followed in May 2009 by the creation of a new national security service focused on cybercrime; police officers were also given explicit permission to “break into, inspect and control” Internet cafés in the interest of preventing terrorist activities.²¹ In 2005 the Algerian Government began allowing ISPs to use VoIP for international calls.²² State-own telecoms company Algeria Telecom Satellite (ATS) launched VoIP and GPS in September 2008.²³

Surveillance

Article 14 of ministerial decree no 98-257 of August 25, 1998²⁴ makes ISPs responsible for the sites they host, and requires them to take “all necessary steps to ensure constant surveillance” of content to prevent access to “material contrary to public order and morality.”²⁵ In 2004, journalists reported that it could take up to two days to receive their e-mails; they believe the government is spying on them.²⁶

Algerian security forces started raiding Internet cafés and checking the browsing history of Internet users after terrorist attacks hit the country in April 2007.²⁷ In April 2008, the security forces increased their monitoring and surveillance efforts in Internet cafés to stop the use of these cafés for terrorist activities.²⁸ In addition, Internet cafés are required to collect names and ID numbers of their customers and report this information together with any suspicious activities to the police.²⁹

In March 2008, the Algerian government ordered domestic mobile phone companies to stop selling anonymous mobile phones and SIM cards. This call was prompted by concerns that mobile phones were used in terrorist attacks in the country.³⁰

ONI testing results

ONI testing found no evidence that the government filters Internet sites. However, the Algerian security forces blocked access to the Web site of the al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb in October 2007 after reports that the organization used the Web site to recruit minors and teenagers and to publish its press releases and videos related to terror attacks in Algeria.³¹

The government’s primary forms of control appear to be the access controls and content monitoring regulations noted above.

Conclusion

Although Algeria does not at present filter Internet content, legislation that criminalizes peaceful criticism of the government and requires ISPs to police online content, together with a highly centralized network, could facilitate the filtering of online content in the future.

NOTES

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