

Online Security in the Middle East and North Africa

A Survey of Perceptions, Knowledge, and Practice
English

Digital communication has become a more perilous activity, particularly for activists, political dissidents, and independent media. The recent surge in digital activism that has helped to shape the Arab spring has been met with stiff resistance by governments in the region intent on reducing the impact of digital organizing and independent media. No longer content with Internet filtering, many governments in the Middle East and around the world are using a variety of technological and offline strategies to go after online media and digital activists.

In this report, which was commissioned by IWPR, we describe the results of a survey of 98 bloggers in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) carried out in May 2011 in order to study bloggers' perceptions of online risk and the actions they take to address digital communications security, including both Internet and cell phone use. The survey was implemented in the wake of the Arab spring and documents a proliferation of online security problems among the respondents. In the survey, we address the respondents' perceptions of online risk, their knowledge of digital security practices, and their reported online security practices. The survey results indicate that there is much room for improving online security practices, even among this sample of respondents who are likely to have relatively high technical knowledge and experience.

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