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Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Morocco - A Field Study -

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Partners of the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis in the “Freedom of Expression” project:



The Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis is a non-profit institution concerned with public policies and is headquartered in Rabat, Morocco. The Institute aims to conduct in-depth research on various public policies-related issues by proposing new ideas to solve problems facing society in terms of democracy and development.

The main activity of the Institute is to produce systematic, in-depth, accurate, and objective analysis of issues relevant to policies. The results and analyses are published by the Institute in the form of policy briefs, research articles, and reports.

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Introduction

In recent years, like many other countries, Morocco has experienced numerous events and economic and geopolitical fluctuations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, preventative measures-imposed restrictions on the movement and everyday life of citizens for an extended period. Attention was diverted from societal priorities, especially those related to rights and freedoms, leading to their increased ambiguity and complexity.

An evaluation of the status of freedoms in general, and freedom of expression and the right to information in particular, revealed significant challenges arising from this crisis. The measures taken were not sufficient to protect these rights, despite their importance for societal development and the protection of fundamental human rights.

In addition to the pandemic's repercussions, Morocco faced another crisis in September 2023: the disaster of El Haouz and High Atlas earthquake. This earthquake highlighted the importance of assessing the effectiveness of communication and information sources during crises. Throughout this period, Moroccan society experienced anxiety and skepticism due to the spread of a vast amount of false information, which was sometimes difficult to verify for reliability and credibility.

This field study, conducted under a project named "Freedom of Expression," aims to contribute to a better understanding of the situation of freedom of expression and the effectiveness of the right to access information and governmental communication during crises in Morocco. The study seeks to help develop a deeper and more detailed understanding of the current situation of freedom of expression and access to information in the country. It aims to build an objective and thorough assessment of the current state of expression freedoms and the right to access information in a context marked by the health crisis, earthquake crisis, and other transformations occurring in Morocco. This project echoes an attempt to merge local practices with the development of international human rights standards and seeks to stimulate dialogue and positive change through evidence and analysis.

The institute strives in its mission to produce analytical, timely, and in-depth studies on policy issues, which may lead to innovative ways of resolving issues related to democracy. For this reason, the institute always participates in initiatives that measure citizens' opinions and orientations on current issues such as freedom of expression and the right to access information, to fully integrate them into policy formulation and decision-making.

This report aims to provide material for researchers, policymakers, and civil society actors. Researchers can use the data and information in the report to enhance academic literature, while policymakers can use its findings to improve the quality of political institutions and public policy outcomes at all levels. As for civil society actors, the report aims to provide them with a realistic picture to help them develop future programs and advocate based on accurate and realistic data.

Dr. Mohamed Mesbah

President of the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis

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Dr. Mohamed Mesbah, the head of the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis, monitored and supervised the entire work, with Mr. Ayman Taleb and Ms. Monica Carrion overseeing its various phases in coordination with the Institute's research team.

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Executive Summary

Freedom of Expression: Assessing Citizens' Opinions on Freedom of Expression in Morocco

Citizens in Morocco place significant importance on freedom of expression, recognizing it as a fundamental human right. The research's findings reveal that a majority of participants in this study view freedom of expression as a significant issue, strongly affirming its importance, despite a minority who perceive it as unimportant or unnecessary.

There is a variation in participants' views on freedom of expression: 42% perceive it as moderately protected, while others see challenges and restrictions that hinder its full realization. There's also ongoing debate over the seriousness and obstacles impeding freedom of expression, causing a sense of insecurity. On the other hand, some participants feel safe and confident in exercising their rights, reflecting a diversity in perceptions and experiences related to freedom of expression in Morocco.

Engagement in expressing opinions in Morocco shows clear diversity, with many preferring not to publicly express their views, while others freely share their opinions and critique government policies.

Regarding criticism of government policies, there are clear differences in views. Most people avoid delving into these issues, while a part of the community feels secure and free enough to openly express their opinions and criticisms. Most study participants reported they have not faced censorship or interference in their freedom of expression over the past five years, while a noticeable percentage expressed concern about these restrictions, and another percentage remain uncertain about their experiences.

There is a notable lack of legal awareness about the press and publishing law in Morocco, with most participants lacking insufficient knowledge about it. Although a small percentage have varying levels of knowledge, legal details and information are often limited. Regarding trust in institutions, there appears to be a relatively high confidence in the judiciary. However, when it comes to protecting freedom of expression, opinions vary significantly, reflecting the impact of factors such as a lack of legal awareness and firsthand experiences on trust-building in this context.

Access to Information: Assessing the Effectiveness of the Right to Access Information in Morocco

The results of the study provide important insights into the participants' perceptions of the right to information. This indicates that most citizens consider the right to access information as significantly important, reflecting their profound concern for this fundamental right.

Regarding the assessment of the government's effectiveness in upholding this right, there are significant differences among the study participants, indicating the existence of challenges and barriers that prevent the fulfillment of this right. Based on the findings, there is a gap in knowledge and awareness of the law related to the right to access information, highlighting the importance of raising public awareness of this law.

Television and print media show moderate levels of trust among participants, yet there are some reservations regarding their accuracy, emphasizing the need to improve the credibility and quality of news. Additionally, the study indicates the significance of social media platforms as sources of information and news, and it shows that official government announcements enjoy a relatively high level of trust.

In conclusion, the analysis emphasizes the importance of the right to access information in Morocco and stresses the need to address the various challenges associated with this right through increasing public awareness, enhancing government procedure transparency, and promoting a culture of access to information.

Access to Information During Crises: Assessing the Effectiveness of Access to Information in Times of Crisis

In times of crisis, access to reliable information becomes crucial for citizens. The study highlighted that participants primarily rely on national sources for information during crises but also show a willingness to seek and verify information from international and local sources. Despite the rapid advancement of media and technology, television remains the primary source individuals turn to for relevant government information during crises, emphasizing the importance of visual and auditory coverage of major events like earthquakes.

The study also focuses on language, which plays a vital role in transmitting and communicating information during times of crisis. Arabic was the primary language used in media coverage of the earthquake in Morocco. However, consideration should also be given to Amazigh speakers in the affected areas.

This study also revealed varied assessments regarding the spread of fake news about the earthquake and highlights the necessity of increasing awareness and improving skills to distinguish between reliable and fake news during crises.

In conclusion, the importance of access to information during crises is underscored, stressing the need to enhance effectiveness in guiding citizens through challenging times, building trust in national sources, and developing news verification skills to disseminate accurate and reliable information.

Introduction

This research is part of the "Freedom of Expression" project, a collaborative initiative involving Internews, and the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis (MIPA), and the Moroccan Forum for Young Journalists (FMJJ). Elaborately developed by the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis, the study aims to assess the status of freedom of expression and the right to access information in Morocco.

In the context of ongoing efforts to improve transparency and accountability in Morocco, this report plays a vital role in assessing the status of freedom of expression and access to information. As a fundamental step within the framework of the "Freedom of Expression" project's second objective, the report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities associated with these two fundamental rights.

Furthermore, this report provides essential insight for citizens to establish a solid foundation for a culture of transparency and accountability, and to make tangible progress towards enhancing freedom of expression and access to information.

This report aims to assess the current state of freedom of expression and access to information in Morocco, focusing on the perceptions and experiences of citizens related to these two fundamental rights. The report seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- Provide a comprehensive overview of the status of freedom of expression and access to information in Morocco.
- Identify the challenges and opportunities available in these two areas.
- Offer valuable insights that can contribute to improving policies and practices related to freedom of expression and access to information.

This study adopts a mixed methodology, integrating quantitative and qualitative research to provide a comprehensive picture of the current situation. Data was collected through a field study, complemented by qualitative interviews to measure citizens' opinions on freedom of expression and the right to access information in Morocco.

To understand the frameworks and backgrounds related to the research topic, a literature review was conducted on the status of freedom of expression, the right to access information, the legal framework governing these rights, and the challenges to their activation.

The "Results" section will shed light on three main themes:

- **Freedom of Expression:** This theme will discuss the challenges and opportunities related to practicing freedom of expression in Morocco, including censorship, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly.
- **Access to Information:** This theme will discuss the challenges and opportunities related to access to information in Morocco, including access to public information and freedom of information.
- **Access to Information During Earthquakes:** This theme will discuss the challenges and opportunities related to access to information during crises, with a focus on earthquakes.

This report represents a valuable tool for awareness and motivation towards creating a positive change in the field of freedom of expression and access to information in Morocco. It primarily targets stakeholders involved in the project and journalists, aiming to provide valuable insights that can contribute to improving policies and practices related to these two vital areas.

I. The Institutional Framework of Freedom of Expression and Ensuring the Right to Access Information

The years 2016 and 2020 have been pivotal in advancing protection of freedom of expression and ensuring the right to access information. Within this period, the Press and Publishing Code was officially implemented after being published in the Official Gazette. This Code represents a milestone in legal advancements to ensure the right to freedom of expression, distinct from prior legal provisions, as it encompasses three laws: the Press and Publishing Law, the Law on the Basic Statute for Professional Journalists, and the Law on the Establishment of the National Press Council. Additionally, Morocco has adopted a law that allows Moroccans the right to access information to support the principles of openness and transparency.

The Code introduced several new features to enhance the guarantees of press freedom and develop an environment for practicing freedom of expression. Notably, it abolished penalties that restrict freedom, ensuring the right to access information and the protection of source confidentiality, established the National Press Council as an institution for self-regulation of the sector, and put systems to ensure the practice of press freedom in respect of its rules and ethics.

Nevertheless, the promulgation of new legislation does not necessarily mean the removal of all restrictions on the practice of freedom of expression and the right to access information. These embody behavioral and cultural characteristics before they are enshrined in laws, legislations, terms, and labels. Freedom of expression has emerged as a pivotal component across societies, encompassing those that have shifted towards political and media diversity as well as those whose institutions are still monopolized.

This study seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the reality of freedom of expression and access to information in Morocco. It delves into the legal and institutional development of freedom of expression, focusing on the Press and Publishing Code's innovations that regulate journalistic practice and the criticisms recorded within its framework. The study explores the institutions established to defend freedom of expression and highlights the prospects for amending the legal system for journalistic practice, identifying indicators of continued monopolies in the audio-visual field. The study's second section aims to highlight the

challenges that hinder the environment for practicing freedom of expression, and the third section addresses the issues that obstruct the right to access information.

Legal and Institutional Development of Freedom of Expression

The Evolution of Journalism Legislation: Between Innovations and Criticisms

Press freedom is considered the most important indicator for measuring freedom of expression in any country. This cannot be achieved without studying the legal system regulating journalistic practice to determine whether it guarantees broad freedom of expression or partial freedom.

Morocco's 2016 Press and Publishing Code represents the most recent legislative tool to regulate the field of journalistic practice and enshrine press freedom. This legal text differs from previous ones by being classified into three distinct laws: the first being the Press and Publishing Law¹; the second, the Law related to the Basic Statute for Professional Journalists²; and the third, the Law establishing the National Press Council³.

While the laws related to the Basic Statute for Professional Journalists and the establishment of the National Press Council aim to regulate media practice, the Press and Publishing Law defines the rules related to the practice of press freedom, publishing, and printing. It specifies the conditions for practicing journalism, the rights of journalists and press institutions, and the guarantees for practicing journalism, especially the principles of freedom and plurality guaranteed by the Constitution. It also outlines the obligations incumbent upon the rules regulating activities of printing, distribution, advertising related to the press and publishing, as well as those related to the special protection of certain rights, authority of courts, and measures that precede them, and rules related to professional ethics⁴.

The genesis of the Press and Publishing Code can be traced back to 2002, following the revision of the Press Law which changed its name to "Press and Publishing Law" No. 77.00. There were calls for its amendment, which the Ministry of Communication responded to by opening a dialogue with professionals in 2003, continuing until 2007. The outcome was a new draft Press and Publishing Law presented to the General Secretariat of the Government, without the ratification procedure being activated.

¹ Royal Decree No. 1.16.122 issued on 6 Dhu al-Qi'dah 1437 (August 10, 2016) enforcing Law No. 88.13 on Press and Publishing. Official Gazette, Issue 6491, 11 Dhu al-Qi'dah 1437 (August 15, 2016), pp: 5966 – 5987.

² Royal Decree No. 1.16.51 issued on 19 Rajab 1437 (April 27, 2016) enforcing Law No. 89.13 on the Basic Statute for Professional Journalists. Official Gazette, No. 6466, 12 Sha'ban 1437 (May 19, 2016), pp: 3849-3853.

³ Royal Decree No. 1.16.24 issued on 30 Jumada al-Awwal 1437 (March 10, 2016) enforcing Law No. 90.13 establishing the National Council for Press. Official Gazette, Issue 6454, 28 Jumada al-Thani 1437 (April 7, 2016), pp: 2961-2969.

⁴ Article 1 of Law No. 88.13 regarding Press and Publishing, see Official Gazette, Issue 6491, 11 Dhu al-Qi'dah 1437 (August 15, 2016), p: 5966.

Nevertheless, the enactment of the 2011 Constitution⁵ contributed to resuming the debate on the 2007 draft, after the Ministry of Communication opened a new dialogue with professionals in January 2012 to update the Press and Publishing Law. In October 2012, the Scientific Committee for Dialogue and Consultation on the Press and Publishing Code project was appointed, led by Mohamed El Arabi Messari. After thirteen general meetings and numerous subcommittee meetings, the committee presented amendment proposals for 110 articles⁶; the Press and Publishing Law project underwent substantial changes, with sixty out of ninety articles being noted and amended, followed by the Professional Journalist Law with twenty-three out of twenty-nine articles, and notes concerning fifteen out of sixty-one articles in the National Press Council Law project.

The Scientific Committee for Dialogue and Consultation concluded with the extraction of three draft laws known as the "Press and Publishing Code,"⁷ presented at the Press House in Tangier on October 18, 2014, and placed on the Ministry of Communication's website for public comment. On July 29, 2015, the government approved in a council meeting Law Project No. 90.13 establishing the National Press Council, and on October 12, 2015, Law Project No. 89.13 concerning the Basic Statute for Professional Journalists, and on December 23, 2015, Law Project No. 88.13 related to Press and Publishing, which was referred to the House of Representatives⁸ on February 4, 2016, to begin the ratification process in both chambers of Parliament.

Between April and August 2016, the Parliament ratified the three law projects after requiring a second reading, which were subsequently published in the Official Gazette and came into effect sequentially.

Innovations Expanding the Margin of Freedom of Expression

Thorough analysis of the three legal texts that constitute the Press and Publishing Code reveals five main innovations:

Firstly: Enhancing guarantees of press freedoms, which was achieved through:

⁵ Royal Decree No. 1.11.91 issued on 27 Sha'ban 1432 (July 29, 2011) enforcing the text of the Constitution, Official Gazette, Issue 5964, 28 Sha'ban 1432 (July 30, 2011), pp: 3600-3627.

⁶ Moustafa El Khalfi, "Dialogue", Al-Tajdid newspaper, Issue 3145, May 10-12, 2013, p: 7.

⁷ Article 4 of the Press and Publishing Law No. 88.13 states the following: "This law, along with Law No. 89.13 on the Basic Statute for Professional Journalists and Law No. 90.13 on establishing the National Council for the Press, constitutes the Press and Publishing Code." See the Official Gazette, Issue 6491, 11 Dhu al-Qi'dah 1437 (August 15, 2016), p: 5967.

⁸ The First Chamber of Parliament.

- Abolishing punitive imprisonment and replacing them with civil compensation and appropriate fines: While the terms "imprisonment" and "jail" appeared in 23 chapters of the previous Press and Publishing Law No. 77.00, the new law favors monetary penalties over incarceration in 19 articles, doing away with custodial sentences for offenses including defamation and insult, repeat offenses, privacy breaches, and the good-faith publishing, broadcasting, or transmission of false news, claims, or facts, as well as offenses against the dignity of foreign heads of state and diplomatic representatives.

It's noteworthy that two articles explicitly state the non-application of physical coercion, namely, in Article 92 which states: "Physical coercion shall not be applied in press and publishing cases in the event of proven inability to pay by legally established means," Article 98 states: "Under this law, the suspect cannot be arrested or detained pre-emptively."

Despite this progress, which consolidates Morocco's commitment to abolishing penalties restricting freedom during the United Nations Human Rights Council session in Geneva in 2012, some imprisonment penalties remain in another form, having been transferred to the Criminal Law⁹, related to insulting symbols of the Kingdom and inciting the commission of felonies and misdemeanors.

- Enabling journalists to present evidence of proof throughout the trial stages: Unlike the previous law, which restricted the accused's right to present evidence proving the truth of the defamatory statement to only 15 days following the summons to court, the new law allows for the presentation of evidence proving the truth of the defamatory accusation at all stages of the lawsuit and litigation, as stipulated in Articles 110 and 111, and terminates prosecution if the evidence confirms the truth of the defamation.
- Guarantees of the right to access news sources and obtain information: Except for confidential information under Article 27 of the Constitution, related to national defense, internal and external state security, and individuals' private lives, the new law ensures access to news and information.

Secondly: Regulating the conditions for entering the profession, through:

⁹ Royal Decree No. 1.16.104 issued on 13 Shawwal 1437 (July 18, 2016) enforcing Law No. 73.15, which amends and supplements certain provisions of the Criminal Code. Official Gazette, Issue 6491, 11 Dhu al-Qi'dah 1437 (August 15, 2016), pp: 5992-5993.

- Implementing new controls and conditions required for granting a professional press ID card: The most important of which is proving the absence of a final decision against the applicant for a felony or misdemeanor in specific cases, and submitting a commitment to respecting the obligations outlined in legislative and regulatory texts, the code of professional ethics, and the internal regulations of the National Council for Press.
- Granting the exclusive right to the National Council for Press to issue, refuse, or renew the professional card annually.

Thirdly: Protecting individual and societal rights and freedoms, manifested in:

- Explicitly prohibiting the incitement to prostitution, sexual assault, discrimination, and violence: Explicitly prohibiting the publication of pornographic or obscene materials or those that exploit in inciting prostitution, pimping, or sexual assault on minors according to Article 73, publishing proceedings related to child cases or cases involving minors, as well as those related to adults that allow identifying children (Article 75), and displaying and selling to children publications, of any kind, prepared for prostitution, pimping, crime, or consumption or promotion of drugs or alcohol (Article 79).
- Protecting private life and the right to an image: Article 89 of the new law stipulates that any exposure of an identifiable person, through the fabrication of allegations or disclosing facts or photographic images or intimate films related to their private life, constitutes an invasion of privacy unless it has a close relation to public life or an impact on public affairs management.
- Implementing provisions regarding advertising to protect the individual and society: Prohibiting all advertising that insults or denigrates women, perpetuates her inferiority, promotes gender discrimination, insults people based on religion, gender, or color, offends the youth and people with special needs, incites hatred or terrorism, or promotes products harmful to the physical and mental safety of minors, as stipulated in Article 64 of the new law.
- Respecting the presumption of innocence: Emphasizing the principle of presumption of innocence in journalism dealing with cases presented to courts, while affirming the right to judicial information and the right to publish judicial decisions.

Fourthly: Expanding and strengthening the judiciary's jurisdiction in press and publishing cases, manifested in:

- Making the judiciary the sole and exclusive authority to receive declarations of newspaper issuance.
- Making confiscation, seizure, and suspension the exclusive authority of the judiciary: Stopping a periodical publication or blocking an electronic newspaper site will only be by judicial decision, and the seizure of a periodical publication will be issued by an urgent judicial decision, with the exception only concerning foreign newspapers which the administration still has a say in.
- Publishing convictions of journalists linked to the plaintiff's request and a judicial decision.

Fifthly: Defining the rights and freedoms of the professional journalist, represented in:

- Establishing judicial protection for the confidentiality of sources: The new text stipulates that disclosure can only occur through a judicial decision and in cases related to national defense, internal and external state security, and individuals' private lives unless they have a direct relation to public life, unlike the previous text which included in its first chapter "All media have the right to access news sources, and to obtain information from various sources unless this information is confidential by law."
- Stipulating the protection of journalists from assaults, the right to obtain information, and affirming the penalty in case of refusal.
- Abolishing penalties restricting freedom in cases of recidivism: In addition to removing the penalty restricting freedom and reducing the fine, the temporal scope has been reduced from five years to one year.
- Restricting the geographical jurisdiction in press lawsuits, where the place of distribution was removed, and only the place of printing is considered when it comes to the responsibility of the printer.

Criticisms Narrowing the Space of Freedom of Expression

Despite the progress made, several criticisms of the Press and Publishing Code have been noted, raising doubts about its ability to guarantee press freedom and the right to access information. These can be summarized in four points:

Firstly: The lack of specificity in the exceptional cases for lifting the confidentiality of sources, as stated in Article 5 of the new law, which opens the door to broadening their scope.

Secondly: The qualification requirement of an exaggeratedly long tenure of 15 years to be eligible for membership in the National Council for Press, especially considering that when 56.3% of journalists holding a professional press card as of 2020 have less than 10 years of experience¹⁰.

Thirdly: The ongoing subordination of the press to the executive authority through the mechanism of public support, in the absence of a regulating law, raises concerns about operating on a basis of loyalty and control, regardless of Article 7 of the Press and Publishing Law stating that "benefiting from public support will be based on principles of transparency, equal opportunity, and impartiality."

Fourthly: The lack of explicit stipulation that the Press and Publishing Law alone applies to press and publishing offenses. The prevailing practice over six years of enacting the new law shows the application of the Criminal Law in publishing cases, which includes penalties that restrict freedom.

Institutional Establishment of the Press

The National Press Council as a Self-Regulatory Body

The establishment of the National Press Council as an independent professional body, endowed with legal personality and financial autonomy¹¹, is one of the most important updates in the Press and Publishing Code. It primarily aims to self-regulate the press and publishing sector and establish necessary systems that ensure the profession is practiced with respect to its rules and ethics. It also involves issuing professional press cards instead of the executive authority represented by the Ministry of Communication, in addition to mediating disputes between professionals or between them and third parties, monitoring respect for press freedom, and considering disciplinary cases related to breaches of professional duties and the charter of professional ethics.¹²

According to Article 2 of its founding law, the Council's tasks and competencies include expressing opinions on draft laws and decrees related to the profession, proposing measures to develop, qualify, and modernize the sector, and preparing sector-related studies.

Per Article 4 of its founding law, the Council consists of twenty-one (21) members distributed as follows: seven (7) members elected by professional journalists among themselves,

¹⁰ Statistical Study on the Reality of Male and Female Journalists in Morocco, National Press Council, May 5, 2021.

¹¹ Article 1 of Law No. 90.13 on the establishment of the National Press Council.

¹² Article 2 of Law No. 90.13 on the establishment of the National Press Council.

considering the representation of different types of press and media; seven (7) members elected by newspaper publishers among themselves; and seven (7) members including a representative from the Higher Judicial Council, the National Human Rights Council, the National Council for Languages and Moroccan Culture, the Association of Moroccan Lawyers, the Union of Moroccan Writers, a former publisher appointed by the most representative publishing body, and an honorary journalist appointed by the most representative journalists' union, provided that these representatives have experience in the field of media and journalism. The Council's composition aims to achieve gender parity. The government also appoints a delegate to the Council, responsible for coordinating between the Council and the administration, attending Council meetings in an advisory capacity.

This institutional project, the first of its kind, was formalized after its legislative text had gone through various stages. Between July 29, 2015, when the government approved the draft law to establish the National Press Council, and April 7, 2016, when it was published in the Official Gazette, it took nine months to approve this significant legal text for the sector, following the Press and Publishing Law.

However, there was a noticeable delay in publishing the implementing decrees of this law, which did not emerge until three years later, specifically in 2019. These decrees included one outlining the procedures for granting and renewing the professional press card¹³ and another appointing the government's delegate to the National Press Council¹⁴.

The elections for the Council experienced unexplained delays and were held on June 22, 2018, more than two years after the law was enacted. The preparation for these elections began on April 2, 2018, with the formation of a committee to oversee the election process of professional journalists and newspaper publishers¹⁵ as stipulated in Article 54.

Regarding the election system, a list voting system was adopted for the category of professional journalists, and a single vote system for the category of newspaper publishers, as per Article 2 of the supervisory committee's decision. The voting process for professional journalists was conducted at ten offices in Rabat, Casablanca, Tangier, Fez, Oujda, Marrakech, Agadir, Beni Mellal, Laayoune, and Dakhla, and in Casablanca for publishers. The preparation for the elections experienced some confusion, with an amended electoral roll published after

¹³ Decree No. 2.19.121 issued on 17 Rajab 1440 (March 14, 2019) specifying the procedures for granting and renewing the professional press card. Official Gazette, Issue 6764, 21 Rajab 1440 (March 28, 2019), pp: 1658-1659.

¹⁴ Decree No. 2.18.849 issued on (January 23, 2019) appointing the government delegate to the National Press Council.

¹⁵ Decision No. 1/18 of the Supervisory Committee on the Election Process of Representatives of Professional Journalists and Newspaper Publishers, issued on 16 Rajab 1439 corresponding to April 2, 2018, specifying the procedures and organization of the election stages for members of the National Press Council.

errors and outdated information were found in the original rolls, which included names of retired journalists, employees, or those linked to press enterprises that had ceased publication or changed. The locations of some voting offices¹⁶ were also changed at the last minute.

The election, conducted on June 22, 2018, resulted in the following¹⁷: For the representatives of professional journalists, the participation rate was 43.3%, with the "Freedom, Integrity, Professionalism" list coming first with a total of 918 votes, followed by the "Change" list with 19 votes, and the "Loyalty and Responsibility" list with 18 votes. The winning list included Hamid Saadni (2M) as the list head, Rabia Malik (National Broadcasting and Television Company), Mariam El-Ouadghiri (Ecomedia Group), El-Mokhtar Ammari (TelQuel Arabic website), Younes Moujahid (Al Ittihad Al Ichtiraki Newspaper), Abdelkader El Hajjaji (Maghreb Arab Press), and Abdellah El-Bakali (Al-Alam Newspaper)."

For the representatives of the newspaper publishers' category, the participation rate was 62.8%, and the seven seats were won by, in order: Fatima El Ouariaghli (39 votes), Nouredine Miftah (34 votes), Mohtat El Raqas (29 votes), Mohamed El Hajjam (28 votes), Mohamed Selhami (26 votes), Mohamed Abdelmonaim Delmi (26 votes), and Abdelhak Bakkhat (25 votes).

After the establishment of the National Press Council, a meeting was held on October 5, 2018, at the headquarters of the Communication Sector to elect the President and Vice-President. The Council members elected Younes Moujahid from the category of professional journalists as President, and Fatima El Ouariaghli from the category of newspaper publishers as Vice-President.

The term of office for Council members is set at four years, renewable once¹⁸. To carry out the assigned tasks, the Council established five committees, as per Article 12 of its establishing law. These include the Committee of Professional Ethics and Disciplinary Issues, the Professional Press Card Committee (headed by a professional journalist from the Council members), the Training, Studies, and Cooperation Committee, the Mediation and Arbitration Committee (headed by a representative of the Supreme Judicial Council), and the Press Enterprise and Sector Qualification Committee (headed by a newspaper publisher from the Council).

The actual start of the National Press Council was on October 5, 2018. Returning to the competencies of the National Press Council, which are considered its strength and

¹⁶ Communiqué regarding the change of locations for some voting offices, June 13, 2018, Ministry of Communication website.

¹⁷ Communiqué about the voting results for the election of members of the National Press Council, June 22, 2018, Ministry of Communication website.

¹⁸ Article 6 of the Law Establishing the National Press Council.

effectiveness, three main tasks can be identified for evaluating the institution's performance, whether positive or negative:

1. Issuing Professional Press Cards:

Two months after the Council's establishment in early 2019, members of the Professional Press Card Committee faced a significant challenge in activating the key provisions, namely that the National Press Council should issue the professional press card itself, brought by the law establishing the Council. Due to the lack of headquarters and human resources initially, and the decree specifying the procedures for issuing professional press cards not being issued until March 2019, the Communication Sector of the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports continued to receive and process professional card applications, similar to the previous practice. The only noticeable change was that these cards were issued with the stamp and signature of the President of the National Press Council. The number of cards issued in 2019 reached 3016¹⁹. The Council did not fully exercise its authority in issuing professional cards until 2020, after acquiring its headquarters, and the Professional Press Card Committee managed to process a total of 3673 applications, approving 2928 of them.²⁰

Following its first experience in handling the issuance of professional press cards, the National Press Council announced a dialogue with the Communication Sector to explore the possibility of amending²¹ some provisions of the decree on issuing press cards to make access to the profession smoother, while safeguarding its value and status in society.

2. Addressing Disciplinary Cases of Press Institutions and Professional Journalists:

Assessing disciplinary cases within the press is pivotal for upholding ethical professional standards²², given that the press's authority is not derived from a social contract or public mandate. Therefore, it needs to dive into its primary responsibility: serving citizens with full commitment to professional ethics.

From the first weeks of its establishment, the National Press Council developed and ratified the charter of professional ethics, which, was approved after several meetings and consultations, and published it in the Official Gazette on July 29, 2019. Despite its priority, the charter did not adhere to the legal deadlines for its establishment and publication as stipulated

¹⁹ List of journalists who obtained the professional press card for the year 2019, Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports - Communication Sector website.

²⁰ Professional Card 2020: Statistics of Male and Female Journalists, National Press Council website.

²¹ Communiqué on the occasion of National Media Day, November 15, 2020, National Press Council website.

²² Claude-Jean Bertrand, "La Déontologie des Médias" (Media Ethics), Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1997, p. 10.

in Article 2 of the law establishing the Council, which required completion within a maximum period of six months from the Council's installation.

Regardless of the above observation, the implementation of the charter enabled the Committee of Professional Ethics and Disciplinary Issues to handle complaints received by the Council from bodies and individuals seeking redress and compensation for what they consider to be an insult to their dignity and honor or defamation. As of December 2020, approximately forty²³ complaints were received, yet without any disciplinary decisions ruling being issued, raising questions about the reasons for this delay. The Council announced that some of these were resolved through mutual agreement with the accused newspapers, as they only required publishing statements clarifying the complainants' side of the story.

It should be noted that the Council can consider disciplinary cases on its initiative, based on majority requests, as per Article 39 of its establishing law, in the context of proactively addressing violations that constitute a flagrant breach of professional ethics. Nevertheless, as of December 2020, no case had been taken up by the Council. In contrast, the Council's Professional Ethics Committee prepared a report on professional practice during the COVID-19 pandemic, noting several isolated breaches²⁴ of the charter of professional ethics, following its previous condemnation of some news websites for exploiting the coronavirus topic.²⁵

3. Proposing Measures for the Development, Qualification, and Modernization of the Sector:

Enhancing and developing the journalistic enterprise is a key approach to protecting the press, ensuring its existence, and strengthening its roles in society. Hence, the National Press Council must be a proactive force in this area, especially the Press Enterprise Committee, which conducted a field research report. This report concluded that the crisis in Moroccan journalism is structural, with complex and interlaced dimensions²⁶, and indicated that the vision is unclear, and the professional future is not well-controlled²⁷.

As the committee embarks on a new study²⁸ of the sector, aiming to present a realistic vision of the challenges the press may face, the only report completed so far provides a basis for advocating the qualification of the journalistic enterprise. It opens prospects for exiting the

²³ Communiqué on the occasion of National Media Day, previous reference.

²⁴ Interim Report COVID-19: Monitoring the Ethics of the Journalism Profession, National Press Council, July 7, 2020, p. 6.

²⁵ COVID-19: Upholding Professional Conscience Vigilance, Press Release, June 9, 2020, National Press Council website.

²⁶ Report on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Journalism Sector and Measures to Exit the Crisis, National Press Council, May 2020, p. 22.

²⁷ IDEM, p. 21.

²⁸ Communiqué on the occasion of National Media Day, previous reference.

structural crisis of the press and saving national journalism from bankruptcy, considering it a vital service for democratic building.

The Interim Committee's Role for Organizing Press Affairs:

After the first term of the National Press Council was completed on October 4, 2022, without organizing new elections, the Council faced an exceptional situation. The government was compelled to issue a decree to extend the Council's term by six months exceptionally²⁹. However, elections were not held during the extension period, which was supposed to be a transitional phase. This was due to differing views among the professional and union associations represented in the Council on renewal methods. The Moroccan Forum for Young Journalists called for an urgent and comprehensive review of the law establishing the National Press Council, given the various legal complexities it raises.³⁰

There was also a clear desire to abandon the principle of elections in a proposed law for amending the National Press Council³¹, presented by several parliamentary groups³². This proposal included intriguing suggestions, such as adopting the principle of appointment by the most representative bodies instead of elections, appointing the President by the King, and extending the Council's term to five years instead of four. However, the parliamentary groups would later retrace this proposal.

On April 4, 2023, the Council entered a "legal vacuum" after the extension period expired. To address this, the government approved in its council meeting on April 13 a bill³³ presented by the Minister of Culture, Youth, and Communication. This bill provided for transferring the powers of the Council to a temporary committee for managing the affairs of press and publishing. The House of Representatives passed the bill on June 19, 2023, and it was subsequently approved by the House of Councilors on July 18, pending its publication in the Official Gazette to come into effect.

²⁹ Communiqué of the Government Council meeting, Prime Minister's website, September 29, 2022, at the following link (accessed on April 14, 2023): <https://www.cg.gov.ma/ar/node/10698>

³⁰ The Moroccan Forum for Young Journalists Calls for a Review of the National Press Council Law," TelQue1, September 30, 2023, at the following link (accessed on November 11, 2023): <https://cutt.us/sdN0s>

³¹ Proposed Law to Amend and Supplement Law No. 90.13 on the Establishment of the National Press Council, registration number in the House of Representatives: 204, registered on January 18, 2023.

³² The proposed law was submitted by the National Rally of Independents Group, Authenticity and Modernity Group, Independence Group for Unity and Equality, Movement Group, Constitutional Democratic Social Group, and the Progress and Socialism Group. It was referred to the House of Representatives on January 18, 2023, before being withdrawn by a letter from the heads of the groups on February 3, 2023, before its referral to the committee.

³³ Draft Law No. 15.23 on the Establishment of a Temporary Committee for Managing the Affairs of the Press and Publishing Sector, the General Secretariat of the Government, April 8, 2023.

This interim committee, in addition to the outgoing President of the National Press Council serving as its President, comprises eight other members. These include the Vice-President of the outgoing Council as the Deputy Chair of the Committee, the outgoing Chair of the Professional Ethics and Disciplinary Issues Committee, the outgoing Chair of the Professional Press Card Committee, three members appointed by the Prime Minister among individuals known for their expertise and competence in the fields of journalism, publishing, and media, a judge appointed by the President of the Supreme Judicial Council, and a representative from the National Human Rights Council appointed by its President.

This project divided the journalistic community between supporters and opponents. The front of the opposition was led by the Moroccan Federation of Newspaper Publishers and the National Union of Press and Communication, under the umbrella of the Moroccan Labor Union. In contrast, the National Union of Moroccan Press and the National Association of Media and Publishers supported it.

While both the Moroccan Federation of Newspaper Publishers and the National Union of Press and Media Communication, under the Moroccan Labor Union, called in a joint statement for the "freezing of the draft law to establish a temporary committee for managing the affairs of the press and publishing sector," describing it as "unconstitutional, futile, and eliminative, damaging the independence of the press and the journalists' right to choose their representatives,"³⁴ the National Association of Media and Publishers welcomed the government's approval of the draft law, considering it "aims to correct the illegal situation that the decisions of the National Press Council would lead to, and ensures the normal functioning of the press and publishing sectors."³⁵

The National Union of Moroccan Press expressed in a statement its "full support for the initiative to form a temporary committee,"³⁶ considering that "the discussion of developments related to the National Press Council cannot be separated from the imbalances in its founding stage, primarily due to the many flaws and gaps in the laws regulating the profession, especially the law establishing the National Press Council and the Press and Publishing Law."

³⁴ The Moroccan Federation of Newspaper Publishers and the National Union of Press, Media, and Communication, under the umbrella of the Moroccan Labor Union, condemn the attempt to usurp the institution of self-regulation. Moroccan Labor Union website, April 12, 2023, available at the following link (accessed on November 11, 2023): <https://cutt.us/yWquI>

³⁵ The National Association of Media and Publishers expresses surprise at the "smear campaigns" against the project to reform the media and press system. Al-Sahraa Al-Maghribiya, April 14, 2023, available at the following link (accessed on November 11, 2023): <https://assahraa.ma/web/2023/171036>

³⁶ Communiqué of the National Union of Moroccan Press, National Union's website, April 16, 2023, available at the following link (accessed on November 11, 2023): <https://cutt.us/xzkFb>

A policy paper published by the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis in April 2023, titled "Has Self-Regulation of the Press Entered a Dead End?", highlighted ten issues threatening the self-regulation of the press in Morocco, including:

- The principle of appointment contradicts the idea of self-regulation of the press, which remains the organizational form that guarantees the best freedom for journalists³⁷, especially if linked to the executive authority.

- The composition of the temporary committee appears to be a "new extension" of the expired council, but with the selection of specific members responsible for the failure to conduct council renewal elections.

- Assigning the temporary committee, mainly composed of members of the expired council, to develop a new approach to solve the sector's problems is a waste of time, especially since it is tasked with the same duties outlined in the law establishing the National Press Council, and these members have already served four years and six months without providing the required solutions.

- The government's interpretation regarding the impasse of the law establishing the National Press Council and the lack of a mechanism for conducting elections is arbitrary, as Article 54 of the law does not indicate it is only related to the foundational elections, and Article 9 refers to the previous article in its provision on what should be done if the council is unable to perform its duties. It states that the committee referred to in Article 54 oversees the establishment of a temporary committee tasked with the council's duties until the new council is installed, within a maximum period of six months.

- The Prime Minister's appointment of three members to the temporary committee challenges its independence, especially since the philosophy of self-regulation of the press is based on the right of journalism and media professionals to organize their profession on democratic and independent principles from the executive authority, in full respect of press freedom guaranteed by Article 28 of the Moroccan Constitution, which cannot be restricted in any form of prior censorship.

³⁷ The Swedish Press and broadcasting Authority, (Regulation of the Media and Media Subsidy), January 2023, p: 16.

The Challenge of Amending the Legal Framework for Journalistic Practice

Five years following the implementation of the Press and Publishing Code, professional journalism associations raised demands for amending the legal framework, strengthened by an official desire to achieve this, especially with the temporary committee for managing the affairs of the press and publishing sector being tasked with conducting a comprehensive assessment of the current situation of the press and publishing sector and proposing measures to support its organizational structure.

Historically, the laws regulating journalistic practices on Morocco have evolved to align with changing contexts and circumstances. The following table summarizes the evolution of the Press Law, which is the backbone of journalistic practice, from the first Press Law³⁸ adopted by Morocco after its independence in November 1958 to the latest law issued in August 2016:

Amendment to the Press Law

The original law: The Press Law issued on November 15, 1958.		
Amendments	Number of Amended Articles	Amended Articles
June 1 st 1959	1	Article 71
September 2 nd 1959	3	Complementary Measures
May 28 th 1960	1	Article 77
April 28 th 1962	1	Article 70
November 13 th 1963	6	Articles: 70, 71, 72, 73, 76 and 78.
April 10 th 1973	15	Articles 20, 25, 28 (Sections 3 and 4), 29, 30 (Section 2), 34, 35, 41, 42, 45, 47, 49, 70, 74, and 77.
January 2 nd 1974	1	Article 49
October 3 rd 2002	21	Articles 1, 4, 6, 8, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 29, 30, 35, 41, 42, 62, 67, 70, 72, 76, and 77.
The new law: The Press and Publishing Law issued on August 10, 2016 (It includes 126 articles instead of 80 in the 1958 Press Law)		

The Continuous Monopoly of Audiovisual Broadcasting

Unlike the print media, which was granted a margin of freedom in the mid-1990s, and the electronic media that emerged in the midst of the technological revolution, the state's control over the audiovisual sector has been in place since independence. The process of liberalizing this sector only began in 2002 with the issuance of the law establishing the High

³⁸ Royal Decree No. 1.58.378 issued on 3 Jumada al-Awwal 1378 (November 15, 1958) regarding the Press Law. Official Gazette, Issue 2404 Bis, 16 Jumada al-Awwal 1378 (November 27, 1958), pp: 2856-2864.

Authority for Audiovisual Communication³⁹. Additionally, the decree-law ending the state's monopoly on radio and television broadcasting⁴⁰ opened the way for free initiatives in the audiovisual communication sector.

In practice, the liberation of the audio-visual sector from the dominance of what was known as "the mother of ministries"⁴¹ did not appear until 2005 with the issuance of the law related to audio-visual communication.⁴² This law defined the general rules and basic controls aimed at structuring and regulating the audio-visual communication sector, benefiting from the political détente in the context of what was known as "the new era." However, this was not tangible until May 2006, when the High Authority for Audio-Visual Communication granted ten licenses to the first generation of private radio stations, and an exceptional license to one television channel⁴³ (Medi 1 Sat). Then, with the granting of a second generation of licenses in February 2009, four private radio stations were included.

Subsequently, three television licenses were granted in two stages (in July 2018 and July 2019), but only one channel, "Chada TV," materialized. Currently, there are 14 private radio stations and four private channels in Morocco, despite the announcement of the end of the state's monopoly on radio and television broadcasting in September 2002. In contrast, public media dominates the media scene through two companies: the National Broadcasting and Television Company (SNRT) with a group of general, thematic, regional channels and national and regional radio stations, and the Audio-Visual Studies and Realizations Company (SOREAD-2M) with two channels and a radio station. This reflects the state's failure to deal with the media field as a homogeneous unit.

The prominent transformation in the audio-visual sector is the reorganization of the High Authority for Audio-Visual Communication⁴⁴, established in August 2002 to give opinions on every issue related to the audio-visual communication sector, and constitutionalized in 2011. According to the first article of the new law No. 11.15 on its reorganization⁴⁵, it became an

³⁹ Royal Decree No. 1.02.212 issued on 22 Jumada al-Thani 1423 (August 31, 2002) establishing the High Authority for Audiovisual Communication. Official Gazette, Issue 5035, 24 Jumada al-Thani (September 2, 2002), pp: 2541-2545.

⁴⁰ Decree-Law No. 2.02.663 issued on 2 Rajab 1423 (September 10, 2002) ending the state's monopoly in the field of radio and television broadcasting. Official Gazette, Issue 5038, 4 Rajab 1423 (September 12, 2002), p. 2615.

⁴¹ Moubarak Boudarka (Abbas), (Talks on What Happened - Fragments of My Autobiography as Told to Boudarka: The Biography of Abdelrahman Youssoufi), Moroccan Publishing House, February 2018, page 191.

⁴² Royal Decree No. 1.04.257 issued on 25 Dhu al-Qi'dah 1425 implementing Law No. 77.03 related to audio-visual communication. Official Gazette, Issue 5288, 23 Dhu al-Hijjah 1425 (February 3, 2005), pages 404-418.

⁴³ Press Release, Signing of Specifications for the New Private Audio-Visual Broadcasters, High Authority for Audio-Visual Communication, May 17, 2006.

⁴⁴ Royal Decree No. 1.02.212 issued on 22 Jumada al-Thani 1423 (August 31, 2002) establishing the High Authority for Audio-Visual Communication. Official Gazette, Issue 5035, 24 Jumada al-Thani 1423 (September 2, 2002), pages 2541-2545.

⁴⁵ Royal Decree No. 1.16.123 issued on 21 Dhu al-Qi'dah 1437 (August 25, 2016) implementing Law No. 11.15 related to the reorganization of the High Authority for Audio-Visual Communication. Official Gazette, Issue 6502, 20 Dhu al-Hijjah 1437 (September 22, 2016), pages 6810-6818.

independent constitutional institution for regulating and monitoring the audio-visual communication field. It ensures the freedom of audio-visual communication as a fundamental principle, respecting Moroccan society's linguistic, cultural, and political plurality, the pluralistic expression of opinions and thoughts, and the right to information in the audio-visual field.

Unlike the National Press Council, the High Authority for Audio-Visual Communication falls under the framework of good governance, independent regulation, and monitoring bodies as stated in the 2011 Constitution. It derives its strength from other bodies and councils as it is tasked with constitutionally determined roles involving regulatory, monitoring, or supervisory powers or following up on implementation⁴⁶. This constitutional status gives the Authority significant power and influence in its relations with state institutions and structures.⁴⁷

The High Authority consists of the Supreme Council for Audio-Visual Communication, as a decision-making body, and the General Directorate for Audio-Visual Communication, as an administrative and technical body. The Supreme Council for Audio-Visual Communication, according to articles three, four, and five of the law reorganizing the Authority, is entrusted with the tasks of expertise, consultation, opinion giving, regulation, and monitoring and penalty imposition.

In this explanatory table are the tasks and competencies of the Supreme Council:

Tasks and competencies of the Supreme Council for Audio-Visual Communication		
Expertise, Consulting and Suggestion	Regulation and Standardization	Monitoring and Sanctions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Providing opinions on any matter referred to it by His Majesty the King, the Government, or the Parliament. 2. Obligatorily providing opinions to the Head of Government regarding draft laws and decree projects. 3. Obligatorily providing opinions to the Presidents of both Chambers of Parliament regarding proposed laws. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Receiving applications for licenses, permissions, and authorizations, and granting these licenses and permissions. 2. Granting licenses for the use of radio-electric waves. 3. Approving the specifications for national audio-visual communication companies. 4. Ensuring compliance with legislative and regulatory texts for the use of public audio-visual communication means during electoral and referendum campaigns. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Monitoring the compliance of audio-visual communication broadcasters with legal texts and specifications. 2. Monitoring the respect for rules of pluralistic expression of different thought and opinion streams. 3. Monitoring the compliance of audio-visual communication devices and

⁴⁶ Decision of the Constitutional Council No. 932/2014, File No. 1389/14, dated January 30, 2014. Website of the Constitutional Court.

⁴⁷ Hicham Madacha, (Regulatory Bodies - Regulation of the Audio-Visual Communication Sector as a Model), New Success Printing Press, Casablanca, 2018, page 79.

4. Presenting any suggestion or recommendation to the Government concerning changes of a legislative or regulatory nature.	5. Establishing legal and technical standards applicable for measuring the audience of audio-visual communication broadcasters' programs.	broadcasters with legal and regulatory texts in the field of advertising. 4. Issuing penalties for committed violations.
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As for the General Directorate of Audio-Visual Communication, it consists of various administrative and technical structures of the High Authority that work on implementing the decisions of the Supreme Council, and it deals with the matters outlined in the following table:

Tasks and competencies of the General Directorate for Audio-Visual Communication		
Program monitoring	Infrastructure and technological tracking	Studies and development
<p>1. Verifying the extent to which broadcasters respect their commitments related to the ethics of programs, scheduling, and production.</p> <p>2. Monitoring compliance with legal and regulatory provisions related to the pluralistic expression of streams of thought and opinion.</p>	<p>1. Planning and using frequencies that the Authority is responsible for managing, on a technical level.</p> <p>2. Monitoring the infrastructure and communication equipment used for broadcasting audio-visual communication services.</p> <p>3. Monitoring the frequency spectrum as well as protecting the reception of frequencies assigned to the High Authority; and following the standardization of broadcasting and distribution devices and techniques via cable for audio-visual communication services.</p> <p>4. Monitoring the technical characteristics of the signals sent to provide audio-visual communication services.</p> <p>5. Technological vigilance.</p>	<p>1. Studying license applications and permissions and supervising competitive bidding announcements.</p> <p>2. Monitoring the legal and financial status of audio-visual communication broadcasters.</p> <p>3. Conducting sectoral economic studies.</p> <p>4. Tracking audience measurement.</p> <p>5. Monitoring the sector and the growth strategies of the broadcasters.</p>

Challenges in the Environment of Practicing Freedom of Expression

Identifying the Key Actor in Freedom of Expression

The definition of a professional journalist has been a continuous point of contention by professionals for the development of journalistic practice in Morocco and to prevent intruders and impostors. The earliest legislation dates back to 1942, and it came into effect in the region under French colonization as a law regulating those practicing journalism in Morocco⁴⁸. Despite achieving independence, no changes were made to the law regarding journalists until more than half a century later, with the issuance of a statute for professional journalists⁴⁹ in 1995. This was the result of the first national conference on media and communication held in Rabat on March 29, 1993.

This law remained in effect until the revision of the Press and Publishing Law, which was then included for amendment in the Press and Publishing Code. It was issued in May 2016 under the name "Law No. 89.13 concerning the Statute of Professional Journalists", after the ratification process in both chambers of Parliament and its publication in the Official Gazette took about eight months. It included 31 articles, while its first article distinguished between four categories of professional journalists:

The professional journalist;

The freelancer journalist;

The trainee journalist;

The honorary journalist and provided a precise definition for each.

The new law defines "professional journalist" as "any professional journalist who practices journalism primarily and regularly, in one or more written, electronic, audio-visual, or public or private news agencies headquartered in Morocco, and whose main income comes from practicing the profession." A freelancer journalist is "any professional journalist who deals on request with one or more press institutions headquartered in Morocco, and whose main income comes from practicing journalism and does not receive a fixed salary."

A trainee journalist is "any professional journalist who practices journalism in one or more press institutions headquartered in Morocco and does not have more than two years of experience in practicing journalism, with completion of an approved continuous training

⁴⁸ Royal Decree issued on 1st Rabi' al-Thani 1361 (April 18, 1942) regarding the system of those practicing journalism in Morocco. Official Gazette, Issue 1544, 13 Jumada al-Awwal 1361 (May 29, 1942), pages 741-743.

⁴⁹ Royal Decree No. 1.95.9 issued on 22 Ramadan 1415 (February 22, 1995) implementing Law No. 21.94 related to the Statute of Professional Journalists. Official Gazette, Issue 4318, 4 Rabi' al-Awwal 1416 (August 2, 1995), pages 2159-2161.

program; one year of practice for those holding at least a bachelor's degree or a specialized diploma in journalism, issued by public or private higher education institutions, or a diploma recognized as equivalent." While an honorary journalist is "any professional journalist who has been retired after practicing journalism for no less than 21 years."

A Triad Hindering the Practice Environment

Although the law related to the Statute of Professional Journalists precisely defines the conditions for belonging to this category, journalistic practice since the enactment of the Press and Publishing Code in 2016 has proven that the professional journalist faces three challenges that hinder their ability to perform their functions: prosecution under criminal law in publication cases, frequent assaults, and the absence of an entry point to the profession.

- Prosecuting Journalists Under Criminal Law in Publishing Cases:

The most significant challenge facing professional journalists in Morocco remains the possibility of their prosecution under criminal law in publishing cases. This challenge persists despite the Moroccan government's rejection of three recommendations aimed at not prosecuting journalists under criminal law, instead of the Press and Publishing Law, in cases related to publishing. These recommendations were received from the working group concerned with the Universal Periodic Review of 2017 for Morocco.

In September 2019, the government, through the Ministry of State for Human Rights, presented its interim report to the United Nations Human Rights Council on the implementation of recommendations from the third round of the Universal Periodic Review mechanisms. This process allows countries to announce measures taken to improve human rights situations and fulfill their commitments in this field⁵⁰. However, the report did not indicate endorsement of the three recommendations related to not prosecuting journalists under criminal law.

The first recommendation, which Morocco received but did not respond to, called for "refraining from relying on laws other than the Press Law when considering offenses related to freedom of expression." The second recommendation urged "ending the judicial prosecution of journalists under criminal law for exercising their right to freedom of opinion and expression peacefully, and for their commitment to the right to access information." The third recommendation called for "ending the judicial prosecution of journalists and releasing them,

⁵⁰ Key Facts about the Universal Periodic Review, Human Rights Council, United Nations, Council's Website.

along with other individuals imprisoned merely for exercising their right to express themselves, assemble peacefully, and form associations."

The government justifies its lack of support for the complete abolition of prosecuting journalists under criminal law provisions, stating, "prosecuting journalists in cases that do not fall under their professional duties should not be exempt from the mentioned exception, in order to protect citizens' rights and ensure equality before the law." Currently, the prosecution of journalists under criminal law in publishing cases continues, even though Article 17 of the Press and Publishing Law, which states that "provisions of other laws do not apply to anything explicitly stated in the Press and Publishing Code," does not provide adequate protection for journalists against the possibility of being tried under criminal law in publishing cases due to its broad wording.

Opening the door to prosecuting journalists under criminal law instead of the Press and Publishing Law, the government sought in 2018 to introduce a bill⁵¹ amending the Press and Publishing Law. This bill included amendments aimed at repealing articles from the Press and Publishing Law and leaving their regulation to criminal law, such as crimes of incitement to hatred or discrimination and insulting judges, public officials, and law enforcement officers. However, it remained stagnant in Parliament.

The trial of four journalists⁵² for leaking data and news related to a parliamentary fact-checking committee⁵³ serves as a prominent example of how journalists are tried under laws outside the Press and Publishing Law in publishing cases. On December 23, 2019, the Rabat Court of Appeal sentenced the four journalists to six months suspended imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 dirhams.

Overall, prosecuting journalists under criminal law remains a major challenge that is not mitigated by reducing the instances of public prosecutors automatically initiating legal actions in cases of slander and defamation. This approach continues despite circulars⁵⁴ from the Public Prosecutor's Office to the public prosecutors at the courts, urging them to refrain from initiating prosecutions in slander and defamation cases. Exceptions are made for situations where the

⁵¹ Bill No. 71.17 which amends and supplements Law No. 88.13 on Press and Publishing. It was referred to the Office of the House of Representatives on March 20, 2018.

⁵² The four journalists are Abdelhak Belachgar, Mohamed Ahaddad, Kaouthar El Zaki, and Abdelilah Sakhir, who were prosecuted for leaking information related to the deliberations of a parliamentary fact-finding committee on pension funds and breaching professional confidentiality.

⁵³ Royal Decree No. 1.14.125 issued on 3 Shawwal 1435 (31 July 2014) for the implementation of Organic Law No. 085.13 concerning the management method of parliamentary inquiry committees. Official Gazette, issue 6282, 17 Shawwal 1435 (14 August 2014), pp: 6375-6377.

⁵⁴ The Public Prosecutor's report on the implementation of criminal policy and the functioning of the Public Prosecutor's Office 2019, previous reference, p: 289.

aggrieved parties cannot file direct complaints, such as the status of government members, and for complaints filed by institutions.

- **Repeated Assaults on Journalists:**

Another challenge, no less important than the punitive approach in dealing with press and publication crimes, is the recurring instances of assaults on journalists while performing their duties, as documented by reports from the Moroccan National Press Union. The government had put in place measures to protect journalists, particularly activating a complaints mechanism in cases of assault on journalists while performing their professional duties⁵⁵. This was officially announced in 2019 in the "Press Freedom Indicators 2018" report. However, to date, there have been no reports or numerical indicators regarding the violations committed against journalists and the measures taken to protect them.

The Ministry of Communication had previously announced the activation of a joint mechanism with the Ministry of Justice and Freedoms to follow up on any assaults that journalists might fall victim to. However, not once were the results of these assaults announced or accountability established, despite the state's duty to ensure that those who assault journalists do not escape punishment, as stipulated in Article 7 of the Press and Publishing Law, which stipulates that: "Public authorities are committed to providing institutional guarantees to protect journalists from assault while practicing their profession."

- **Lack of a credentialing process for entry into Journalism:**

Among the challenges facing professional journalists is the chaotic affiliation with the sector. Practicing the profession does not require permission⁵⁶ from anyone and can even be done without possessing a "press card." This can be described as a lack of a "professional credentialing process" to the field of journalism and publishing in Morocco.

Adding to the difficulty is the lack of a specific academic orientation required to obtain a press card. It suffices to have a bachelor's degree in any field or even a specialized degree in journalism from a private higher education institution⁵⁷, unlike other professions that require specific academic qualifications and degrees.

Although this challenge is almost universal due to the overlapping nature of journalism as a profession and freedom of expression as a value since the emergence of journalism, the

⁵⁵ Press Freedom Indicators 2018, previous reference, p: 34.

⁵⁶ Claude-Jean Bertrand, (la déontologie des médias), p : 32.

⁵⁷ Decree No. 2.19.121 issued on 7 Rajab 1440 (14 March 2019) regarding the procedures for granting and renewing professional press cards. Official Gazette, issue 6764, 21 Rajab 1440 (28 March 2019), pp: 1658-1659.

situation in Morocco is different. The number of people belonging to the profession may be higher than the number of professional cardholders. This is mainly due to the proliferation of online sites that do not comply with the Press and Publishing Law, employing individuals who do not meet the required conditions primarily for financial considerations. Moreover, numerous individuals not affiliated with the sector commonly create online websites, thanks to the simplicity involved in the process. Some justify this by the fact that the beginning of journalism in Morocco – like other countries – was not originally by full-time journalists, but rather by thinkers, politicians, or intellectuals who practiced it as a form of political struggle, especially when party newspapers were the most widespread.

Challenges in Implementing the Right to Access Information

The Context of Establishing the Right to Information Law

Access to information is a right stipulated by many international legislations and is one of the main indicators for assessing the human rights situation in any country. It originates from the right of every individual to receive information from public institutions, and exercising this right does not require proving the existence of interest or providing an explanation. The term 'information' refers to "all materials held by public bodies, regardless of the form of storage or the source, including information classified as secret."⁵⁸

Article 27 of the Constitution grants citizens the right to access information held by public administrations, elected institutions, and bodies charged with public service duties, which can only be restricted by law. Article 6 of the Press and Publishing Law clearly states that "journalists and press bodies and institutions have the right to access news sources and obtain information from various sources, except for information that is confidential or whose access rights have been restricted according to the provisions of the second paragraph of Article 27 of the Constitution." Confidential information includes matters related to national defense, protection of the state's internal and external security, individuals' private lives, and preventing the infringement on liberties and fundamental rights. The same article also stipulates that "public administration, elected institutions, and bodies charged with public service duties are committed to enabling journalists to access information within legally prescribed deadlines, under penalty of applying sanctions on them in the current legislation."

⁵⁸ Open Data in a Comprehensive Legal Framework, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, United Nations.

The most significant challenge for professional journalists and citizens is the proper implementation of the Law on the Right to Access Information.⁵⁹ This law, which took eight years to be ratified, began its journey with its draft being presented to the members of the government council at three stages before its approval. The first stage was on August 1, 2013, while it was approved in the government council on July 31, 2014, and in the House of Representatives on July 20, 2016. It was not until January 9, 2018, that it was approved in the House of Councilors, followed by a second reading approval in the House of Representatives on February 6, 2018, before being published in the Official Gazette on March 12, 2018.

However, the law did not fully come into effect until March 12, 2020, with the commencement of the administrations and public institutions' operations to activate this law. Over 1850 individuals were appointed to receive and respond to requests for information⁶⁰. In the same context, training courses were organized for these individuals, and an electronic portal⁶¹ was created to facilitate the process of submitting requests and extracting related statistics.

The initial impetus for the enactment of the Right to Information Law dates back to four years before the adoption of the new Constitution in 2011, following Morocco's ratification of the United Nations Convention against Corruption in May 2007. Article 10 of this Convention stipulated the necessity for "each State Party, in accordance with the fundamental principles of its domestic law and with due regard to the need to fight corruption, to adopt measures to enhance transparency in its public administration, including with regard to the organization of its public administration, its functioning and its decision-making processes, and the legal acts and documents that concern the public, with due regard for their privacy and personal data protection."⁶²

Article one of this law defines the scope of the right to access information held by public administrations, elected institutions, and bodies charged with public service duties, as well as the conditions and methods of its exercise. Article two provides a precise definition of information, referring to it as "data and statistics expressed in numbers, letters, drawings, images, audiovisual recordings, or any other form, and included in documents, reports, studies, decisions, periodicals, circulars, memos, databases, and other public documents, produced or

⁵⁹ Royal Decree No. 1.18.15 issued on 5 Jumada al-Thani 1439 (22 February 2018) for the implementation of Law No. 31.13 on the Right to Access Information. Official Gazette, issue 6655, 23 Jumada al-Thani 1439 (12 March 2018), pp: 1438-1443.

⁶⁰ Open Government Portal of Morocco, accessible at the following link:

<https://www.gouvernement-ouvert.ma/pan-engagement.php?engagement=14&lang=ar>

⁶¹ Portal for Access to Information, available at the following link: <http://www.chafafiya.ma/>

⁶² United Nations Convention Against Corruption, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2004, p: 13.

received by the institutions or bodies concerned in the context of public service duties, regardless of their medium, whether paper, electronic, or otherwise."

Challenges in Implementing the Law on the Right to Access Information

It is remarkable that despite five years since the final approval of the law concerning the right to access information, the legal arrangements for its practical implementation are still facing difficulties. Among the indicators of this are the failure to publish the list of individuals responsible for providing information at all concerned bodies to date, although the law mandates this. This issue aligns with the problem of insufficient financial resources and qualified human capital.⁶³

Additionally, there is a low rate of response to requests for information submitted by citizens, both in quantity and quality.⁶⁴ This is due to the absence of a permanent mechanism to support and enhance the capabilities of the appointed individuals responsible for information and a shortfall in publishing information, especially those stipulated in Article 10 of the law concerning proactive information publication. This article states that "the concerned institutions and bodies, each within its jurisdiction, must publish, to the extent possible, the maximum amount of information in their possession that does not fall under the exceptions listed in this law, through all available publishing means... especially information related to the following: Agreements that have commenced accession or ratification procedures, legislative and regulatory texts, draft laws, finance law projects and their accompanying documents, and budgets of local communities,..."

The law on the right to access information makes recourse to administrative justice the last stage in the process of accessing information, as defined by its articles. Articles 16 and 19 stipulate that responses to access to information requests must be made within a deadline not exceeding 20 working days. If a request is not responded to, the requester can submit a complaint to the head of the concerned institution within 20 days from the expiry of the response deadline, to be studied and responded to within 15 days. According to Article 20 of the same law, the information requester has the right to submit a complaint to the Right to Access Information Committee, established under the Prime Minister pursuant to Article 22, within a period not exceeding 30 days following the expiration of the legal deadline designated

⁶³ Marwa Shalaby, Sylvia Bergh, (Power to the People? The Law on the Right to Access Information in Morocco), Carnegie Endowment, October 2, 2020, available at the following link: <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/82835>

⁶⁴ Open Government Portal of Morocco, previous reference.

for responding to the complaint addressed to the head of the institution or body, or from the date of receiving a response to the complaint.

The law also ensures that the final word is given to administrative justice to consider appeals of information requesters and to review whether the institutions and bodies concerned have complied with the law. Article 22 of Law 31.13 states the right of the information requester to appeal before the competent administrative court within a deadline of 60 days from the date of receiving a response from the Right to Access Information Committee regarding their complaint, or from the expiry of the legal deadline (30 days) designated for responding to the same complaint.

The Intriguing Case of the First Complaint by a Journalist⁶⁵ to the Administrative Court. Despite completing all the procedures stipulated in the law on the right to access information, the initial attempts of this journalist to test the law and its practical application by government institutions encountered challenges. In July 2020, the journalist submitted a request to the Ministry of Economy and Finance to obtain information and two requests to the Ministry of Health (on September 7 and 28, 2020), through the national portal "Chafafiya" (<http://www.chafafiya.ma>), created by the government for electronic receipt of requests.

However, all three requests were ignored by the respective ministries after the legal deadlines had passed, in clear violation of the law on the right to access information, which mandates bodies and institutions to respond to requests, whether by acceptance, reasoned refusal, or requesting an extension of the response deadline. Consequently, the journalist resorted to the Administrative Court, following the procedure for obtaining information as defined by the law.

The journalist began this process by filing an appeal for annulment directed to the President of the Administrative Court in Rabat, against the Minister of Economy and Finance, and the Moroccan State represented by the Head of Government, on December 17, 2020. The appeal sought to annul the implicit decision of the Minister of Economy and Finance refusing to provide the requested information on the details of the income and resources of the "COVID-19" fund, established by the order of King Mohammed VI.

However, five months after the file was processed in the Administrative Court, the court issued its decision on the appeal on May 18, 2021. The court noted that "the legislator required, before an information requester resorts to the Administrative Court to challenge the decision of the head of the concerned institution or body as per Article 21, compliance with the prior

⁶⁵ Yasser Al Makhtoum, a journalist at 'Alyoum 24' website.

administrative procedure related to submitting a complaint to the head of the institution or body and submitting a complaint to the Right to Access Information Committee within the legally specified deadlines."

The court added that, upon reviewing the file documents, it was evident that "the appellant had submitted his request to the Ministry of Economy and Finance and Public Administration Reform to obtain information related to the details of the resources and expenses of the COVID-19 pandemic management fund, and had submitted a complaint to the Right to Access Information Committee, without providing evidence of submitting a complaint to the Minister of Economy and Finance and Public Administration Reform, as the head of the concerned institution or body for the information request. This makes the current appeal procedurally defective for not respecting the aforementioned prior administrative procedure, and therefore, it should be declared inadmissible."

The journalist also filed another appeal against an implicit decision by the Minister of Health, which involved not responding to a request for information submitted on September 28, 2020, via the "Chafafiya" portal. This request concerned details of the "Corona" contracts entered into by the ministry during the pandemic. This request, too, was ignored, with all legal deadlines for responding to the preliminary procedures before approaching the Administrative Court expiring without any response from the concerned bodies, particularly the Ministry of Health, regarding the response to the request and the two complaints directed to both the Minister of Health and the Right to Access Information Committee affiliated with the Head of Government.

The journalist issued a comment on the ruling⁶⁶, which stated the following:

"Upon a careful reading of the first judicial ruling issued by the administrative courts of the Kingdom, which discussed and decided on the subject of appealing an implicit decision related to the refusal to provide a 'journalist' with requested information under the application of the Right to Access Information Law No. 31.13, which came fully into effect on March 12, 2020, the following observations can be made:

- ✓ *The court, by accepting the appeal in terms of form, affirmed the legality of using the 'Chafafiya' portal to place a request for information, and the formal procedures preceding the appeal stage before the administrative court, including adhering to the deadlines set by the portal, based on legal provisions.*

⁶⁶ A collective book, (The Application of the Law on the Right to Access Information Before Administration and Judiciary in Morocco). See the study by Yasser Al Makhtoum in the book titled: 'The Administrative Judiciary and the Application of Law 31.13 on the Right to Access Information', supervised and coordinated by Abdelaziz Nouaydi.

- ✓ Even though it was not taken into consideration, the court noted the contradiction on the part of the entity challenged in the appeal (the Ministry of Health and the Judicial office of the Kingdom), where it "sometimes asserts that the information requested by the concerned party is published on the portal and available to the public and can be downloaded", and at other times states that "the information sought is confidential, and disclosing it violates Article 7 of Law 13-31 regarding exceptions".
- ✓ It seems that the court, in justifying its decision to reject the appeal for the 'protection of the findings of the fact-finding committee', did not differentiate between the fact-finding committees, as provided for in Article 65 of the Constitution and regulated by an organic law, and 'temporary exploratory missions' established under Article 107 of the internal regulations of the House of Representatives.
- ✓ In presenting the facts, the court stated that the Ministry of Health argued in its memorandum that "the date of submitting the request (September 28, 2020) coincided with the work of the fact-finding committee", which the court based its decision to reject the appeal on. However, the truth, as confirmed by the House of Representatives on its website, is that the date of approval of the temporary exploratory mission concerning the Ministry of Health's contracts during the pandemic and the start of its work was Tuesday, December 1, 2020, a date subsequent to the expiration of the ministry's deadline to respond to the information request, which is 15 days from the date of receipt of the request.
- ✓ Intriguingly, while the court defended the legitimacy of the Ministry of Health's refusal to provide the requested information, it relied on a correspondence submitted by the ministry, indicating the formation of a parliamentary exploratory mission. This correspondence, according to the court, is dated July 8, 2021, more than three months after the registration of the initial appeal against the Ministry of Health's implicit decision (April 2, 2021).

The stakes remain high for the administrative judiciary, which is now facing a democratic test or exercise, to be a key actor in the implementation of the provisions of the Right to Access Information Law, and the activation of one of the fundamental rights and freedoms stipulated in the 2011 Constitution.

Perhaps the most significant challenges posed are the proper interpretation of the provisions of Law 13-31 on the Right to Access Information, especially Article 7 regarding exceptions. These could become a safe haven for refusing any request for information and adapting them with unjustified legal reasons and arbitrary interpretations of the legal text. This requires vigilance from administrative judges and also legislative amendments to the law to protect this constitutional right."

Summary

Through a theoretical study of the legal and institutional evolution of freedom of expression, its practice environment, and the process of establishing the right to access information, we can observe several conclusions and summaries, foremost among them:

- The frequency of amendments to the press law has increased, with eight versions of the press law being enacted over 44 years (between 1958 and 2002), before a new law was enacted in 2016. Calls for its amendment arose less than five years after its enactment.

- The Press and Publishing Code enacted in 2016 represents the most significant legal development in the media field. It differed from previous legal texts by encompassing three laws: the Law on Press and Publishing, the Law on the Basic Status of Professional Journalists, and the Law Establishing the National Press Council. In addition to abolishing imprisonment penalties, it introduced six major innovations, including strengthening guarantees of press freedom, regulating entry into the profession, protecting individual and societal rights and freedoms, expanding and strengthening the judiciary's role in press and publishing cases, regulating and promoting electronic journalism, and defining the rights and freedoms of the professional journalist.

- Despite the positive updates of the Press and Publishing Code, four criticisms were recorded: its lack of precision in exceptional cases for lifting the confidentiality of sources, its requirement for excessively long tenure to be eligible for membership in the National Press Council, its failure to explicitly state that the new law alone applies in press crimes, and its continued subjugation of the press to the executive authority through the mechanism of public support.

- Despite the government signing of the decree to end the monopoly of radio and television broadcasting 18 years ago, the prevailing media system in the audiovisual sector remains the public media system. This is evident from the comparison between the number of public and private radios and channels (16 public radios vs. 14 private, and 10 public channels vs. four), giving the impression that the state adopts a "partial liberalization."

- Morocco has made strides in establishing press institutions, reflected in the creation of the National Press Council as an independent professional body with legal and financial autonomy. Its primary goal is the self-regulation of the press and publishing sector and the issuance of necessary regulations to ensure the profession is practiced in accordance with its rules and ethics, including issuing professional press cards instead of the executive authority

represented by the Ministry of Communication, among other objectives. This is also embodied in the reorganization of the High Authority for Audiovisual Communication, which the 2011 Constitution placed among the bodies for good governance, independent regulation, and oversight.

- Defining the professional journalist has continually been a challenge amid the evolving professional practice. The law regulating those involved in journalism has only been renewed twice in seventy years, operating for over half a century with a law dating back to the colonial era before being changed in the mid-1990s and finally with the issuance of the law on the basic status of professional journalists within the 2016 Press and Publishing Code. This law distinguished between categories of professional journalists and provided clear provisions regarding the organization of labor relations in journalistic institutions and the procedure for granting and withdrawing professional cards.

- Despite defining everything related to belonging to the profession, the journalistic practice over the past five years has revealed challenges that hinder the professional journalist's ability to perform their functions and roles. One of the main challenges is the continued possibility of prosecuting them under laws other than the Press and Publishing Law in publishing cases, especially after the government's rejection of recommendations aiming not to prosecute journalists under criminal law instead of the Press and Publishing Law, received from the working group of the Universal Periodic Review of 2017 for Morocco. The government's continued justification for not fully supporting the termination of prosecuting journalists outside the Press and Publishing Law, in order to uphold the principle of equality before the law, effectively empties the Press and Publishing Law of its content.

- The failure of government mechanisms to protect journalists from assaults while performing their work, documented by professional bodies, and the lack of reporting on committed violations and measures taken to correct the situation.

- The most significant challenge facing the general public is the proper implementation of the law on the right to access information, which took eight full years to be ratified and two more years to come into effect. The legal arrangements for its implementation are still facing difficulties, reflected by the failure to publish the list of individuals responsible for providing information across all relevant bodies despite the law mandating this, and the weak interaction rate with citizens' information requests.

In conclusion, freedom of expression and the right to access information are a public privilege for society, not just for journalists. Therefore, exercising these rights requires legal,

political, and professional guarantees to avoid creating a significant "glass ceiling"⁶⁷ where journalists' and citizens' thoughts and actions are monitored at all times. They can play a role in oversight, which has historically been a powerful political tool enabling the suppression of the peaceful development of public opinion.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Sabah Yassin, "Media: Freedom in Collapse," Arab Network for Research and Publishing, First Edition, Beirut, 2010, p. 18.

⁶⁸ Robert Neiter, translated by Fouad Shahin, "History of Censorship in Print," Dar Al-Kitab Al-Jadeed Al-Muttahida, First Edition, Beirut, January 2008, p. 148.

II. The results of the Field Study

In this second part, the methodology will be reviewed, and the results of the study will be divided and classified according to three axes:

- **Axis of Freedom of Expression: Evaluating citizens' opinions regarding freedom of expression in Morocco:** The data will be divided based on concepts and perceptions related to freedom of expression. Information regarding the opinions and positions of participants will be gathered and categorized, including their assessment of the challenges and opportunities related to this aspect.
- **Axis of the Right to Access Information: Evaluating the effectiveness of the right to access information in Morocco:** The impact of the legal and institutional framework in Morocco on individuals' right to access and use information will be assessed. Information will be categorized according to the sources that provide it to citizens, including various media outlets, government institutions, satellite channels, and websites.
- **Axis of Access to Information During Crises: Evaluating the effectiveness of accessing information in times of crisis:** The data will be divided and classified according to access to information during crises, specifically in the context of earthquakes. This will explore how these crises affect individuals' right to access information and how the government handles providing information and guidance during these emergency times.

Research's Methodology

The Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis and "Menassat" for social research and studies⁶⁹ adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods to comprehensively represent the current situation and to measure citizens' opinions quantitatively regarding freedom of expression and the right to access information in Morocco.

The quantitative survey, executed between September and October 2023, included a representative sample of 1,645 individuals, representing Moroccan citizens aged 18 years and older. The representativeness of the sample was ensured by relying on random samples with a predetermined quota for "gender" to achieve an equal distribution of males and females in the sample. The representative sample for Moroccans over the age of 18 was based on the population structure defined by the High Commission for Planning⁷⁰ (RGHP 2014).

Regarding the qualitative or qualitative study, the technique of in-depth interviews with semi-structured questions was used with 30 participants. The sample included gender equality and socio-economic diversity, and interviews lasted 30 to 40 minutes per participant.

One of the major limitations of this study is the sensitivity of the topic "freedom of expression and the right to access information," which was further exacerbated by the earthquake crisis experienced in Morocco and the general anxiety prevalent among citizens, civil associations, and government institutions. This led to delays in the information-gathering process, requiring additional efforts and details to ensure comprehensive and accurate data collection.

This study aims to assess freedom of expression and the right to access information in Moroccan society, and thus its scope includes all adults in the community. Below is a description of the scope of the qualitative study according to different distributions:

Distribution by Gender:

The research includes all members of society, both male and female. The participant statistics in this research are 51% females and 49% males.

⁶⁹ Menassat for Research and Social Studies is a research institution and non-profit organization based in Casablanca, Morocco. The institution aims to conduct in-depth research focused on developing innovative ideas and applying various approaches regarding social issues at the local, national, or regional level.

⁷⁰ [Population Census \(RGPH\) 2014](#)

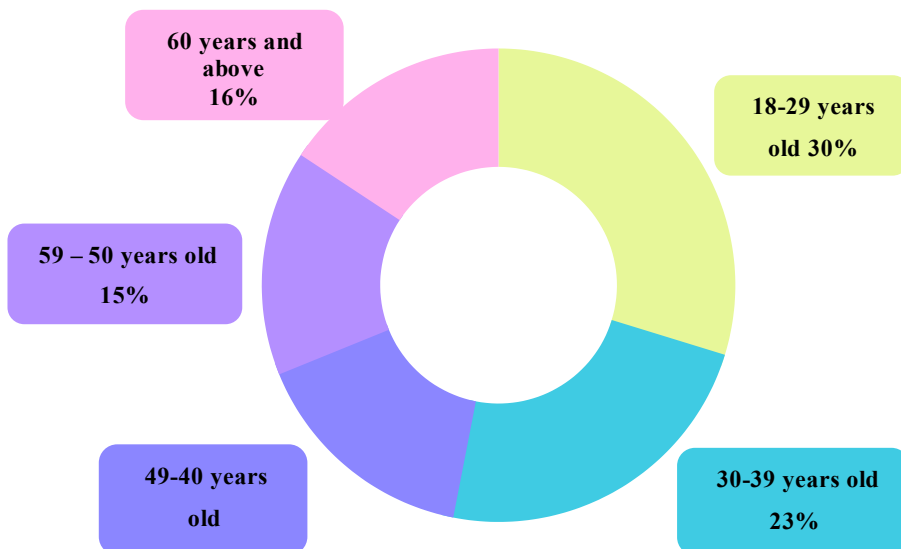
Graph 1: Distribution of Survey Participants by Gender



Age Distribution:

The research includes individuals from all age groups in society. As Graph 2 below illustrates, 29.8% of the respondents are aged between 18 and 29 years, 23% are between 30 and 39 years, 16% are between 40 and 49 years, and 15% are between 50 and 59 years. Meanwhile, the percentage of respondents aged over 60 years constitutes 16%.

Graph 2: Distribution of Survey Participants by Age

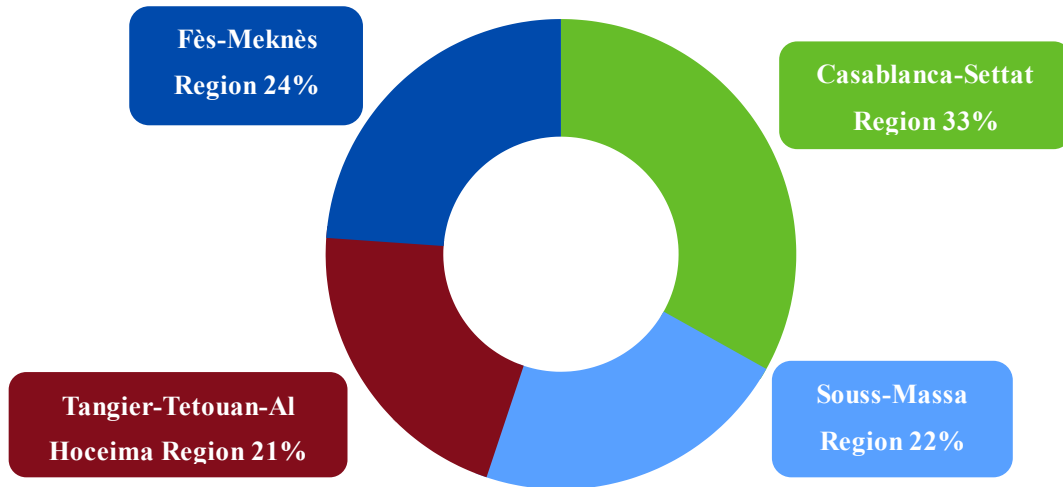


Distribution by Region:

The research includes individuals from the four largest regions in Morocco as indicated by Graph 3 below. It shows that 33% live in the Casablanca-Settat region, 24% in the Fès-

Meknès region, and 22% in the Souss region. As for the Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima region, the percentage of participants in this survey reached 21%.

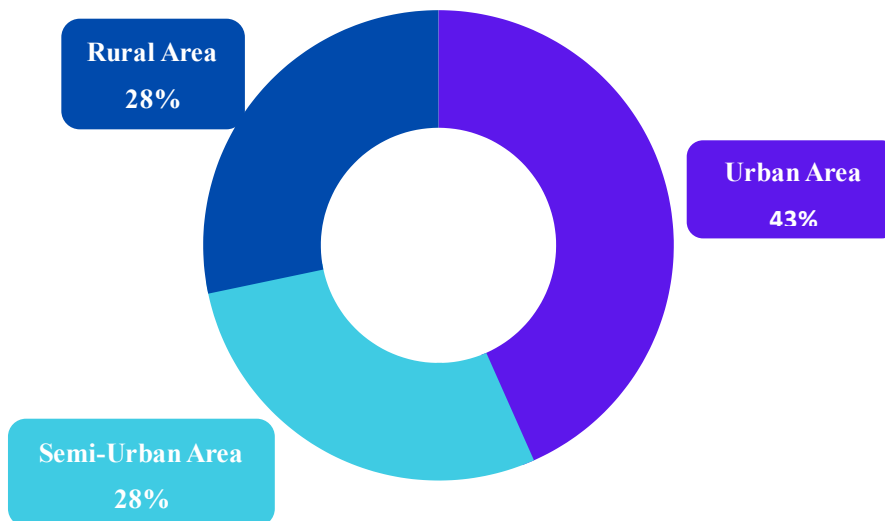
Graph 3: Distribution of Survey Participants by Region



Rural/Semi-Urban/Urban Distribution:

The research includes individuals living in rural, urban, and semi-urban areas. It shows that 43% of the respondents reside in urban areas, 28% live in semi-urban areas, and 28% live in rural areas.

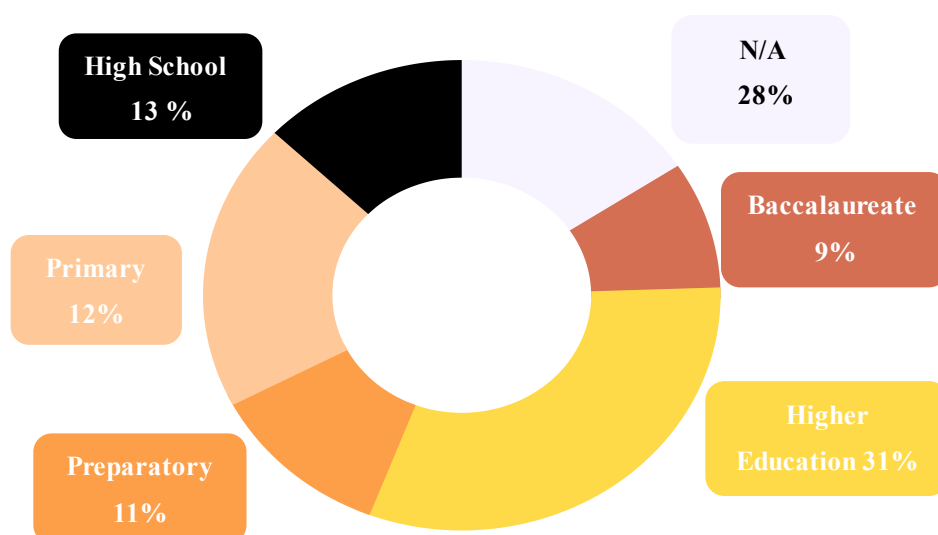
Graph 4: Rural/Semi-Urban/Urban Distribution of Survey Participants



Distribution by Educational Level:

The research includes individuals from various educational levels. 31% of the respondents have a higher education, 9% have a baccalaureate degree, 13% have secondary education, 11% have preparatory level education, 20% have primary education, and finally, 15% of the respondents reported having no educational level.

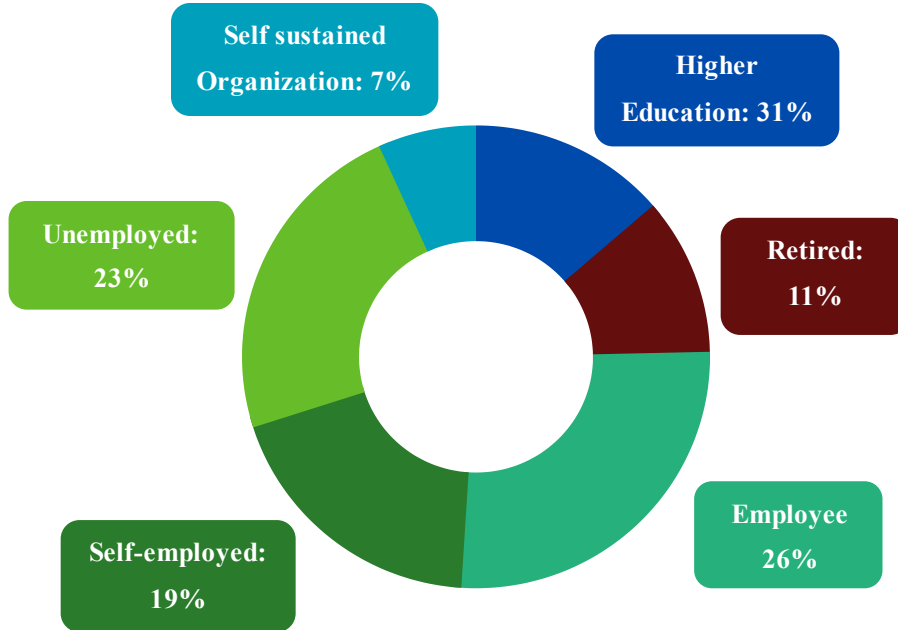
Graph 5: Distribution of Survey Participants by Educational Level



Distribution by Professional Activity:

The research shows that 26% of the survey participants are employed (wage earners), 23% are unemployed, 19% are entrepreneurs and self-employed, 14% are students, 11% are retirees, and 7% belong to non-governmental organizations.

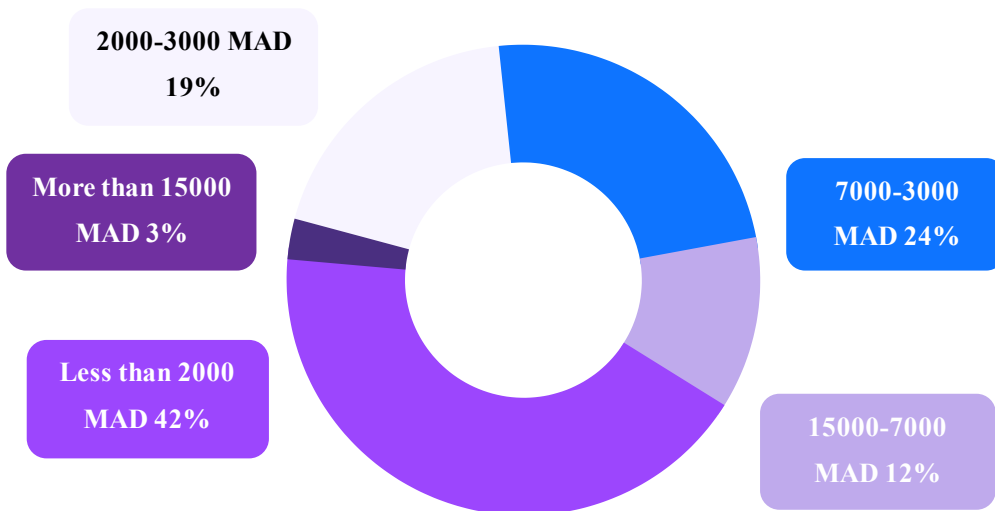
Graph 6: Distribution of Survey Participants by Professional Activity



Distribution by Monthly Income Level:

This distribution refers to the income level received by the participants in this study. 42% of the participants earn less than 2000 dirhams per month, while 24% earn between 3000 and 7000 dirhams per month, and 19% earn between 2000 and 3000 dirhams, and 12% earn between 7000 and 15000 dirhams, while the percentage of those earning more than 15000 dirhams per month is 3%.

Graph 7: Distribution of Survey Participants by Monthly Income Level



First Axis: Freedom of Expression: Evaluating Citizens' Opinions on Freedom of Expression in Morocco

Overview of the research findings

- Citizens in Morocco place significant importance on freedom of expression, considering it a fundamental human right. However, a minority either question its importance or lack sufficient awareness about it.
- Citizens hold varied opinions on freedom of expression: some perceive it as being relatively guaranteed, while others identify ongoing challenges and constraints that hinder its full realization.
- Obstacles hindering freedom of expression contribute to insecurity among citizens. Conversely, a segment of those surveyed feels safe and confident in exercising this right, highlighting a diversity of perceptions and experiences related to freedom of expression in Morocco.
- Expression of opinions in Morocco exhibit contrasts, with many preferring to withhold their views publicly, while others engage freely in voicing their opinions and criticizing government policies.
- Most of the research participants have not witnessed or experienced censorship or violation of their right to expression in the past five years. Meanwhile, a notable percentage has felt such constraints, and another fraction remains uncertain about their experiences.
- There is a considerable gap in legal awareness regarding press and publishing laws in Morocco, indicating that most participants lack knowledge and insight into this regard.
- The judiciary in Morocco enjoys relatively high confidence. However, opinions are severely divided concerning the protection of freedom of expression, reflecting how factors like a lack of legal awareness, opacity in judicial proceedings, and firsthand experiences shape trust in this sphere.

Introduction

Freedom of expression is recognized as one of the fundamental human rights, safeguarded by a multitude of international treaties and national constitutions. It is an essential pillar for constructing democratic societies, fostering principles of good governance and promoting transparency.

The impact of freedom of expression extends to all facets of citizens' social and political life, serving as the foundation for active political engagement and the diversity of societal dialogue. Moreover, it strengthens the principles of transparency and accountability, especially in scrutinizing the performance of governing bodies and institutions.

In Morocco, while freedom of expression is an established right, navigating through its challenges is imperative. These challenges include balancing the freedom of expression with maintaining national stability and security. An assessment of freedom of expression in Morocco involves examining the degree to which this balance is achieved.

This chapter delves into freedom of expression in Morocco, through analyzing the citizens' opinions. We will address a variety of issues linked to freedom of expression, as its value as a human right, the current context in Morocco, and ultimately, the tangible exercise of this right within the societal and legal frameworks.

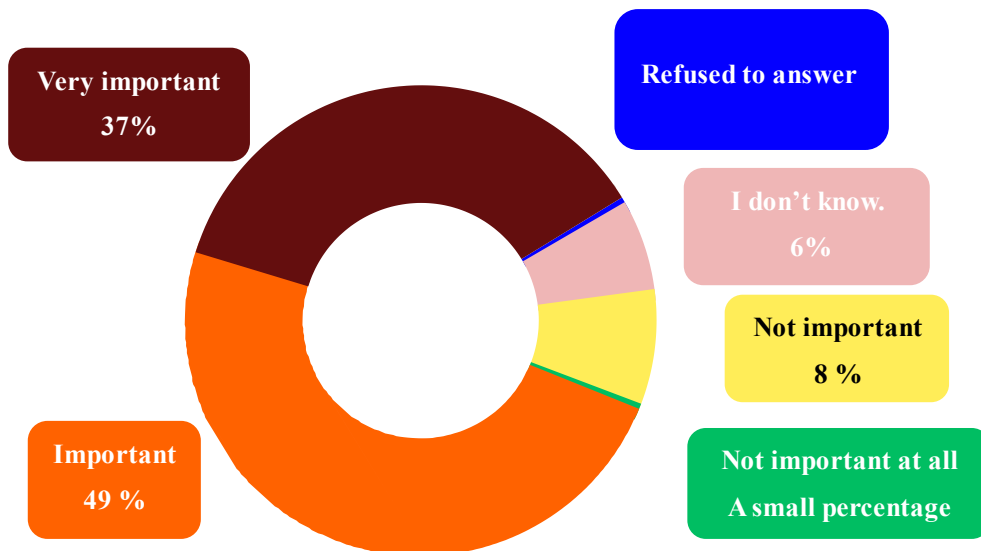
The objective of this chapter is to cast light on the Moroccan population's engagement with the right to freedom of expression and the obstacles that hinder its full realization.

Freedom of Expression as a Human Right

Freedom of expression surpasses the intrinsic nature of humanity, symbolizing the essence of the right to human life itself. In this research, some participants consider it as the core of the right to life.

Survey findings (Graph 8) reveal that most Moroccan citizens consider freedom of expression to be a critical issue, with 49% deeming it important, and 37% asserting its extreme importance. Conversely, about 8% believe that freedom of expression is not important, and another 7% express uncertainty, indicating a knowledge gap that could be addressed through targeted awareness and educational initiatives. Additionally, a small fraction of participants chose not to respond, possibly indicating the sensitivity of the subject or a reluctance to disclose their views on it.

Graph 8: Participants' Response About the Importance of Freedom of Expression in Morocco



A participant's statement from the interviews underscores that "freedom of expression is now a widely and extensively discussed issue. However, it should be approached from various perspectives. The perspective I wish to highlight is the natural right aspect; freedom of expression as

*a human right is on par with the right to life, if not the essence of the right to life itself. Without freedom of expression, there would be no particularly human life."*⁷¹

The discussions with participants also touched upon the connection between freedom of expression and liberties in general. They emphasize that freedom of expression is a fundamental human right, allowing individuals to voice their thoughts and opinions without fear of harassment or repression. One participant emphasizes that freedom of expression is coupled with a primary value—freedom itself—indicating that humans have an essential right to freedom. He stated, "*Freedom of expression is fundamental in constructing human rationality and thought. A person must be free, and its value is manifested in possessing freedom. Thus, for me, freedom is essential in human nature. Moreover, freedom of expression is part of freedom in general, as it allows expressing all the internal feelings about different matters.*"⁷²

More specifically, some respondents focused on freedom of expression in terms of its broad implications and tangible and intangible dimensions. For those working in some specific field like journalism, it represents for them a primary material for work. For the average person, it's the "*freedom to choose the topics I will work on, the freedom to freely share my research without any institutional or self-imposed or social censorship, as well as the freedom of expression for a journalist and the ordinary person on social media, and freedom of expression for individuals within families. Hence, freedom of expression takes multiple forms.*"⁷³

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right, ensuring the liberty to articulate individuals' views and thoughts without apprehension of harassment or suppression. This right is vital to ensure a sound democratic society where citizens can participate in decision-making and express their concerns and opinions on issues of interest.

As per the quantitative data, there is a consensus in recognizing the importance of freedom of expression and affirming its necessity as a fundamental human right. Nonetheless, a challenge remains in engaging with groups that doubt about this right's importance or lack adequate knowledge of it, requiring continuous efforts in awareness and education.

⁷¹ Interview with A.Kh., Casablanca – October 2023.

⁷² Interview with A., Casablanca – October 2023.

⁷³ Interview with M., Casablanca – October 2023.

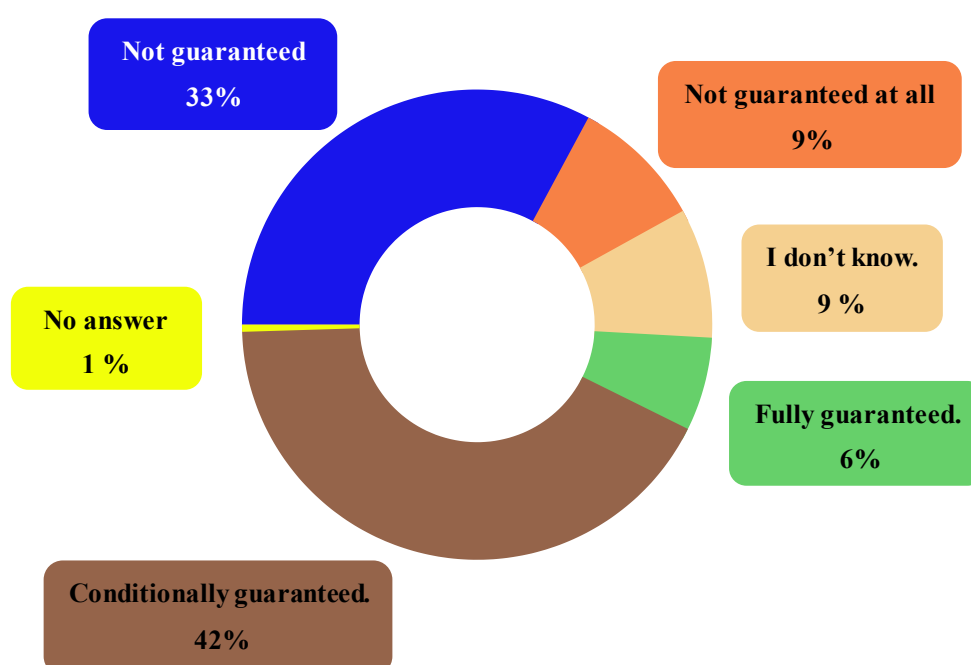
The Current Status of Freedom of Expression

Debating the status of freedom of expression in Morocco presents a multifaceted topic that can generate diverse responses depending on the point of view adopted. There is an acknowledgment of progress made in recent years towards strengthening freedom of expression, with individuals increasingly voicing their opinions and stances without fear of severe repercussions. Despite this progress, the full realization of freedom of expression faces persistent challenges and barriers. According to the survey findings (Graph 9), there is a noticeable division in perceptions: 42% feel that freedom of expression is conditionally guaranteed, suggesting a cautious optimism about their ability to speak freely, yet tempered by certain reservations and underlying concerns. 33% do not perceive freedom of expression as guaranteed, pointing to systemic obstacles that potentially hinder free expression. 9% deny the existence of this freedom, which can indicate profound concerns regarding the expression of dissenting views. Equally 9% withheld judgment, highlighting their uncertainty. Finally, a small proportion abstained from responding, possibly due to the topic's sensitivity.

Freedom of expression stands as a cornerstone human right, enabling individuals to articulate their thoughts without intimidation or suppression. This right is essential to the vitality of a democratic society, empowering citizens to participate in governance and advocate for matters of personal and communal interest.

An in-depth interview, conducted with a citizen from Casablanca, reveals the nuanced understanding that freedom of expression extends across various spheres, including political,

Graph 9: Participants' Opinions on Freedom of Expression in Morocco



intellectual, and artistic fields. It is seen as an intrinsic right that commands respect and upholds the essence of human dignity.⁷⁴

In the realm of professional life, the latitude for freedom of expression is often determined by the nature of the role and the environment of the workplace. For instance, in civil society organizations, as opposed to military or strict hierarchical environments, the environment allows a wider exercise of free speech. *"As an active member of an association, the context allows me to freely express my ideas and suggestions. I can draft advocacy documents freely, in a manner that meets and responds to the needs of the people I represent within this framework. However, there are matters that I may not be able to discuss openly if I were on a plateau."*⁷⁵ According to Pierre Bourdieu, legitimacy in discourse can be restrictive in certain social fields and within them, expanding in others. The freedom granted within civil society organizations for open expression narrows public servant roles or other sectors where obedience and compliance are more rigorously expected from employees or collaborators.

Feeling Safe when Expressing Opinions

The act of speaking out in public and open spaces often symbolizes the power and opportunity to break free from constraints. However, a contrasting perspective views public expression as heavily scrutinized and subject to collective surveillance, especially on topics considered taboo or offensive to public sensibilities, whether expressed verbally, behaviorally, or symbolically.

"Every individual has the right to express their political, intellectual, and artistic views freely. This is the essence of freedom of expression as I understand it. It means being able to communicate my ideas, convictions, and identity in various ways—through publishing, speaking out, or via social media. And why not artistically? Through paintings or any other creative form. The important thing is to voice my opinion. This is a guaranteed right, which should be upheld as a fundamental human right. That's my take on freedom of expression."

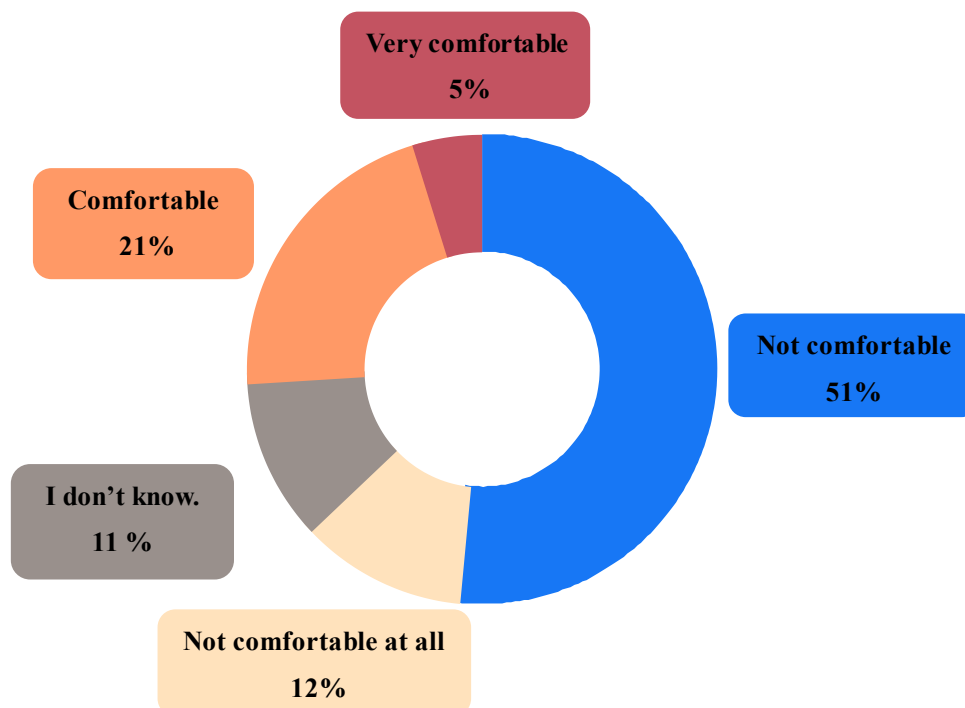
When citizens were asked about their level of comfort and safety when publicly expressing their opinions in Morocco (Graph 10), a significant 51% expressed discomfort. This suggests a high level of concern and mistrust in the public environment regarding freedom of expression. 21% reported feeling comfortable speaking out, indicating a subset of participants who feel secure in exercising their rights. 11% feel completely insecure, highlighting serious

⁷⁴ Interview with Kh., Casablanca – October 2023.

⁷⁵ Interview with A., Casablanca – October 2023.

challenges that could threaten free speech in Morocco. An additional 11% were uncertain about their sense of security when voicing their opinions, pointing to a need for more information and support. Only a small fraction, 5%, felt highly secure in expressing their opinions openly, suggesting that complete comfort with public speech may be limited in the Moroccan context.

Graph 10: Participants' Sense of Security Regarding Freedom of Expression



Personal Engagement and Freedom of Expression's Practice

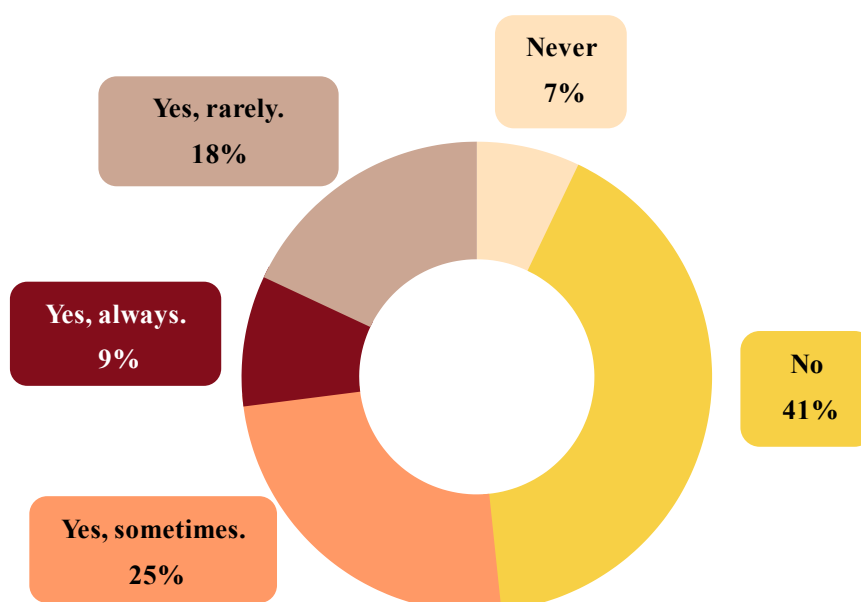
Personal engagement in societal activities and voicing opinions in public forums are critical components of democratic life and civic participation. They provide individuals with the opportunity to share their thoughts, express their opinions, and influence decision-making and public policy.

Public Expression

Sharing ideas and opinions, whether in public forums, conferences, discussions, or even on internet platforms and social media, requires confidence, especially regarding sensitive or controversial issues. Some participants believe that such forms of expression can be a mean to impact society and bring positive change. Individuals can help raise awareness about important topics by engaging in public discourse, foster open and constructive dialogue, and work towards collective solutions to societal challenges.

According to the survey results (Graph 11), 41% of respondents, representing the majority, indicated they had not expressed their opinions publicly in the past 12 months, either in real life or online. This means that many prefer to not participate in sharing their views in public spaces. Approximately 25% of respondents express their opinions in public forums 'sometimes'. Meanwhile, 18% of participants stated they 'rarely,' express their opinions in public, indicating a lower level of participation. 9%, affirmed they 'always' express their opinions in public forums. Finally, 7% of participants responded that they 'never,' express their opinion in public.

Graph 11: Participants Public Expression's Level in Real Life or Online



Expression and Criticism of Government Policies

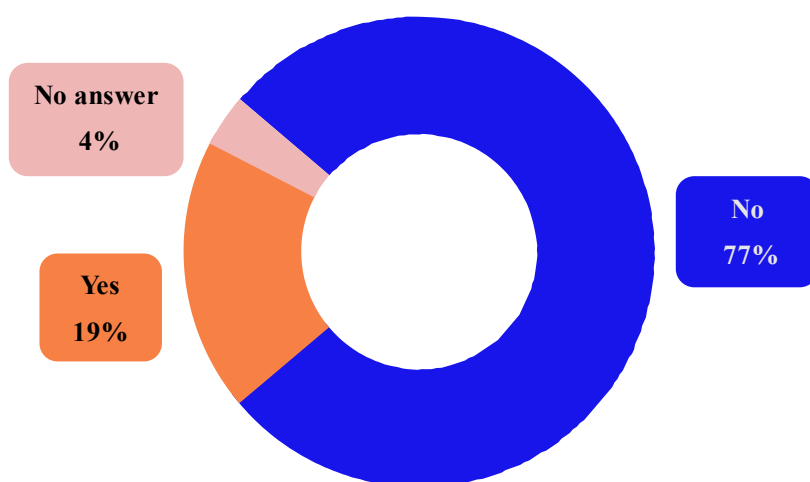
In recent years, there has been a noticeable trend among some individuals in Morocco to utilize various platforms to voice their opinions and critiques of government policies. Some have chosen social media as a platform to raise their voices, while others have preferred to write on blogs or news websites. The freedom of expression is a fundamental and necessary right for a healthy and active democracy; however, it comes with significant responsibilities and challenges.

The majority of survey participants (Graph 12), representing 78%, responded with 'no,' indicating that either they do not feel the need to criticize government policies or may hesitate to do so. Approximately 19% of the participants answered 'yes,' reflecting a considerable

proportion of participants who feel free and secure enough to openly criticize government policies.

Meanwhile, 4% of the participants chose not to answer the question, which could indicate personal reservations or concerns about facing potential accountability.

Graph 12: Participants' Criticism of Government Policies



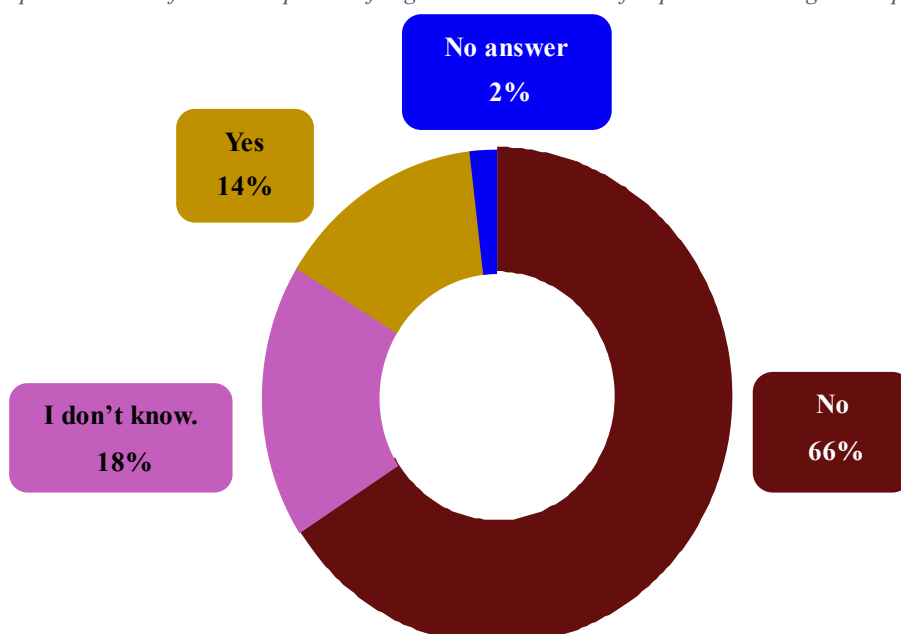
Censorship and Infringement on Freedom of Expression's Experiences

Freedom of expression is understood not just as a lack of direct constraint, but as something that comes into existence in response to and in defiance of external pressures. It is seen as a more profound human right that ensures respect for individual and collective peculiarities and their decision-making power. This right encompasses the ability to make choices, speak freely, express personal opinions, and to share perspectives that differ from others or from mainstream views.

Censorship represents one form of external constraints, where authorities or other stakeholders impose limits on what can be said or published. Such restrictions can restraint freedom of expression, suppress critical opinions and dissent voices, creating an environment where individuals fear freely sharing their ideas. In Morocco, censorship is a complex issue where cultural, political, and social factors interact. Censorship is not only about government interference but also encompasses societal and self-imposed pressures that may force individuals to restrict their expression.

The question 'Have you personally witnessed or been subjected to any form of censorship or infringement on your freedom of expression in the past five years?' (Graph 13) seeks to explore individuals' direct experiences with censorship. A meticulous analysis of the responses to this question provides valuable insights into the prevalence of censorship in Moroccan society and how individuals respond to restriction attempts to their freedom of expression. Shared experiences by participants include examples of self-censorship, societal pressures, or interventions by government or non-government entities. Understanding these experiences deeply is a fundamental step towards offering effective recommendations to

Graph 13: Cases of Censorship and Infringement on Freedom of Expression Among Participants



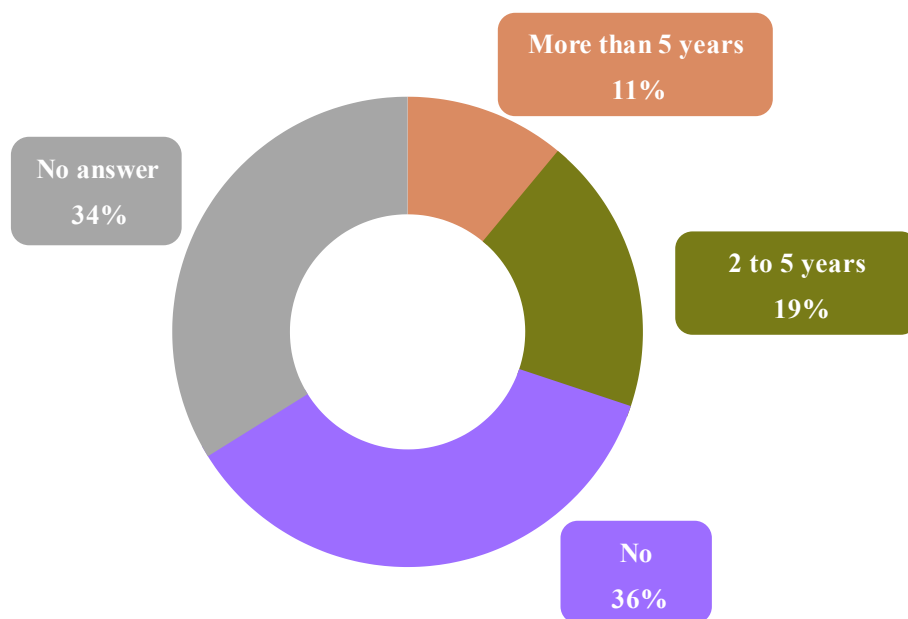
improve the status of freedom of expression in Morocco.

Based on the field work results, a considerable proportion of participants, representing 66%, responded "No," indicating that most citizens did not witness or experience censorship or infringement on their freedom of expression in the past five years. Approximately 18% of participants are unsure or do not know if they have been subjected to censorship or infringement on their freedom of expression, which means a lack of awareness about the issue or an inability to recognize instances of censorship. Meanwhile, 14% of participants answered "Yes," reflecting a notable segment of individuals who felt their freedom of expression compromised. Finally, 2% of participants chose not to answer the question.

Regarding the duration of the experienced censorship, 36% of the participants who responded affirmatively (Graph 14) stated they personally faced censorship or infringements on their freedom of expression during the last 12 months. Additionally, 19% faced such issues two

to five years ago, and 11% more than five years ago. Meanwhile, 34% of those who confirmed constraints on their freedom of expression chose not to answer the question.

Graph 14: Duration of Participants' Exposure to Surveillance and Free Speech Infringement



These findings reflect a diverse picture of the status of freedom of expression in Morocco, where the absence of censorship experiences for the majority of participants implies that a significant portion does not feel threatened in this regard. Nonetheless, the notable percentage that reported facing censorship or infringements calls for attention and investigation into the reasons for such varied experiences. The uncertainty expressed by a substantial number of participants could result from a lack of awareness about the standards of free expression or difficulty in recognizing instances that constitute restrictions on this right. Ultimately, enhancing awareness and improving the legal and institutional framework are crucial to ensure genuine and effective protection of freedom of expression in Morocco.

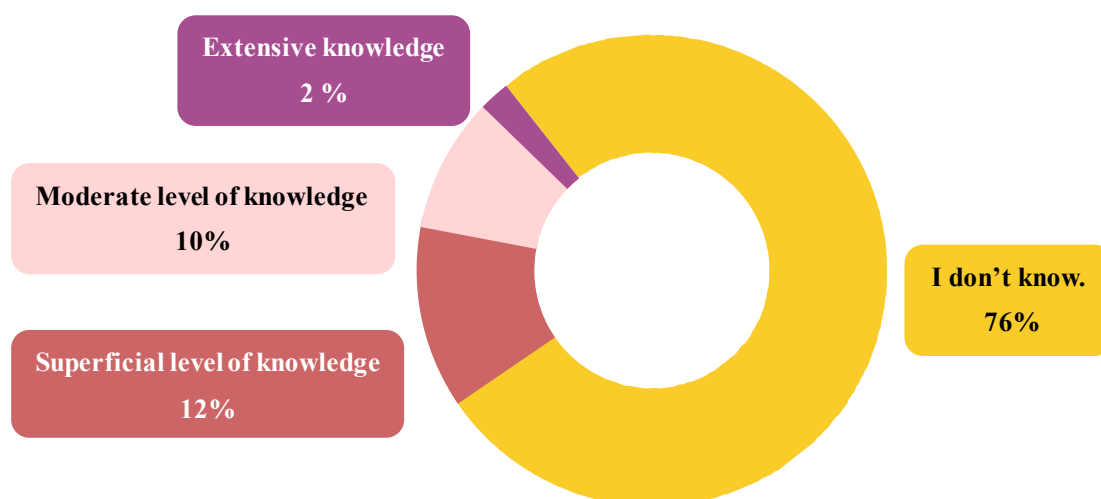
Legal Awareness and Trust in Institutions

Understanding the Laws Related to Press and Publishing

The legal frameworks governing press freedom and publishing in Morocco, particularly Law 88.13, serve as a vital foundation for understanding and regulating this fundamental right. However, the extent of awareness and understanding of these regulations varies among

citizens, which impacts the level of trust in the legal and judicial institutions. Citizens need to be knowledgeable about their legal rights and obligations, as well as the limitations imposed by law on freedom of expression and publishing, to ensure a responsible and informed exercise of these freedoms.

Graph 15: Participants' Knowledge of Law 88.13 Related to Press and Publishing in Morocco



Legal awareness fosters transparency, justice and empowers citizens to effectively defend their rights and freedoms. Therefore, questions about citizens' knowledge of Law 88.13 are particularly relevant, as the answers could offer a deeper understanding of the relationship between legal awareness and citizens' trust in Morocco's legal institutions and systems.

The majority of participants, representing 76%, reported not knowing Law 88.13, indicating a significant gap in awareness about Press and Publishing Law in Morocco. About 12% of participants have a superficial understanding of the Law, while 10% claim to have a moderate level of knowledge, and only 2% of participants possess extensive knowledge of the Law. (Graph 15).

Trust in Institutions: Confidence in the Judiciary's Ability to Protect Freedom of Opinion and Expression

In relation to trust in unelected institutions such as the judiciary, these entities enjoy higher trust than elected bodies. According to the 2023 Trust Index Study, citizens' trust in the

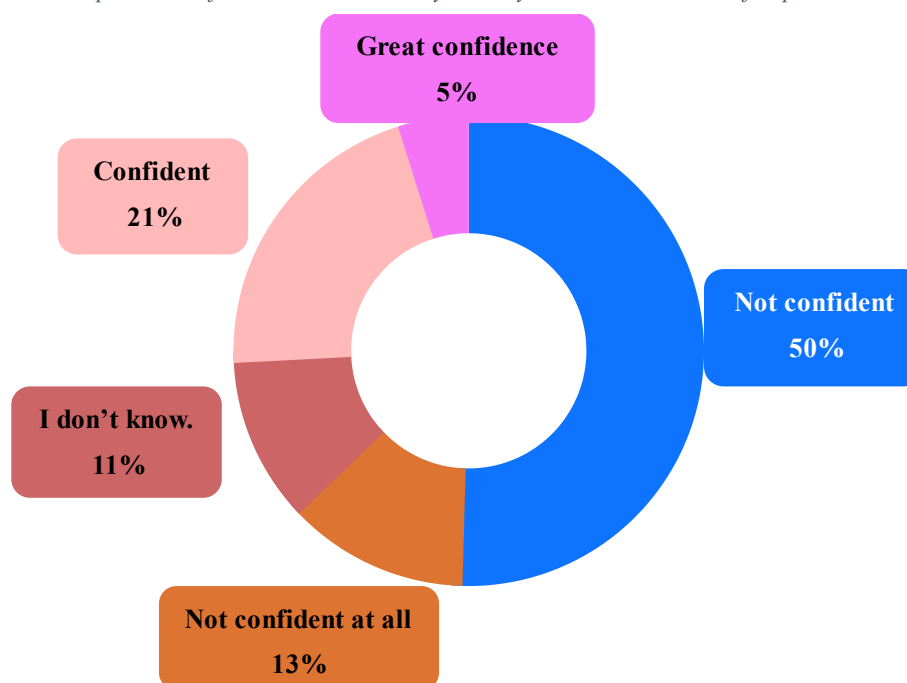
judiciary is relatively high compared to other institutions, with 72% overall trust, 37% trust completely and 35% trust to some extent.⁷⁶

Regarding Moroccan citizens' perspective on the judiciary in relation to protecting freedom of expression, there is a noticeable contradiction. On the one hand, general confidence in the judiciary is high, with 72% of citizens expressing varying degrees of trust.

On the other hand, when it comes to confidence in the judiciary's ability to protect and enhance freedom of expression, there is a clear divergence of opinions. About half of the participants, 50%, express a lack of trust in the judiciary in this area, while only 21% trust in its ability to protect freedom of expression, and a mere 5% express great confidence in this regard. Meanwhile, 31% of participants have no trust at all in the judiciary on this matter, and 11% are unsure whether they trust it or not (Graph 16).

This contradiction could result from several factors, including a lack of legal awareness, possibly a lack of transparency in the judiciary's work, or even previous personal experiences. Additionally, their opinion might be impacted from the general perception of the judiciary's lack of independence or its influence by the executive power.

Graph 16: Confidence in the Judiciary's Ability to Protect Freedom of Expression



⁷⁶ [The Trust in Institutions Index IV 2023: Is Political Trust in Morocco Declining?](#) - The Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis (MIPA), P 19.

Media Freedom and the Right to Criticism

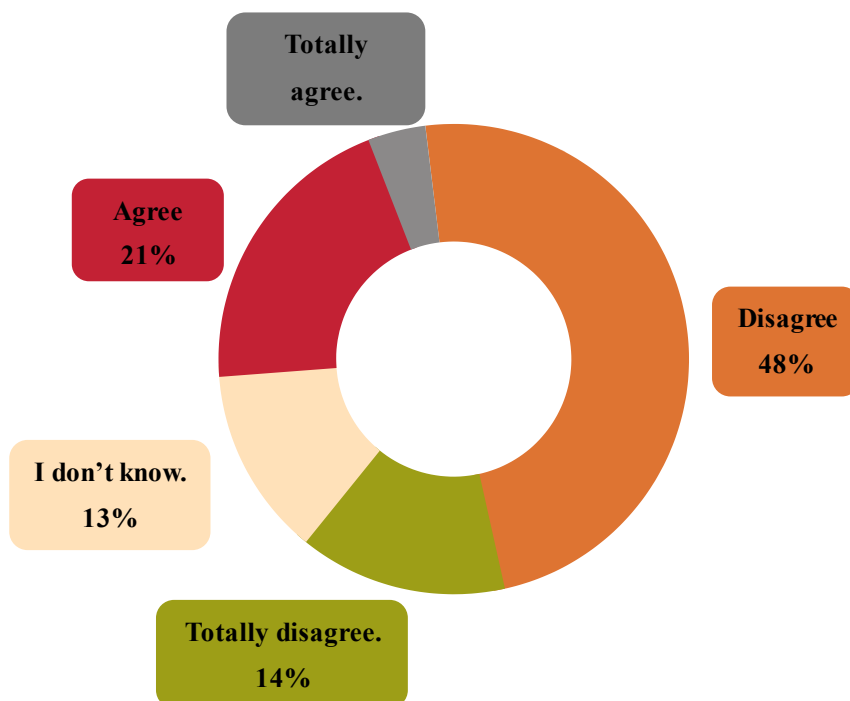
Media Freedom and Political Expression

Media freedom and the right to criticism are essential topics in public debate and in assessing the extent of a state's commitment to democratic principles and human rights protection. In the case of Morocco, there is an ongoing debate regarding the extent of media freedom in addressing sensitive political and social issues.

In theory, freedom of expression is recognized as a fundamental right that should be protected and promoted, which includes the freedom of media and press. However, there may be challenges and obstacles that prevent the full realization of this freedom. Intervention by authorities, whether through direct censorship or other kind of pressure, can restrict media freedom and limit its ability to provide criticism and highlight critical issues.

Through the research results, (Graph 17) it can be concluded that there is a significant divergence of opinions regarding the degree of media freedom in Morocco, especially in relation to covering sensitive political and social issues. A substantial proportion of respondents, 48%, disagreed with the notion that the media operates entirely free from governmental intervention, indicating concerns and doubts about the independence of the media and its ability to operate freely. On the other hand, a considerable proportion of participants, 21%, believe that the media enjoys a degree of freedom. The large number of participants who do not know whether they agree or disagree highlights the need for more awareness and education on this subject. Achieving a balance between media freedom and social responsibility remains an important challenge that requires continuous efforts from all concerned stakeholders.

Graph 17: Freedom of Media to Express on Political and Sensitive Issues



The Right to Criticize the Government

It is evident from the surveys and interviews that the right to criticize the government in Morocco remains a complex and sensitive issue. Freedom of expression, especially in the context of the conducted interviews, remains limited and subject to many restrictions, whether legal or self-imposed. Moreover, public debate in the political arena seems to lack diversity and courage. Numerous respondents conveyed a sentiment of perpetual suspicion, feeling compelled to continually validate their innocence and the integrity of their intentions.

In the interviews conducted, the scope of freedom of expression aligns with the prevailing norms. In the realm of politics, it confronts societal taboos, especially when it infringes upon the three core values represented in the nation's motto, which leads to more rigorous limitations on speech. These limitations manifest either as explicit legal regulations or as self-imposed restrictions that individuals apply to themselves, influenced by their social affiliations and roles within institutional hierarchies: *"The current state is not one of freedom of expression but rather a prevalence of a single viewpoint while marginalizing alternative perspectives. This is evident as the political public discourse has dwindled to nothing. Furthermore, initiating an association always labels one as a suspect. Regardless of whether you engage in critique, you're under suspicion. You are*

*obliged to constantly validate your innocence and the integrity of your intentions in all your endeavors."*⁷⁷

The discussion also highlights the challenges individuals may encounter when they try to freely express their opinions or criticize certain policies or decisions. It sheds light on a reality where open expression might result in adverse professional consequences, highlighting the complexities involved in free communication. Consequently, individuals may find themselves navigating through a delicate balance, choosing their words with care to ensure their true intent is moderated. As one participant revealed:⁷⁸

"You are unable to express yourself freely in your professional life because you're uncertain about who you might encounter and the possible consequences. Expressing your thoughts freely or critiquing a specific policy or decision could backfire. Therefore, you are constrained in your expression. If you choose to express an opinion, you must do so diplomatically or vaguely to avoid potential repercussions."

The quantitative data collected (Graph 18) shows the extent to which citizens accept the freedom to criticize the government. Based on the participants' responses to the survey, it appears that 8% of the respondents strongly agree with the right to criticize the government, while 30% agree with it. On the other hand, 36% of respondents do not agree with this, and 14% do not agree with it at all.

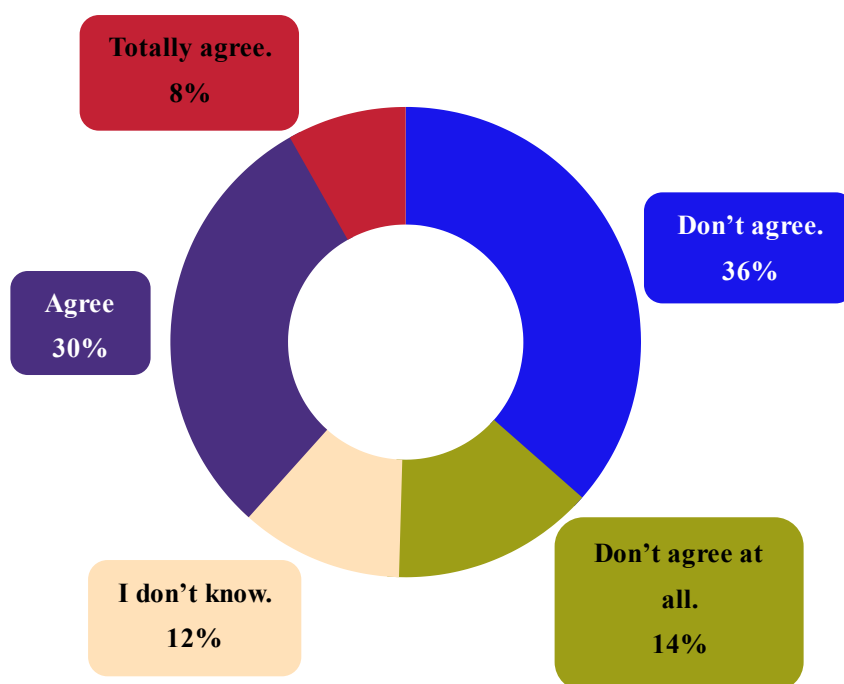
The data collected illustrates a split in public sentiment on the delicate matter of free expression. Some individuals assert their right to scrutinize and assess government actions, while others display hesitance or disapproval towards this liberty.

There is a need to enhance the discourse on freedom of expression and government criticism in Morocco, with an emphasis on addressing the population's apprehensions and the difficulties they have highlighted. Fostering a culture that embraces dialogue and values diverse viewpoints is essential for reinforcing democratic principles and the right to free speech within the community.

⁷⁷ Interview with Kh., Casablanca – October 2023.

⁷⁸ Interview with Kh., Fès – October 2023.

Graph 18: Opinions About the Right to Criticize the Government



Freedom of Expression: Restriction and Relativity

The notion of 'relative freedom' transcends mere legal frameworks, a sentiment echoed in the responses of numerous participants. As both a concept and a practice, freedom permeates the public domain, influencing individuals' interactions, whether directly or symbolically. The discourse that regulates freedoms uses diverse registers, with potential influences ranging from religious culture to social customs and traditions, as well as evolving consensuses grounded in ethical and moral values. One participant illustrated this point by saying, *"When I drive my car, I am free, but I'm not the only one driving. There are many other free disciplined drivers. They are free because nobody forces them to go with a certain speed or from a specific route, but there are traffic signs that you must read and comply with to allow others to have their share of freedom."*⁷⁹ He added, *"Our culture and traditions have set boundaries, and even though there is no legal text that stipulates that, culture and traditions do prescribe and enforce it."*⁸⁰ This can recur in many

⁷⁹ Interview with A, Kh., Casablanca – October 2023.

⁸⁰ Interview with L., Casablanca – October 2023.

spaces where freedoms are rearranged according to a negotiated system between individuals in general or between the individual and the community.

When delving into the direct political engagement in civil spaces closely linked to political matters, like human rights organizations and the business sector, the environment becomes internally more receptive to free expression. A participant, reflecting on his eleven-year tenure within an association, shares: *"What I express in symposiums is presented with extreme clarity; I express myself freely, releasing all that I have stored up, and even in the presence of authorities. It's a way to involve them. Had our speech been considered provocative, they would not have continued to participate in these meetings over years."*⁸¹ This suggests that there's room and a need for discourse in public arenas to adapt to the context and purpose it serves. This adaptation takes place within a framework that requires respect for discourse etiquette and adherence to practice norms, like self-imposed limits on freedom outside of private spheres. This self-regulation supports the notion of a 'free' practice that is mindful and deliberate, where speech is moderated by a sense of responsibility and reason. The participant adds: *"I do not speak impulsively, without responsibility or in an unrefined manner; this is not the essence of free expression. Real freedom of expression lies on the ideas you bring forth, and to generate those ideas, you must delve deep, search, and originate ideas and actions, projects that benefit the group you represent."*⁸² The sentence "freedom and late regret" summarizes some people's illusion of the meaning of freedom of expression and its practices, where severe honesty without tact can be converted to rudeness, according to the statements of some respondents. According to some participants, the individual's moral conscience, anchored in ethical values, serves as a guide to virtuous and noble speech and conduct. It embodies a sense of restraint and adherence to principles in our interactions. While it helps rationalize behavior within the community, it also reflects the internalization of external limits, transforming ethical prohibitions into a set of values ingrained through social background.

⁸¹ Interview with A., Casablanca – October 2023.

⁸² Interview with Kh., Casablanca – October 2023.

One participant stated: ⁸³

“You can't openly criticize issues you disagree with. Our background in a society founded on fear has led us to internalize restraint, setting self-imposed barriers without the need for external enforcement. We limit ourselves, refraining from expressing our true opinions. This culture of fear deep-seated from childhood creates an underlying fear, inhibiting even the desire to speak out.”

Even as individuals become aware of the nature and classification of compulsions that hinder free expression, such constraints are deeply tied to the individual's own rational and moral self-commitments, distinguishing them from external pressures that may arise from others, legal systems, customs, etc. *“When it comes to obstacles, some are reflective and facilitate self-regulation, while others are complete blockades. We are fortunate that the reflective ones are where our conscience lies, where principles and values hold power, and where honorable human behavior prevents actions, one might later regret, such as greed or the unscrupulous chase for achievement. These matters call for self-reflection, diligence, and sensibility. However, there are instances when this becomes a barrier, particularly when laws limit the human quest for improvement, for altruism, often impeded by human-enacted, non-divine ordinances or unjust laws.”* *“Administrative tasks cannot be executed without recourse to legal references; we operate within the legal framework. For instance, if you apply for a leave, the discretion to approve it lies with me,”* even though it is your right. *Due to the recent earthquake, a vigilance committee was established, necessitating work on the weekend in the face of an overriding emergency. Therefore, freedom in administrative roles is exercised within the limitations of legal mandates.”* one participant noted. *“From what we have observed, individuals who voice their opinions or assess others based on their power and influence often end up incarcerated,”* report international organizations. *Despite this, they continue to be detained for long durations, sometimes for a decade or even 15 years. This leads to the realization that 'if I stand alone without support, I'm destined for jail.' Such a situation fosters a sense of self-interest. The deep-seated fear transforms a person into a pragmatist focused only on their own interests, thereby hindering their ability to express their opinions freely and openly.”*⁸⁴

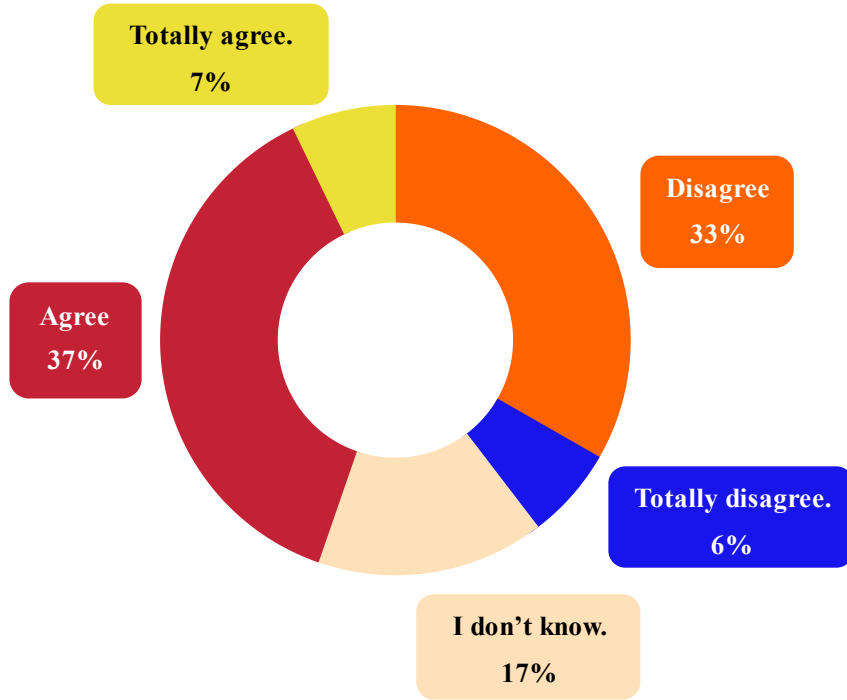
The research's quantitative data offers a complex view of the state of free speech in Morocco. When asked if there are circumstances that could justify limiting free speech, 7% of respondents (Graph 19) strongly agreed, while 37% agreed. On the other side, 33% disagreed and a notable 6.3% were strongly opposed. With 17% unsure, the findings reveal a delicate balance between proponents of necessary restrictions and advocates for free speech. This

⁸³ Interview with Kh., Casablanca – October 2023.

⁸⁴ Interview with A., Casablanca – October 2023.

highlights an urgent call for in-depth discussions to define free speech boundaries and identify the particular instances where limitations may be appropriate.

Graph 19: Options About Restriction of Freedom of Expression



Conclusion

Freedom of expression is undeniably a pivotal concern for the majority of Moroccans, who consider it to be a core human right. This support manifests a collective desire to voice opinions and engage actively in societal discourse.

The right to voice opinions is fundamental for participating in public dialogue and deliberating openly on matters of social and political relevance. The evident support confirms that the population is conscious of freedom of expression's role in disseminating ideas, information, and shaping policymaking.

Recognizing freedom of expression as an inherent right underscore the imperative to strengthen and safeguard this freedom within the societal fabric. It also signals a robust intent among citizens to participate in public affairs and boost societal and political development by articulating their thoughts and positions, hence endorsing the sentiment that freedom of expression is instrumental in societal advancement and national welfare. Nonetheless, the findings indicate a variety of perspectives and experiences concerning freedom of expression. While a segment faces uncertainty over exercising this liberty unrestrictedly, others exhibit confidence in voicing their views without restraint.

The research further discerns divergent thoughts towards government criticism. A faction avoids such political discourse, opting for silence, whereas others are straightforward in voicing their critiques.

As for legal knowledge, the research underscores a pronounced deficit in awareness about Morocco's press and publishing laws, pointing to a need for amplified awareness raising and advocacy. Participant responses shed light on the discord between the protective legislative rhetoric and the tangible practice, evoking questions about the legislative measures, especially constitutional provisions, and the actual practice of these laws.

To conclude, safeguarding freedom of expression presents a challenge necessitating sustained commitment from all concerned stakeholders, including governmental bodies, civil society, and judicial institutions. This endeavor is increasingly pertinent in the digital era, with a growing dependency on social media as a channel for information and news.

Second Axis: The Right to Access Information: Evaluating the effectiveness of the right to access information in Morocco

Overview of The Research Findings

- Many Moroccan citizens place significant emphasis on the right to access information, indicating a shared and widespread interest in this right.
- Participants' evaluations regarding the assurance of the right to access information in Morocco show variations, highlighting the existence of challenges and barriers that could hinder full access to information.
- There is a noticeable gap in knowledge and awareness about the legal framework that governs the right to access information in Morocco. This reveals an essential need for increased public education about the content and importance of this legislation.
- An analysis of individual experiences with public institutions in Morocco shows differences in their tendency to request information and services. Most survey respondents have not previously sought information from public entities, while a minority have done so successfully.
- Moroccan citizens demonstrate varied preferences for sources of information, with television and the internet being the predominant media for obtaining information.
- A moderate level of trust is placed in television broadcasts and print newspapers by Moroccan citizens, with most indicating an average level of confidence in these outlets. Nevertheless, a small segment expresses skepticism about the reliability of the information provided through these channels.
- Social media platforms are widely utilized in Morocco as sources of information and news, reflecting a diversity of platform preferences based on the needs and trust of citizens.
- There is a relatively high degree of trust in official government communications in Morocco. However, a minority of participants continue to express doubt and mistrust regarding the veracity of this information.

Introduction

The right to access information stands as a cornerstone of transparency and democratic participation in society. It serves as a barometer for the health of democracy and openness in any nation. The scrutiny directed towards evaluating the effectiveness of the right to access information in Morocco assumes paramount significance.

This research seeks to thoroughly examine the nature and actual application of this right within the Moroccan context. We set out to assess citizens' attitudes towards this right and expose its importance. Additionally, we explore the barriers that might impede access to information. Our analysis includes a review of the public's understanding of the legal framework underpinning this right and their engagement with public institutions in this context.

By presenting the findings of this research, we aim to shed light on the level of awareness about the right to access information and its significance in society. We will discuss the obstacles that may hinder the fulfillment of this essential right. Moreover, we will reveal the variety in citizens' preferences for obtaining information from public entities and their differing perceptions of various information sources.

Given the prevalent interaction with traditional and social media platforms, evaluating this right and the citizens' use of multiple sources of information highlights significant shifts in the media landscape. We also explore how these elements affect the perception and employment of the right to access information in Morocco.

In conclusion, we will offer a detailed summary of the research's main conclusions, assessing the effectiveness of the right to access information in Morocco.

Importance and Assurance of The Right to Access Information

In today's world, the right to access information is recognized as a fundamental right for every individual. This right extends beyond simply acquiring data or statistics; it encompasses active involvement in the decision-making process and the assessment of government actions.

A participant in the qualitative interviews articulated this point of view, stating, *"As contributors to the state through taxes, we are entitled to be apprised of the operations of public administration and governmental policy, as well as the management of public affairs. My right to access this information is paramount, especially considering my financial contributions to the national budget. It is my prerogative to understand how these contributions are utilized. At the heart of citizenship is the principle of engagement, which includes the right to be informed about how public matters are managed. The obligation to provide this information lies with the designated authorities."*⁸⁵

Another citation from the research comes from a researcher who participated in the interviews. He stressed the value of information in scientific inquiry, pointing out how it significantly helps researchers in gaining a deeper understanding of various phenomena and issues. He placed special emphasis on the importance of statistical data, which can offer insightful revelations about societal behaviors. This statement underscores the vital role that access to information plays in equipping individuals with the resources necessary to empower

"As a researcher, I have the capability to seek out specific statistics, which are of great importance in research. For example, statistics concerning women's expenditure patterns in society, or the proportion of women employed, are crucial. Such details might not be accessible through individual investigation but can be acquired from sources like the High Commission for Planning or other institutions. This highlights the critical role of information — it not only enables extensive use but also opens a variety of possibilities for individuals."

them and to advance research.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, alongside these freedoms and rights comes the obligation to protect security and privacy, ensuring that information is utilized responsibly and in accordance with established legal and regulatory frameworks. As highlighted by an interviewee, *"Institutional information is generally accessible; however, there is a category of confidential information that must*

⁸⁵ Interview with Kh., Casablanca – October 2023

⁸⁶ Interview with A., Casablanca – October 2023.

*remain exclusive, managed by particular entities like security agencies, which is confidential and only available to personnel within that field.*⁸⁷

The right to access information, while fundamental and valuable, is not an unrestricted liberty. It is bound by relative conditions and the necessity for legal oversight. Participants emphasize the need to comply with laws that protect individual privacy, dignity, and personal data. It is advocated that any governmental initiatives, including the adoption of Open Government Partnership (OGP) principles, should adhere to conditions ensuring the right to information access for all, while preventing misuse that could harm individuals, institutions, and public safety. *“This right should be viewed as a collective entitlement rather than an exclusive or discriminatory advantage. Effective exercise of this right is contingent on the presence of laws that penalize the impediment of information access.”*⁸⁸

The quantitative aspect of the research reveals Moroccan citizens' significant estimation to the right to access information. Approximately 83% of respondents rate this right as “important” or “very important,” as illustrated in Graph 20, indicating an enhanced consciousness of the need for transparency and accountability.

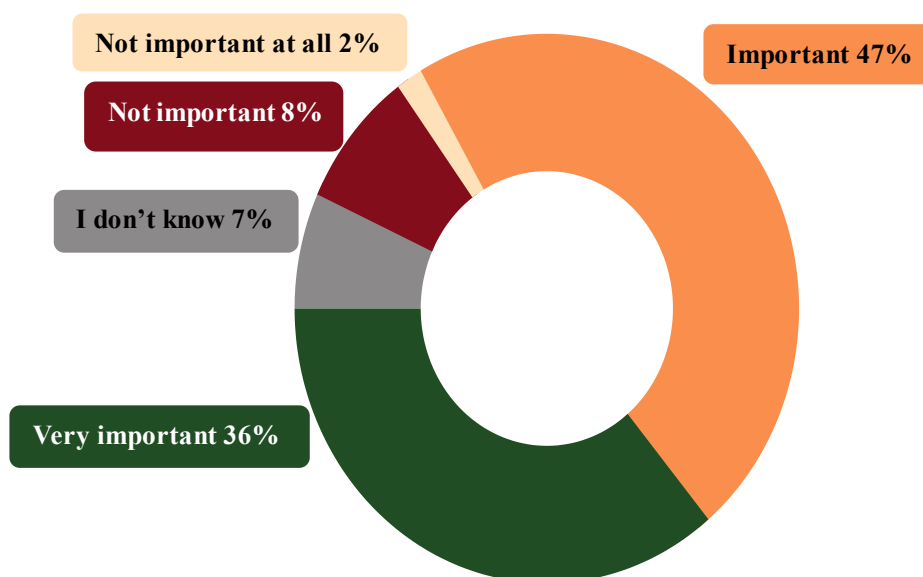
In contrast, 8% of participants consider this right to be of little significance, potentially signaling a deficiency in understanding or an awareness gap regarding how access to information can positively affect their daily lives and civic engagement. Moreover, 7% of respondents confess their unfamiliarity with this right, accentuating the need to enhance awareness and education about its importance.

2% deem the right to access information as “not important at all.” It represents a faction that perceives no benefit from this right, possibly due to a distrust in public institutions or a belief that the information available does not impact their lives directly.

In conclusion, there is broad recognition of the right to access information's importance in Morocco. However, this acknowledgment also underlines the need for continued efforts to strengthen this awareness and guarantee that all citizens are equipped to fully realize this essential right.

⁸⁷ Interview with A., Casablanca – October 2023

⁸⁸ Interview with H., Casablanca – October 2023

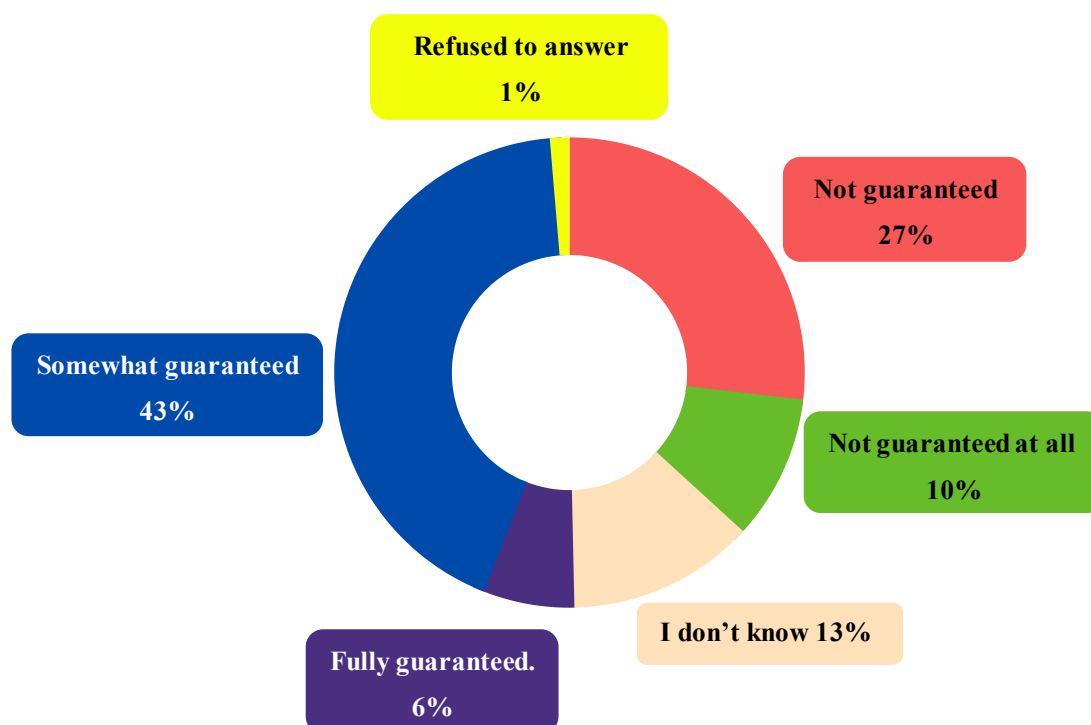
Graph 20: The Importance of the Right to Access Information

Ensuring The Right to Access Information in Morocco

To assess the current status of this right in Morocco, respondents were asked about their perception of the guarantee of the right to access information in Morocco, as presented in Graph 21. The findings reveal that approximately 43% of participants feel this right is only partially upheld in Morocco, indicating the existence of certain barriers that may impede complete access to information. Around 27% of the respondents are of the view that this right is not at all guarantee, denoting a level of dissatisfaction and a recognition of significant impediments that require attention.

10% of those surveyed hold a more critical perspective, believing that the right to access information is entirely unfulfilled in Morocco. Furthermore, 13% of participants feel they lack enough information to make an informed judgment on this issue. Lastly, 1% of respondents chose not to respond to the question.

Graph 21: Ensuring the Right to Access Information in Morocco



The Law and the Right to Access Information

The right to access information is acknowledged as a fundamental entitlement and a crucial resource, governed by principles of proportionality and legal oversight. Participants emphasize the importance of adhering to legal provisions that protect personal data, dignity, and the private lives of citizens. Regarding government initiatives, such as those involving Open Government Partnership (OGP) principles, there is a strong call for settings that secure everyone's right to information while preventing misuse that could harm individuals, institutions, and public safety. It is articulated that *"This right should be viewed as a collective entitlement rather than an exclusive or discriminatory advantage. Effective exercise of this right is contingent on the presence of laws that penalize the impediment of information access."*⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Interview with H., Casablanca – October 2023

The survey also illuminates the critical nature of transparency and accountability in information management. Requesting specific information should involve clear justification and intended purposes, ensuring that the use of such information does not conflict with others' rights or violate their freedoms, and that confidentiality and legal compliance are maintained.⁹⁰

“There is a request form that the concerned party must submit to receive an information. The information in this form must clarify who wants the information, why, and how it will be used. It should not be used against the interest of others, nor should it infringe upon the freedom of others. The information should be personally relevant to the requester and there should not be any legal dispute involved in the case. The information should always be used within certain legal constraints.”

In parallel, the research reveals a significant lack of awareness regarding Morocco's Law 31.13 on the right to access information (Graph 22). The vast majority of participants, specifically 69%, are completely unaware of the law, which may indicate an urgent need to increase awareness of the law's content and its importance among citizens.

Conversely, about 21% of participants have a basic awareness, recognizing the law's existence but lacking detailed understanding. A smaller group, 8%, shows slightly more recognition, although limited.

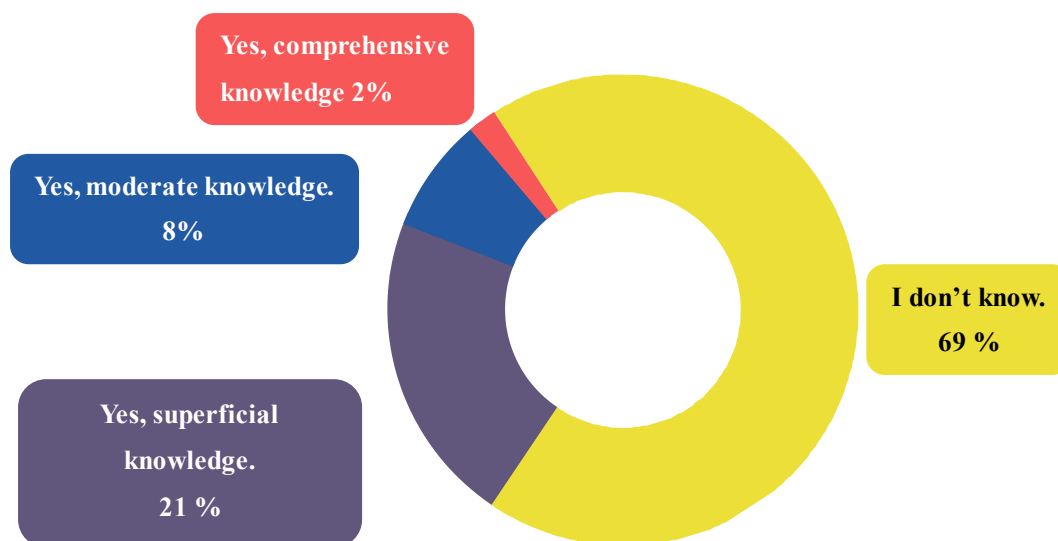
A slight 2% of respondents have an extensive understanding of Law 31.13, likely linked to their professional roles or personal engagement in legal or civic matters related to this legislation.

The expertise in legal texts, their critical analysis, and the commitment to their requirements are rare competencies. The unfamiliarity with legal nuances is a recurring challenge, even among those with some knowledge, which often results in confusion rather than clarity. Typically, their understanding is confined to generic program titles and partnership experiences, despite state efforts to enhance access to information and support the right to free expression. This lack of comprehensive legal understanding continues to affect the ethical and practical aspects of how citizens interact with each other and with institutional bodies. *“I believe that freedom of expression goes beyond constitutional provisions; it is, fundamentally, about education and behavior. Inculcating the values of free expression in the youth is paramount. We live within a state, hence state institutions are tasked with managing public affairs, prompting continual interactions between individuals and these institutions. Individuals need access to information,*

⁹⁰ Interview with Y., Casablanca – October 2023

whether they are academics, civil society activists pursuing specific initiatives or broader goals, or simply citizens who require information for practical purposes or to facilitate their everyday lives.”

Graph 22: Familiarity with Law 31.13: Access to Information Rights in Morocco

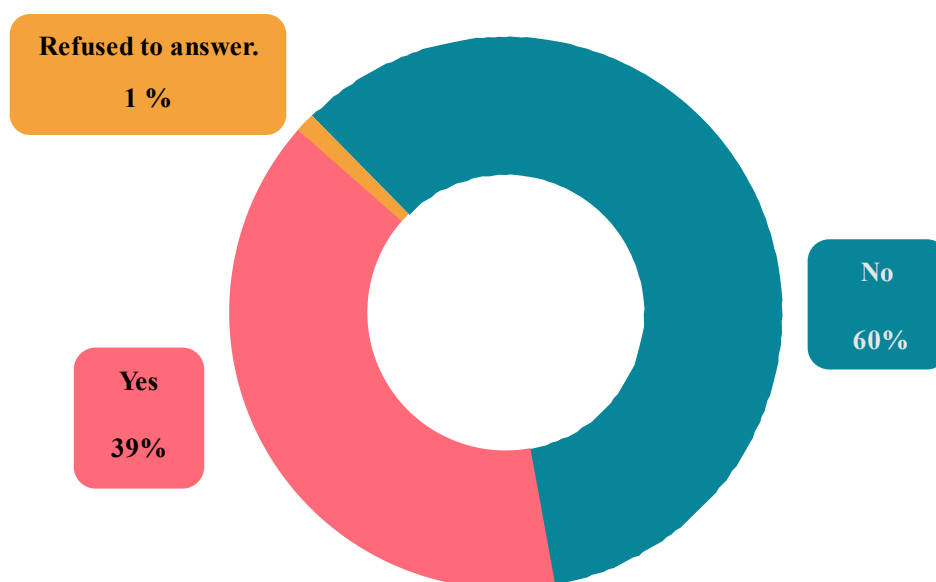


Personal Experience in Obtaining Information from Public Institutions

The survey question, "Have you previously requested information from public institutions in Morocco?" serves as a crucial element of the research. Its purpose is to evaluate individuals' direct experiences with Moroccan public institutions. This question is essential for assessing how actively people seek information and services from these organizations and how satisfied they are with the outcomes. Focusing on this aspect allows for a deeper understanding of how citizens interact with public entities and how effectively these entities meet citizens' needs and expectations.

As described in Graph 23, the survey found that a significant majority, 60%, of respondents have not pursued information from public institutions in Morocco. This suggests a notable gap between the population and public institutions regarding information acquisition. On the other hand, 39% of participants have interacted with public entities to acquire information, indicating that there is a portion of the population that takes initiative in information-seeking from public sources. A small fraction, accounting for 1% of respondents, declined to answer this question.

Graph 23: Information Requests from Public Institutions



Among those citizens who confirmed their efforts to seek information and were requested to specify the sources (Graph 24), ministries were identified as the primary point of contact, with 31% of the inquiries. This statistic illustrates the considerable confidence that citizens have in obtaining information from these pivotal government bodies, likely due to the ministries' essential functions in policy development and national initiative execution.

Public institutions were also frequently approached. They took the second position by representing 28% of the inquiries. This suggests a significant interest in information that directly affects the day-to-day services upon which citizens depend.

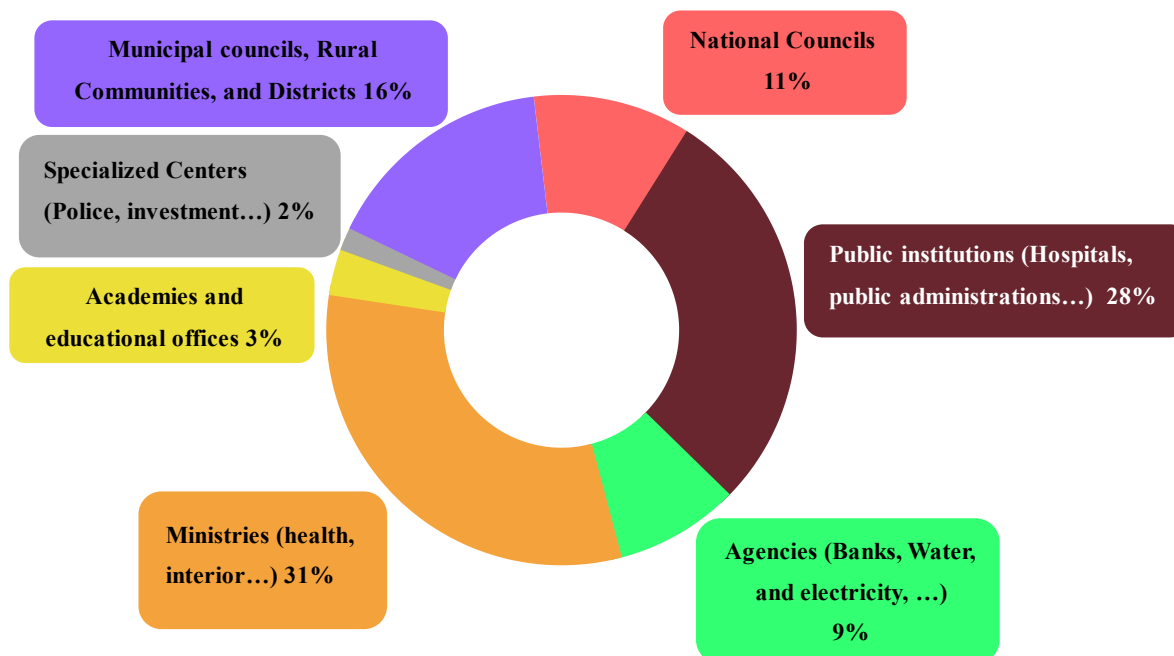
Local authorities, including municipalities, rural communities, and districts, accounted for 16% of the requests. This is indicative of the importance placed on local-level information access and the citizens' desire to actively participate in the governance and administrative processes of their regions. National councils received attention from 11% of those surveyed, which reflects an active engagement with legislative entities and local assemblies.

Specialized agencies were consulted by 9% of respondents, highlighting a targeted need for information related to critical services.

Regional academies and education departments received a rate of 3%. This category shows that there is a relative interest in obtaining information from educational authorities, but it is still less compared to other entities.

Finally, specialized centers like police and investment agencies were sought by 2% of the participants, possibly reflecting a less frequent necessity to interact with these entities for information.

Graph 24: Entities Requested for Information Access



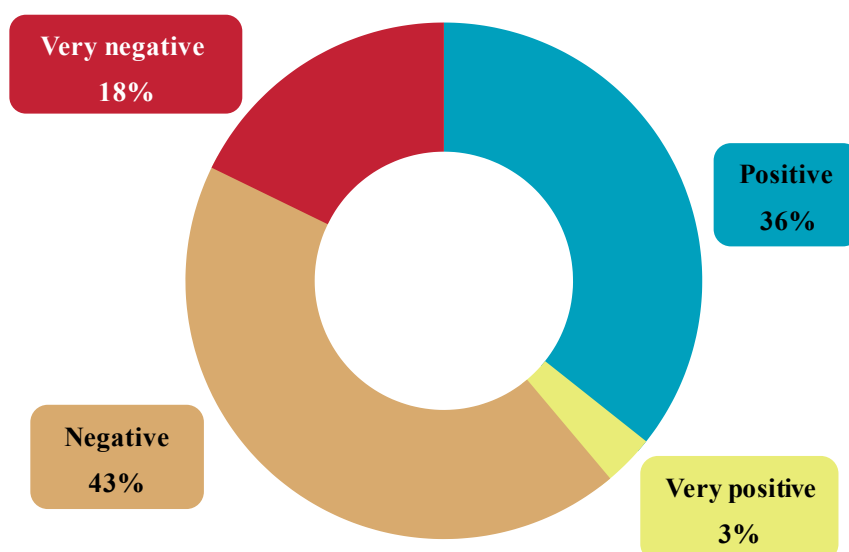
Citizen evaluations of their attempts to access information from government and public institutions (Graph 25) reveal a diverse range of experiences.

43% describe their experiences as negative, which could point to systemic challenges like procedural delays, a lack of transparency, or a failure to respond adequately by relevant authorities.

Conversely, 36% report positive interactions, suggesting that efforts to increase government transparency and enhance the accessibility of information are beginning to show progress in certain areas.

However, 18% rate their experiences as extremely negative, while only a small 3% perceive their experience as exceptionally positive. These figures highlight the critical need for further improvements in information services and the easing procedures for citizens.

Graph 25: Assessing the Right of Obtaining Information from Public Institutions



Sources of Obtaining Information and Citizens' Trust

The integrity of information sources and the level of confidence that citizens place in them are crucial, as these factors significantly influence individual perceptions and trust in the news they receive. Assessing how citizens judge the credibility of various outlets, including state media, social media platforms, and official government communications, is essential to understanding their impact on public opinion and the establishment of trust in information distribution. The research aims to explore this critical aspect of public engagement with different channels of information.

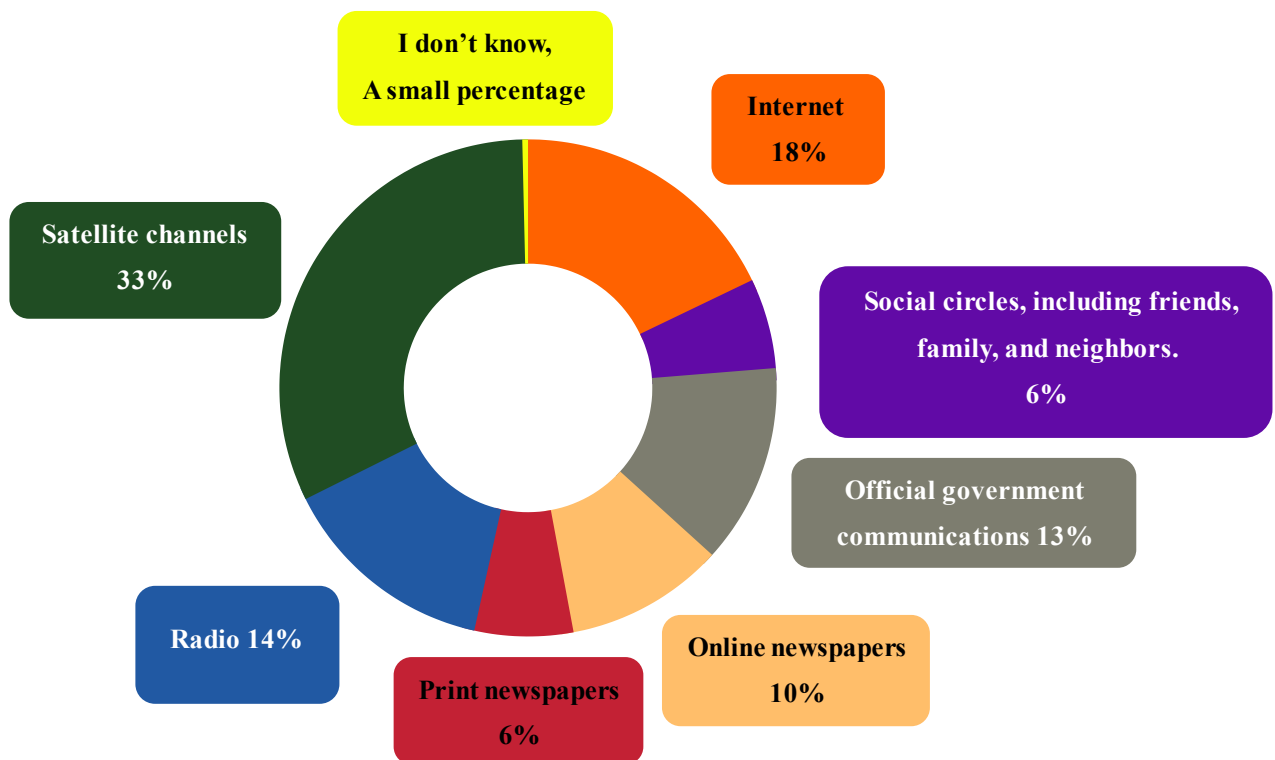
According to research findings, citizens exhibit a wide array of preferences when it comes to their trusted sources of information and news (Graph 26). Satellite channels hold the top spot for trustworthiness with 33% of respondents preferring to them, reinforcing television's continued prominence as a key news medium in Morocco.

The internet has gained significant ground as a preferred source, with 18% of citizens turning to digital platforms for their news, highlighting the growing influence of online media.

Radio and official government communications are also deemed reliable by 14% and 13% of the population, respectively, showing substantial trust in these traditional sources.

Print and online newspapers are considered less influential, trusted by 10% and 6% of citizens, respectively. Social circles, including friends, family, and neighbors, seem to be a secondary source of news, with only 6% of respondents placing their confidence in these networks. Lastly, a small percentage of participants remain undecided about which sources they consider most reliable.

Graph 26: Sources of Information



Some respondents pointed to alternative sources for acquiring information or news (Graph 27). Notably, Facebook stands out as it is trusted by 26% of participants, which underscores the influential role social media platforms play in news dissemination, particularly in an era of rapid technological progress and increased internet accessibility.

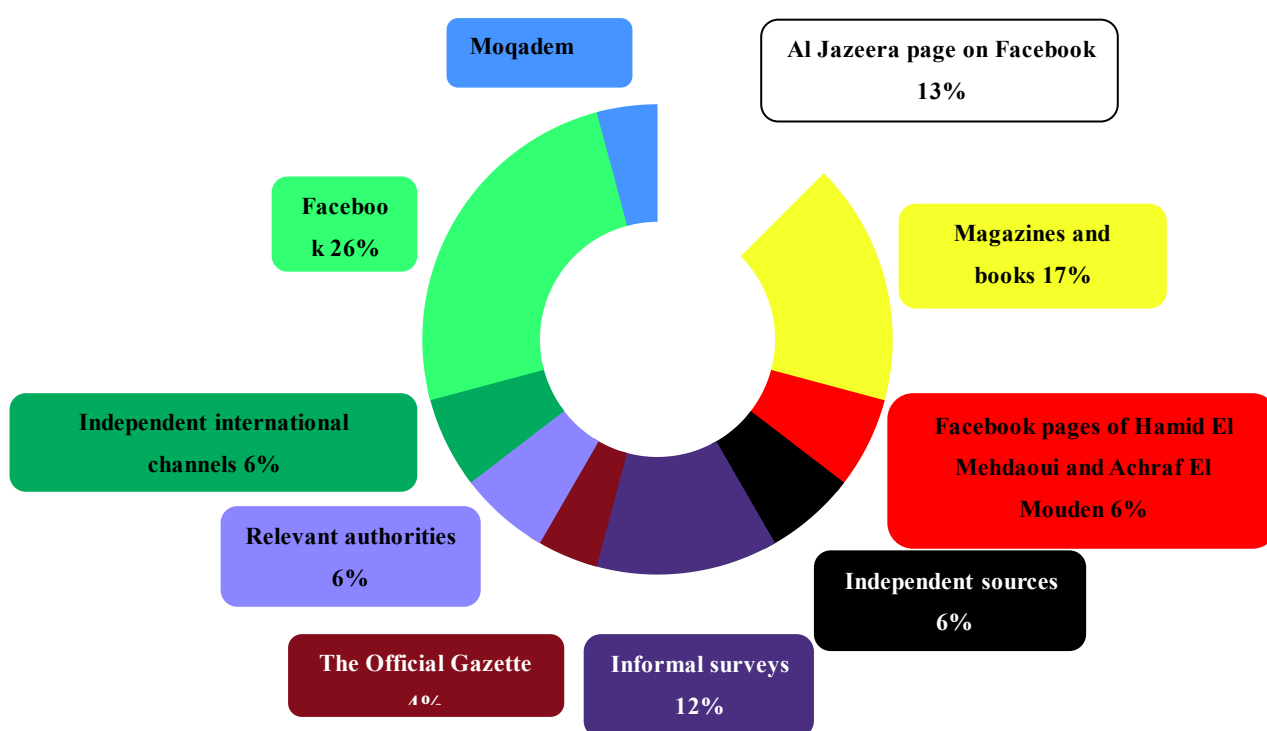
Magazines and books come in second, with 17% of individuals indicating reliance on these traditional print mediums for information.

Al Jazeera's Facebook page occupies the third position with 13%, indicating the trust some place in this news channel.

Following that, a group of sources each hold an equal percentage of 6%, including 'independent international channels', 'relevant authorities', 'neutral sources', 'the Facebook page of journalists Hamid El Mahdaoui and Achraf El Mouden'.

Finally, 'Moqadem' and the official government gazette each appear with 4%, reflecting the limited trust in these sources.

Graph 27: Alternative Sources to Access Information



Trust Levels in Different Media Outlets

Trust Level in Satellite Channels

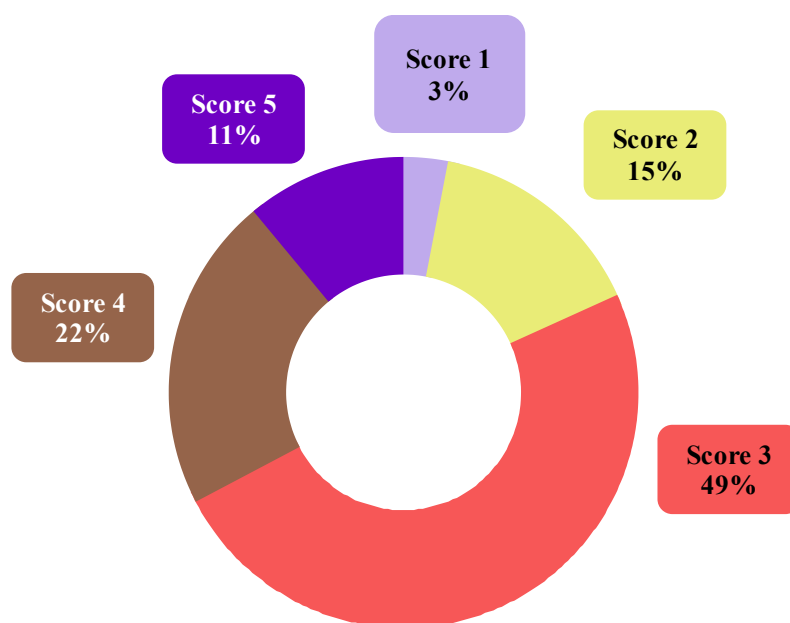
To thoroughly understand public perception of media outlets, the research asked participants to rate their trust in satellite channels on a scale from 1 (least trust) to 5 (most trust), as depicted in Graph 28. The majority of participants, 49%, granted a moderate trust rating of 3 out of 5 to satellite channels, reflecting an average confidence in these sources.

Furthermore, 22% of participants rated their trust at level 4, indicating a relatively high level of confidence, whereas 15% scored their trust at a lower level 2, suggesting some skepticism and reservations about the content provided by these channels. 11% of respondents assigned the maximum trust rating of 5 to satellite channels, implying full confidence in this medium for reliable information.

Conversely, 3% of the survey participants attributed the minimum trust rating of 1, demonstrating a pronounced distrust in the information disseminated by these channels.

The overall findings suggest that there is a moderate to high degree of trust in satellite channels among participants, although with a notable minority who has concerns and doubts regarding the veracity of the information broadcasted.

Graph 28: Trust Levels in Satellite Channels



Trust Levels in Print Newspapers

As illustrated in Graph 29, a majority of the participants, representing 38%, conferred upon print newspapers an intermediate trust rating of 3 out of 5, signifying an average level of confidence in this medium.

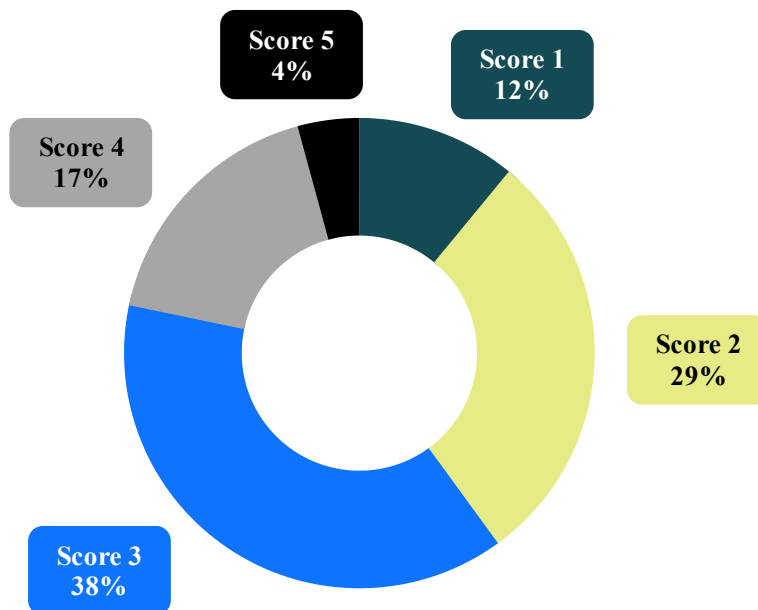
29% of respondents attributed a lower trust rating of 2 out of 5 to print newspapers, suggesting a level of distrust or skepticism regarding their content. 17% of the participants awarded a comparatively high trust rating of 4 out of 5, showing greater trust on print

newspapers for information. Notably, 21% of participants expressed a marked lack of trust by assigning the lowest score of 1 out of 5 to print newspapers.

Finally, 4% of respondents expressed complete trust in print newspapers, giving them the top trust score of 5 out of 5.

While the results indicate that a considerable proportion of individuals perceive themselves as moderately trusting in print newspapers, there is another proportion that feels concern and doubt about the accuracy of the information they publish. At the same time, it appears that a small percentage greatly trusts this type of media and communication.

Graph 29 Trust Levels in Print Newspapers



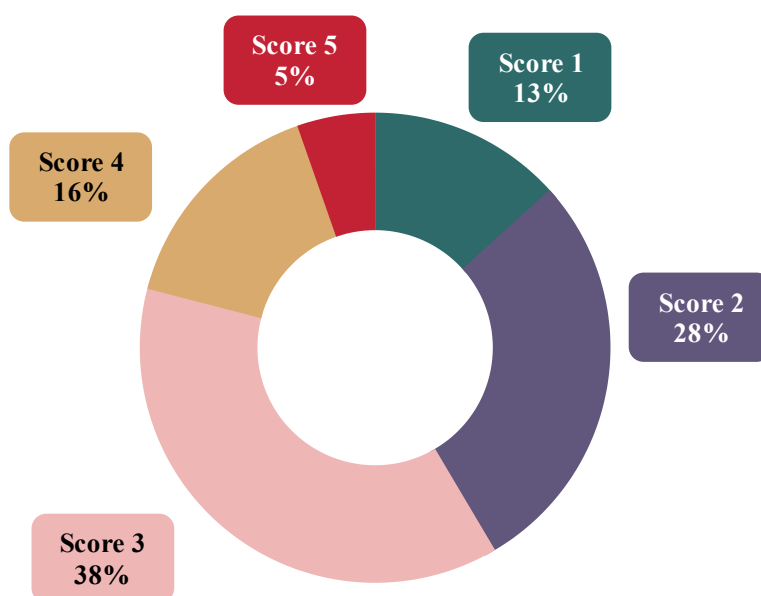
Trust Level in Online Newspapers

According to the survey results outlined in Graph 30, trust levels in online newspapers among Moroccans show notable variation. 38% of respondents attribute a medium trust rating of 3 out of 5 to online newspapers, reflecting a balanced level of trust in this digital medium. Conversely, 28% of individuals express more caution, granting a lower trust score of 2 out of 5, which signals a measure of distrust. Meanwhile, 16% of participants express a relatively high degree of confidence, rating their trust at 4 out of 5.

Additionally, 13% of those surveyed demonstrate significant skepticism, attributing the lowest trust score of 1 out of 5 to online newspapers. On the other end, a very small segment (5%) exhibit complete trust in the medium by awarding the highest trust score of 5 out of 5, indicating that only a minority fully trust the content of online newspapers.

These trust scores underline the hesitations users may have regarding the authenticity of content in online publications, emphasizing the importance of diligent verification and critical assessment of the information accessed through digital news platforms.

Graph 30: Trust Level in Online Newspapers



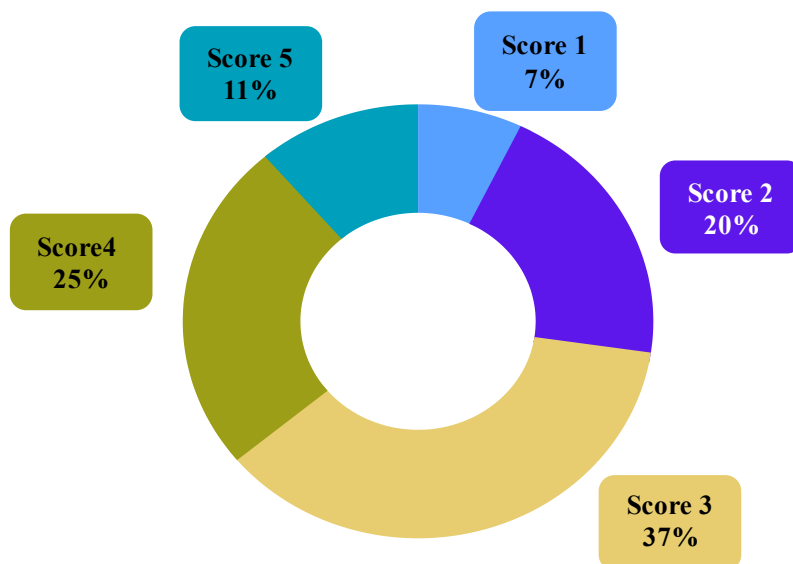
Trust Level in Radio Channels

The data presented in Graph 31 reveals that trust in Moroccan radio channels is mixed, although leaning towards the positive. 37% of respondents allocated a moderate trust rating of 3 out of 5 to radio channels, indicating an average level of trust in this broadcasting medium. On the other hand, 25% demonstrated a high level of confidence by giving a trust rating of 4 out of 5.

There is, however, a segment of the audience, 20%, that expressed reservations, providing a lower trust score of 2 out of 5, signaling some degree of skepticism. 11% felt fully assured by radio channels, awarding the maximum trust score of 5 out of 5. Conversely, only 7% of participants assigned the lowest trust score of 1 out of 5.

Overall, these results reflect a reasonably balanced perspective on Moroccan radio channels, with a substantial portion of individuals exhibiting a high degree of trust in this traditional medium.

Graph 31: Trust Levels on Radio Channels



Trust Level on the Internet

The study's results (Graph 32) reveal varied estimates of individuals' trust in the internet as a source of information. It showed that 44% of participants rated their trust on the internet at level 3, indicating a medium level of trust in this medium. Meanwhile, 20.5% of individuals rated their trust at level 2, which suggests some concern and mistrust in online content. Conversely, 19% of the participants gave the internet a level 4 rating, indicating a relatively high level of trust. On the other hand, 10% of participants gave the lowest trust rating of 1, while only 7% gave the highest trust rating of 5 to the internet as a source of information.

These varied responses indicate a general inclination towards moderate trust, possibly reflecting the understanding that Internet content can range in accuracy and reliability, and often requires additional verification and discernment.

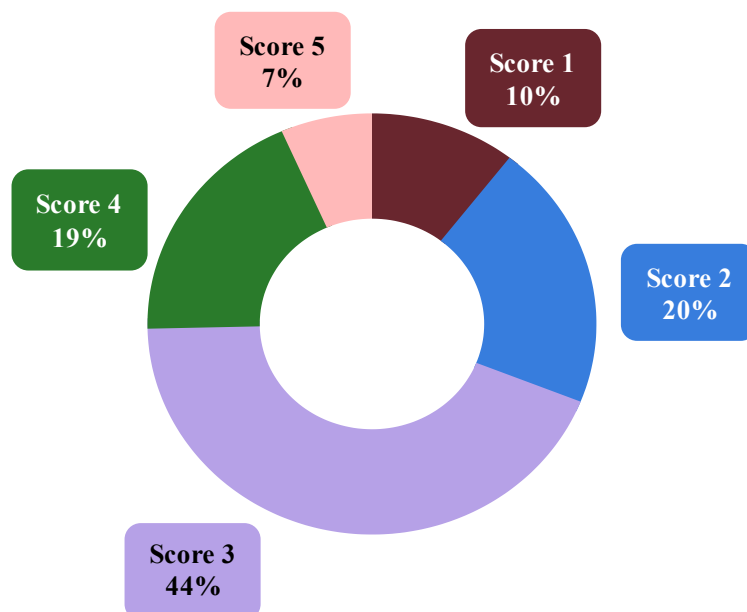
Interview outcomes highlight that the type of information searched profoundly influences both the pursuit and the feasibility of access. The Internet has facilitated an era of continuous and unrestricted communication, overcame traditional barriers of time, location, and functionality, and enabled access to a range of sources, particularly post-publication. Yet, this abundance of information invites challenges regarding credibility, the risk of misinformation, and the meticulousness and stipulations associated with the use of such information, often

necessitating thorough scrutiny. "Is all information available? I don't know. If you request an information like the population of Morocco minus those suffering from a certain disease, it might be easily accessible if this information is available at the hands of the concerned entities. One may wonder if such information exists already or requires the entities to conduct studies about it."⁹¹

As quoted from one participant ⁹² in the qualitative interviews:

"When I think of the right to access information, the initial notion is simply pressing a button on the Internet to get what I need or expecting that no information would be withheld. This was my first impression; it might be different, but that was my immediate reflection."

Graph 32: Trust Level on Internet



Trust Level in the Social Environment

The survey results indicate varying degrees of trust in the social environment in Morocco. A significant proportion of participants (36%) expressed a moderate level of trust, suggesting cautious optimism in the country's social environment. At the same time, 25.6% of the participants chose a level 2 out of 5, indicating some reservations but not a lack of trust. The fourth rank category, consisting of 16% of participants, reflects individuals with a higher level of trust in their social environment. Meanwhile, a smaller proportion, 13%, chose a level 1

⁹¹ Interview with A., Casablanca – October 2023

⁹² Interview with L., Casablanca – October 2023

out of 5, indicating some skepticism and lack of trust in the Moroccan social environment. Another category, rated the highest at 5 out of 5, was chosen by 9% of participants, indicating a strong belief and high trust in Morocco's social environment. These diverse responses reflect the complex fabric of trust within Moroccan society, representing a variety of viewpoints and feelings toward the country's social environment.

Preferred Methods for Obtaining Information or News

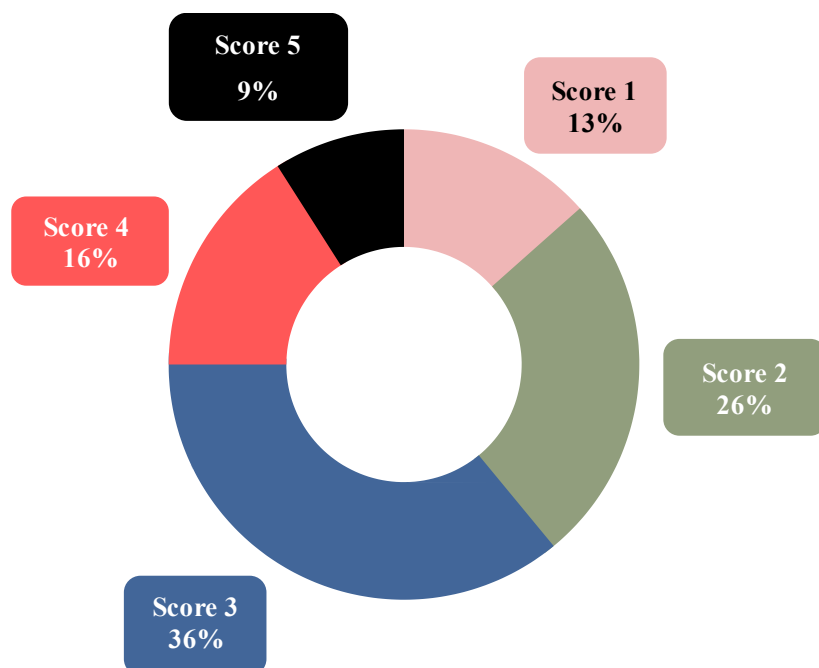
Satellite Channels

Among the satellite channels preferred for information or news acquisition (Graph 34), '2M', 'Al Oula', and 'Aljazeera' are the most frequented.

'2M' leads with 22%, indicating its position as a top choice among viewers. 'Al Oula' follows closely with 21%, highlighting its strong viewership. 'Aljazeera' also commands a significant audience with 21%, reinforcing its status as a robust news provider. 'Medi1TV' has secured 13%, pointing to a loyal viewership for this network.

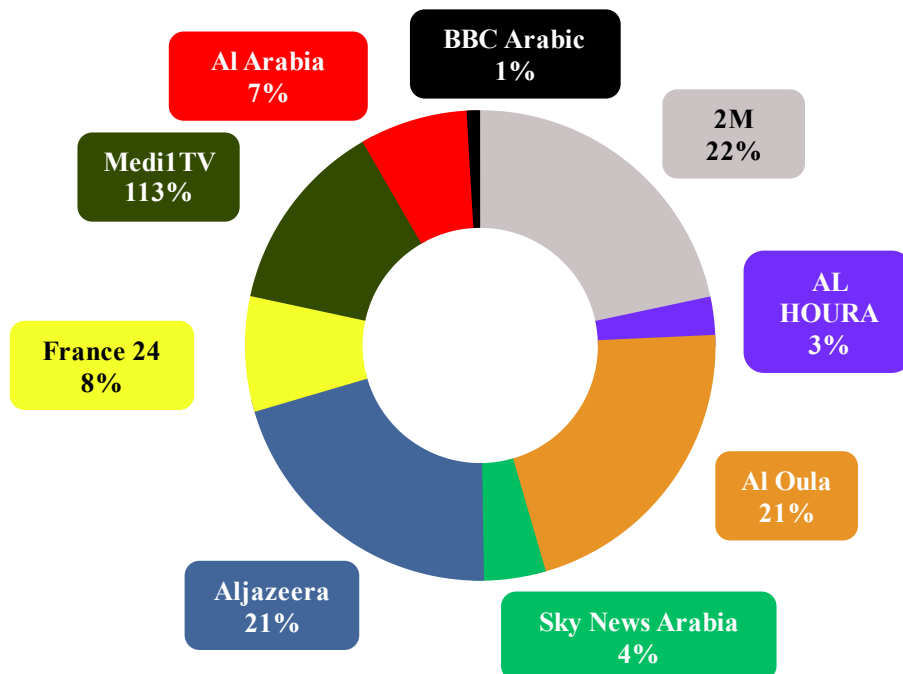
Regarding international channels, 'France 24' captures 8%, and 'Al Arabiya' draws 7,4%, while 'SKY News Arabia' and 'AL HOURA' trail with 4% and 3%, respectively. 'BBC Arabic' garners the least preference, at 1%.

Graph 33: Trust Level in the Social Environment



These figures illustrate the varied preferences of viewers in selecting news channels, highlighting the substantial popularity of both local and international outlets.

Graph 34: Satellite Channels as a Means of Obtaining Information (1)



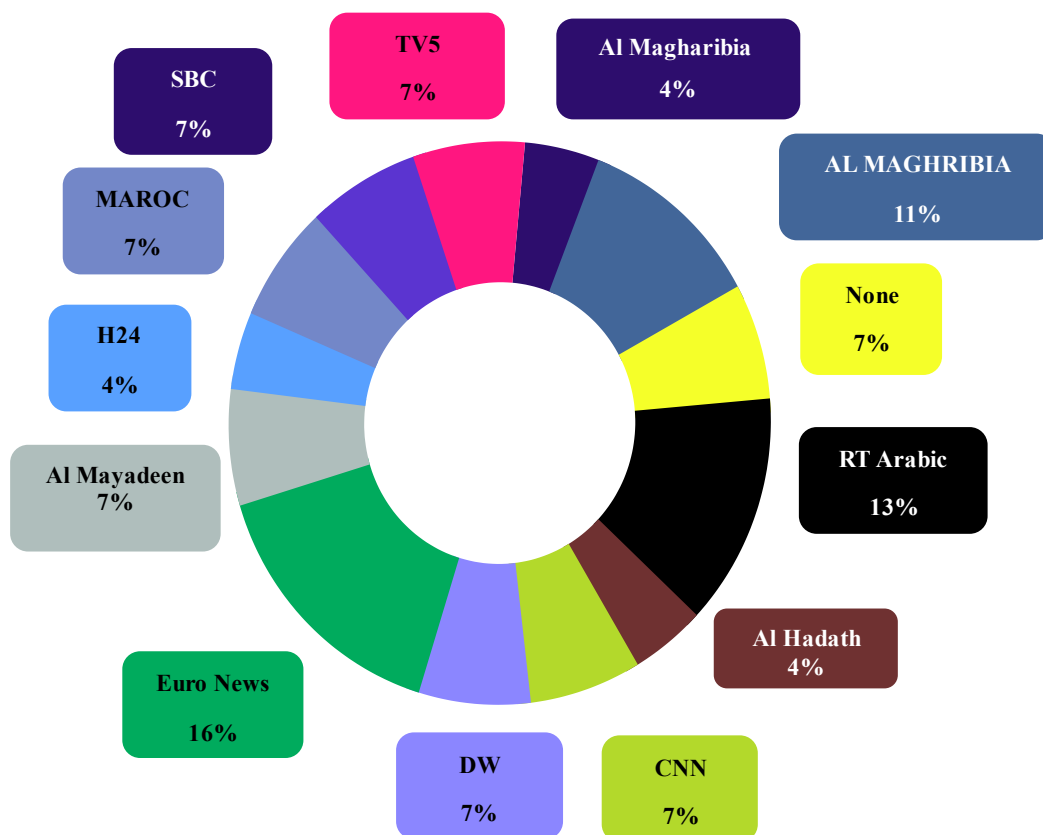
Graph 35 further reveals viewers' interest in diversifying their media and information sources. This inclination might relate to the type of content offered or the perceived accuracy and reliability of the news presented. Other channels noted for their viewership include:

- 'Euro News', leading with 16%, suggests a significant trust among the audience. 'RT Arabic' follows with 13%, underscoring its impact and perceived credibility.
- 'AL MAGHRIBIA' draws 11%, reflecting its appeal to viewers.
- 'MAROC 24', 'SBC', 'TV5', 'CNN', 'DW', and 'Al Mayadeen' each 7%.
- 'H24', 'Al Magharibia', and 'Al Hadath' each 4%.

Additionally, 7% of participants prefer not to use any satellite channels for information or news.

This data highlights the diversity of news sources utilized by participants and the varying trust levels placed in different channels. It is noteworthy that alongside local channels, certain regional and international channels enjoy considerable popularity among the audience.

Graph 35: Satellite Channels as a Means of Obtaining Information (2)



Social Media Platforms as News Source

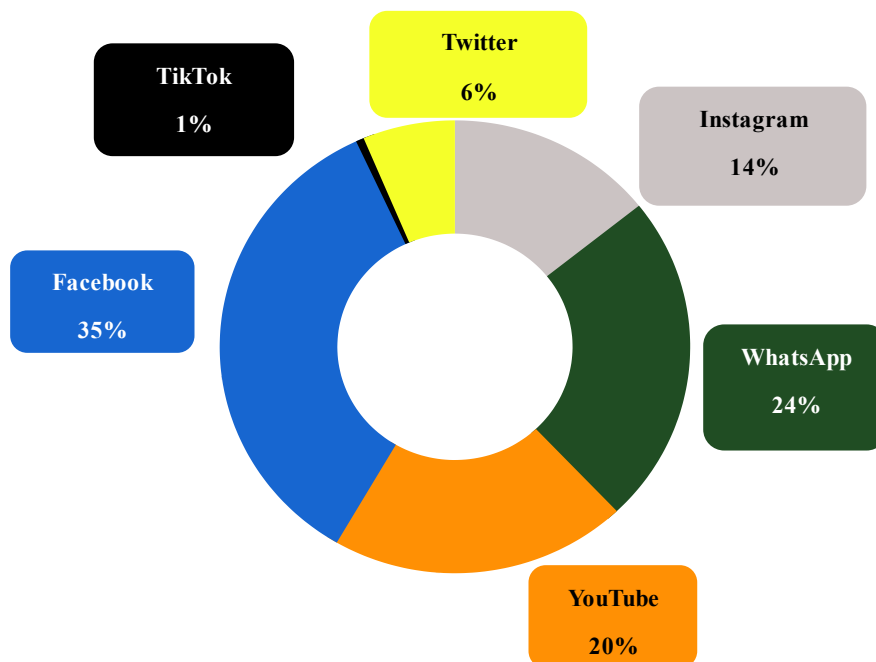
Social media platforms have become indispensable for news and information, with user preferences influenced by individual needs and choices. Graph 36 illustrates this landscape:

- 'Facebook' dominates with 35%, confirming its status as the primary network for news and information.
- 'WhatsApp' follows with 24%. Although primarily an instant messaging service, it has become a popular news-sharing-channel.
- 'YouTube' ranks third at 20%, valued for its news videos and educational content.
- 'Instagram' holds fourth place at 14%, with 'Twitter' at fifth with 6%, recognized for its immediacy in breaking news.

- 'TikTok' also claims a 6% share, illustrating its growing influence in information dissemination.

The data underscore the variety of social media platforms leveraged by citizens for information, reflecting a multi-platform approach to staying informed.

Graph 36: Social Media Platforms as a Source of Information



Electronic Newspapers

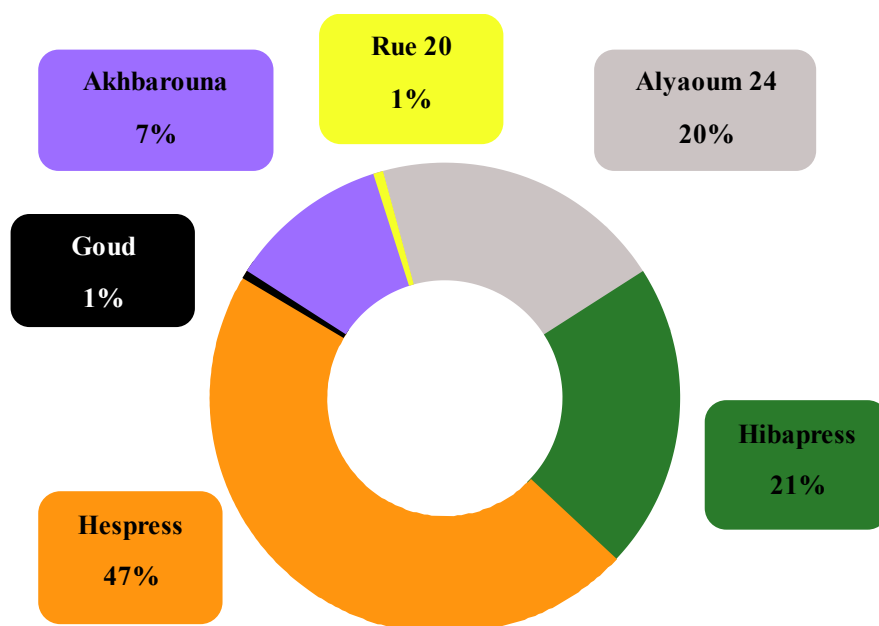
Electronic newspapers are pivotal in providing news to their audiences. The data allow us to estimate preferences for different electronic newspapers as sources of information and news. According to Graph 37:

'Hespress' is the leading choice for many, claiming a significant 47%, indicative of its broad popularity and the trust placed in its content. 'Hibapress' comes in second at 21%, also enjoying a strong following.

'Alyaoum 24' takes third place with 20%, marking it as a preferred source for a considerable audience. 'Akhbarouna' attracts 11%, suggesting a dedicated readership.

'Rue 20' and 'Goud' are at the lower end with just 1%, signaling less traction compared to their counterparts.

Graph 37: Electronic Newspapers as a Source of Information



Access Information and Trust in Government

This section will delve into the levels of trust that Moroccan citizens place in various sources of information and news. Understanding their perception of the different information channels related to the government is essential for assessing the governmental and political landscape and its credibility within Morocco.

Survey data and citizen feedback underscore the confidence placed in government announcements and official statements. These are crucial in forming public opinion and elevating awareness. This analysis aims to shed light on the trust dynamics related to official government communications and their impact on citizens' rights to access information.

Trust in Official Government Announcements

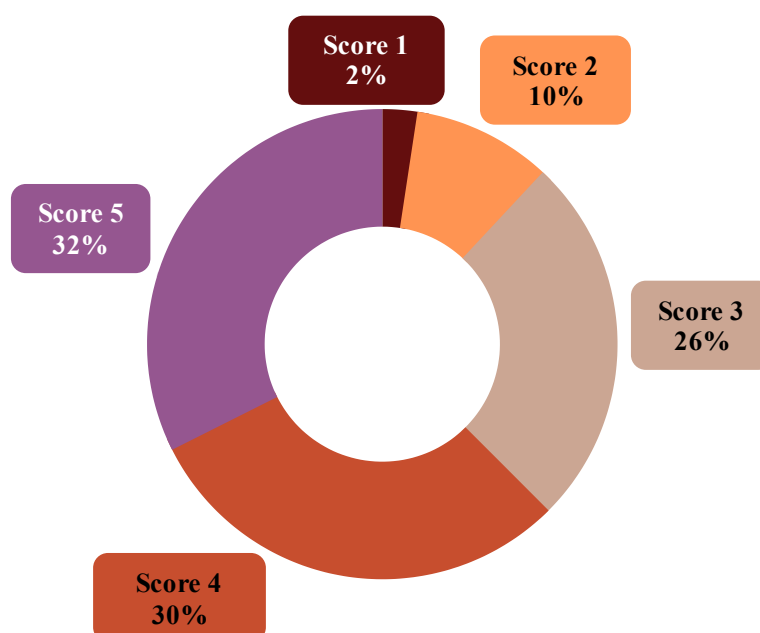
The survey data (Graph 38) indicates a pronounced trust among Moroccan citizens in official government announcements. Notably, 32% of respondents placed the utmost trust in these sources, rating them with the highest score of 5, which reflects a substantial portion of the population's view of government-provided information as accurate and reliable.

Additionally, 30% attributed a high trust rating of 4 out of 5, underscoring considerable confidence in these announcements. A sizeable 26% offered a moderate trust level of 3 out of 5, signifying a general yet cautious belief in the credibility of the information. In contrast, 10% displayed lower trust by scoring 2 out of 5, suggesting some reservations.

Finally, only 2% of individuals gave official government statements the lowest trust rating, which is a level 1 out of 5.

Overall, most Moroccans demonstrate a high level of trust in official government communications. However, there is a segment of the population that maintains skepticism towards the veracity of these sources.

Graph 38: Trust in Official Government Announcements



Trust in Government-Published Information

The level of trust that citizens place in information disseminated by the government is pivotal in shaping the relationship between the public and governmental authorities. Achieving mutual understanding and transparency is intrinsically linked to how much citizens believe in the data and information provided by the government.

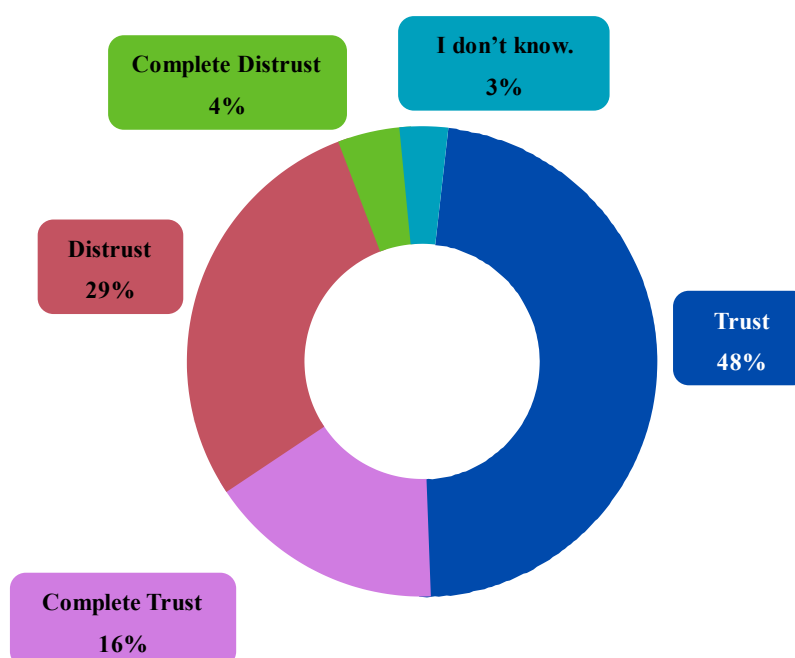
Doubts or skepticism about the credibility of governmental information can profoundly affect democratic engagement and civic involvement, potentially exacerbating societal gaps. Thus, it is vital to measure the trust citizens have in the government-issued information.

According to the findings in Graph 39, there is a range of trust levels concerning information published by the Moroccan government. Notably, 48% of participants exhibit trust in governmental information, reflecting a robust confidence in the communications from state entities.

A notable segment, 16% of respondents, shows an unequivocal trust in governmental information, suggesting the government's effectiveness in fostering a solid relationship of trust with these individuals. On the other side, 29% of the participants express distrust, highlighting doubts and concerns about the authenticity of government-provided information.

The data also point to minor segments of participants who are undecided or do not have a clear stance on their trust in government information. This diversity of perspectives underscores that while a significant number of citizens show trust, a substantial minority expresses skepticism regarding the trustworthiness of government-published content.

Graph 39: Trust in Government-Published Information



Conclusion

The research's findings offer a penetrating look at Moroccan citizens' views on their access to information, illuminating several critical aspects.

A commanding 83% of participants deem the right to information as 'extremely important' or 'important,' confirming the significant emphasis placed on this fundamental right. Conversely, a minimal 2% view this right as unimportant, highlighting an extensive recognition in Moroccan society of the crucial nature of information accessibility.

Participants' evaluation of the government's effectiveness in safeguarding the right to information reveal considerable disparities. These differences suggest the presence of obstacles that may impede the full realization of this right, pointing to a need for in-depth investigations to unravel the complexities of Morocco's information access environment.

An outstanding finding of the research is the pronounced knowledge gap regarding Law 31.13 on the right to access information in Morocco. This gap underscores an urgent requirement for targeted initiatives to raise public awareness and provide citizens with a thorough understanding of the law's implications and importance, thereby strengthening their ability to actively exercise their rights.

While television and print media receive moderate trust from participants, there remains a level of skepticism about their accuracy. This skepticism underlines the essential role of media in enhancing its trustworthiness and the quality of information, especially considering the acknowledged importance of information access.

Social media platforms are recognized as dynamic channels for information and news, reflecting the variance in user preferences. This variation underlines the increasing influence of digital platforms in the information landscape and the necessity of advancing digital media literacy to effectively navigate these complex online spaces.

Furthermore, the research indicates that official government communications are regarded with a high degree of trust by participants. Many view the government's information as precise and reliable, emphasizing the government's duty to provide citizens with trustworthy information.

Overall, this comprehensive examination underscores the importance of the right to access information in Morocco and the complex challenges associated with fulfilling this right.

To address these challenges effectively, it is essential to initiate potent awareness campaigns and enhance transparency in government operations. Promoting a culture of information access and dissemination is crucial, aligning with democratic principles and international standards of human rights.

Third Axis: Access to Information During Crises: Evaluating the effectiveness of accessing information in times of crisis

Overview of the Research Findings

- The findings suggest that, during crises, citizens prefer national sources when seeking information. However, there is a significant tendency to refer to international and local sources for cross-verification.
- Despite the widespread availability of various media and technologies, television remains the primary channel for individuals to access government information during times of crisis. This underscores the importance of audiovisual media in reporting significant events, such as earthquakes.
- In crisis situations, public interest in information and news sharply increases, with television and social media emerging as key platforms. This requires improving individuals' news verification skills to prevent the spread of misinformation during such critical periods.
- The role of language in the dissemination of information and news during crises is pivotal. Arabic, as the official language, was predominantly utilized in media coverage of the earthquake. However, the unique linguistic characteristics of Morocco's regions should be acknowledged to ensure comprehensive and inclusive coverage.
- Opinions vary regarding the spread of fake news about the earthquake. The survey reveals a tangible concern among the population about the rise of misinformation, with divergent views on its extent. These differences underscore the importance of enhancing public awareness and the ability to discern credible news from falsehoods during crises.

Introduction

In the context of crises and natural disasters, the need for accurate and reliable information becomes paramount for citizens and society at large. The urgency of such information is particularly important during disasters such as earthquakes, where the role of governments is critical in offering guidance and disseminating information to assist citizens in staying safe and making informed decisions.

Evaluating the effectiveness of information access during such crises is vital to ensuring that responses to emergencies like earthquakes are prompt and effective.

This section of the research is designed to shed light on the effectiveness and accessibility of government-issued information regarding the recent earthquake in the El Haouz region of Morocco.

We will examine the sources upon which participants depended to acquire information and assess their satisfaction with the quality and reach of this information. We will analyze the government's communication efforts during the crisis.

The research will also address the proliferation of fake news and the strategies for distinguishing it from credible reports, especially in the context of the earthquake. Moreover, we will consider the role of language in effective communication during crises, with the Great Atlas earthquake serving as a case study to highlight the various elements that influence information dissemination and communication during significant emergencies.

Sources for Obtaining Government-Issued Information Regarding the Earthquake

The data illustrated in (Graph 40) provides a picture of the outlets' citizens depend on for information disseminated by the government regarding the earthquake. Notably, 49% of participants turned to national sources as their primary point of reference during crises, signifying strong confidence in national institutions and their ability to deliver accurate and trustworthy information.

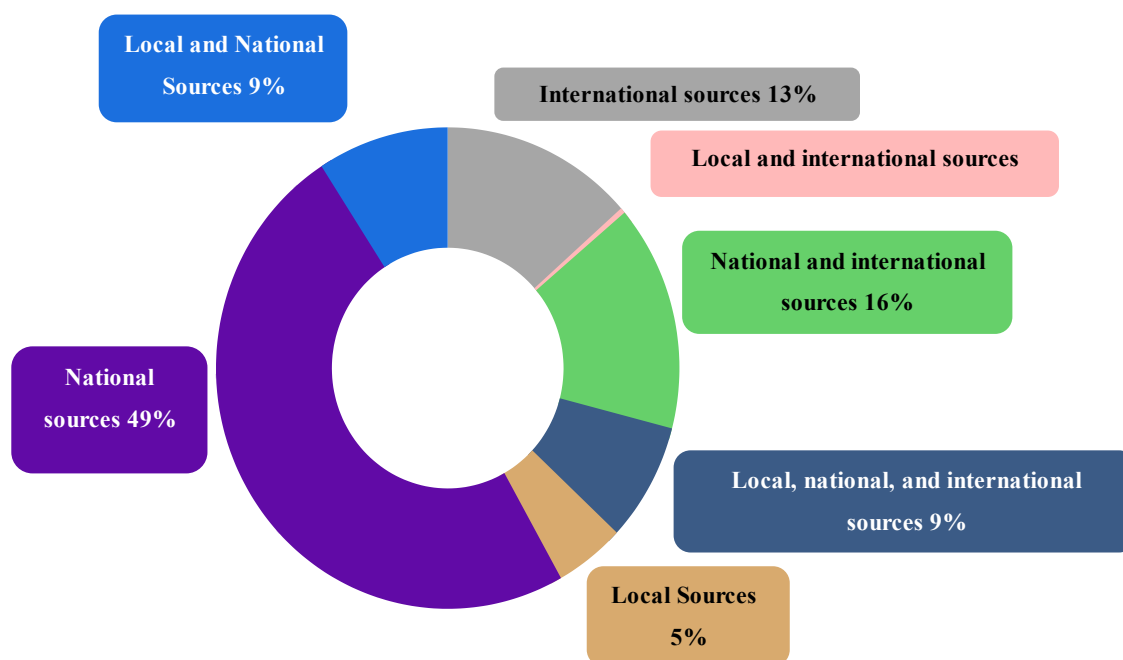
A substantial portion (15%) relied on a combination of international and national sources, demonstrating a practice of cross-verifying information through multiple channels. Meanwhile, 13% showed a preference for predominantly international sources, possibly in pursuit of unbiased and external perspectives.

There was less dependence on national and local sources, with 9% tapping into both. Solely local sources were the mainstay for merely a small minority, at 5%.

Only a negligible percentage looked to both international and local sources, while a more significant 8% sought information from an extensive range of international, national, and local sources.

These findings underscore that while national sources are predominantly preferred during crises, there is an apparent openness to engaging international and local sources to validate information.

Graph 40: Trusted Sources for obtaining Government-issued Earthquake Information



Means of Accessing Government-Issued Information on the Earthquake

When exploring the channels through which citizens obtain information, the communication methods utilized by the government during crises in Morocco must be emphasized.

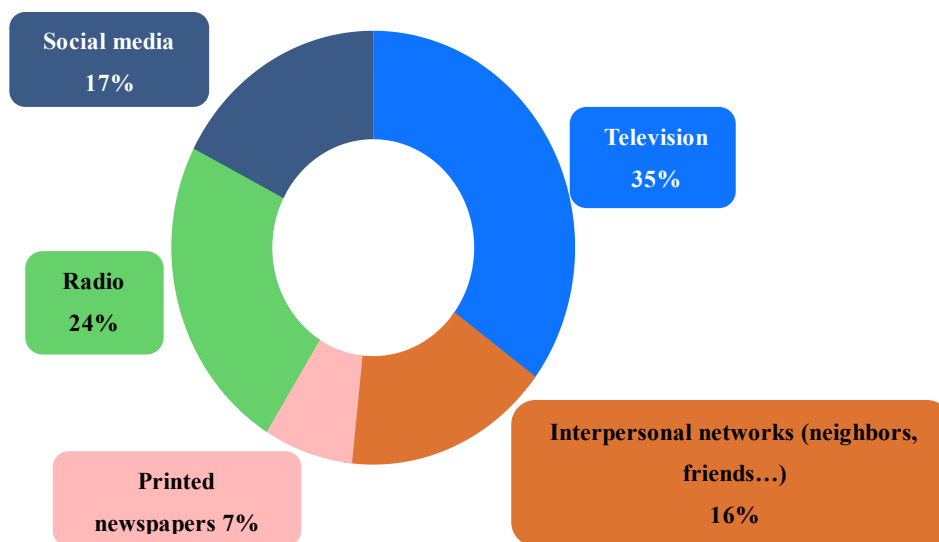
In an era marked by the expansion of media and the rapid advancement of technology, television endures as the predominant medium for disseminating government-issued information. According to the graph, a notable 35% of individuals rely on this source. This enduring preference for television highlights the crucial role that visual and auditory media play in conveying critical events, especially during crises such as earthquakes.

Social media has also emerged as a significant channel, with 17% of citizens using it to stay informed. This points to the increasing impact of these platforms in distributing governmental updates. In contrast, interpersonal networks, including neighbors, friends, and family, account for 16% of the information flow, underscoring the importance of local social circles. Despite the overwhelming trend towards digital media, radio maintains its appeal, capturing the attention of 24% of the population. This indicates a persistent appreciation for

the audio broadcast. Conversely, printed newspapers have been relegated to a lower row of preference at 7%, signaling a shift away from traditional print media as a primary source for government-issued information in such scenarios.

Language and Communication During Crises: The Great Atlas Earthquake

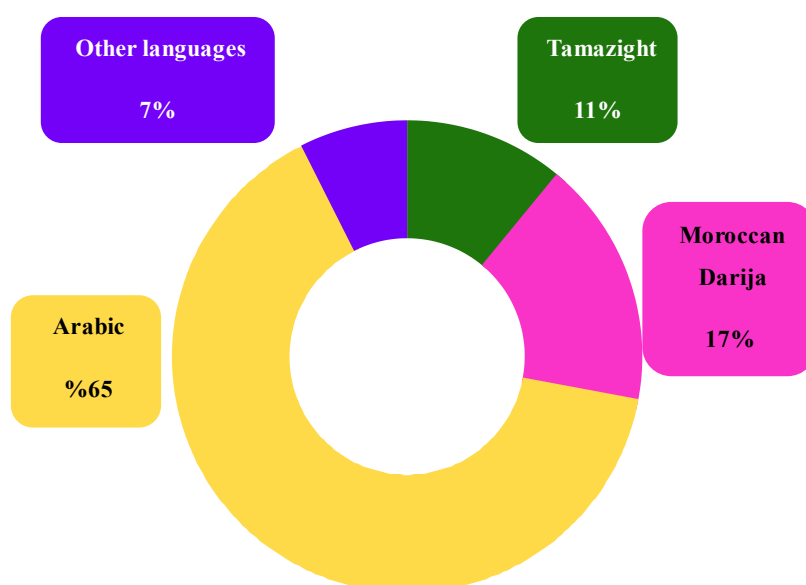
Graph 41: Means of Accessing Government-Issued Information on Earthquake



The language used by journalists and the media to report on significant events, such as earthquakes, is essential to effectively conveying information to the public. In times of crisis, journalists frequently default to the official language to relay critical updates. In the context of Morocco, considering El Haouz earthquake and its impact on a predominantly Amazigh-speaking population is crucial. This section of the research examines the language predominantly used by the press and media in their coverage of the recent seismic event.

Most journalists and media outlets in Morocco chose Arabic for reporting on the earthquake, with it being used in 65% of cases as shown in Graph 42. This preference reflects the prominence of Arabic as the official language and a primary channel for communication within the country. However, the presence of 11% Amazigh-speaking participants in the survey highlights an important demographic. This reliance on Arabic for media reporting underlines the importance of offering information in multiple languages to guarantee that comprehensive and understandable coverage is accessible to all community segments during a crisis.

Graph 42: The language Used by Journalists to Report on the Earthquake



Fake and Reliable News on the Earthquake

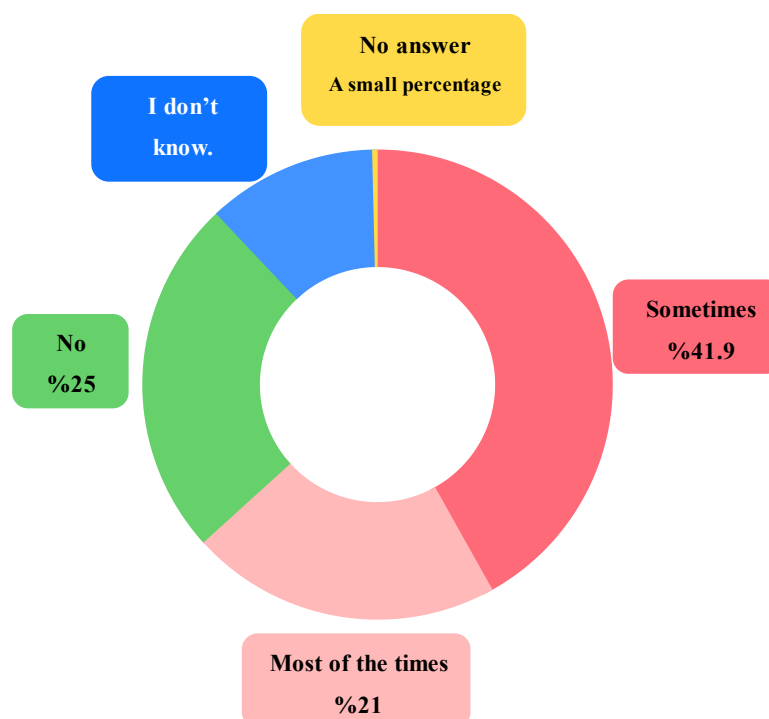
In times of crisis, the demand for information sharply increases, and there is an expectation that both government and media will provide accurate and reliable data. This information is crucial for understanding events and making informed decisions. However, the omnipresence of the internet and the proliferation of social platforms have led to the swift spread of information, regardless of its accuracy. This extensive reach enables the propagation of fake news, which can mislead citizens, obscure accurate reporting, and sometimes result in harmful outcomes for both individuals and institutions.

Adding to this complexity is the difficulty of news verification during a crisis. Rumors can spread rapidly and go viral, intensifying public distress. In this context, it is critical for governments and media organizations to rely on and strengthen the verification of sources before disseminating news. Equally important is the responsibility of individuals to refine their

analytical skills to scrutinize the authenticity of the information received at such pivotal times, as uncritical acceptance can lead to uninformed decisions that potentially worsen the crisis.

In light of this, our survey explored participants' proficiency in discerning accurate from fake news concerning the Great Atlas earthquake. A notable 42% of respondents indicated they could sometimes tell apart fake from trustworthy news, as illustrated in Graph 43. This response suggests a reasonable degree of information literacy, although inconsistently exercised. Noteworthy is that a substantial 25% reported difficulties in distinguishing between authentic and fake news about the earthquake, highlighting a significant challenge in identifying credible sources—a challenge that can amplify stress during times of crisis.

Graph 43: Distinguishing Fake News During the Earthquake



Additionally, a segment of participants, representing 21%, affirmed their overall aptitude at recognizing the authenticity of news. This reflects a subsection of the population that possesses improved awareness and a refined ability to appraise information accurately and confidently.

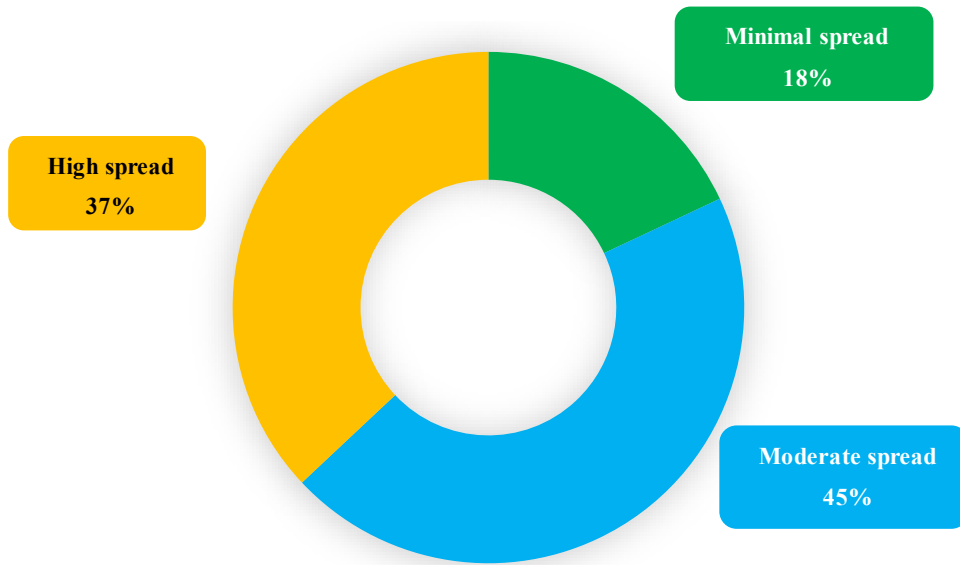
The Spread of False News About the Earthquake

The survey data reveals a variety of perceptions about the spread of fake news concerning the earthquake. A significant 45% of respondents acknowledge a moderate occurrence of such misinformation, indicating an awareness of the potential risks associated with the spread of

false information. Meanwhile, 37% of participants believe the proliferation of fake news to be widespread, while 18% consider its presence to be minimal.

These findings reflect an apparent concern over the dissemination of false news during times of crisis. They illustrate a spectrum of views and beliefs on the matter, underscoring the importance of intensified vigilance and the need to enhance the public's capacity to discern between authentic and false news in crisis times.

Graph 44: Extent of the Spread of Fake News



Conclusion

This study, mainly the axis titled “assessing the effectiveness of information access in times of crisis” has revealed a distinct preference among participants to rely on national sources during emergencies. Yet, there is a notable willingness to consult both international and local sources for verifying information.

Despite the swift advancements in media and technology, television persistently remains the primary channel for the public to receive government information during crises. This emphasizes the solid significance of visual and auditory broadcasts, particularly in conveying critical events like the earthquake.

At such crucial times, public interest in information and news significantly surges, with television and social media emerging as the principal platforms. Consequently, it is crucial for individuals to enhance their skills in news verification to prevent the harmful impact of misinformation in times of emergency.

Language acts as a vital channel for the dissemination of information, with Arabic being the predominant language in media coverage of the earthquake. Nevertheless, accommodating the significant Amazigh-speaking population is equally important.

Regarding the spread of fake news about the earthquake, the survey reveals a range of perceptions, indicating a necessity for improved vigilance and enhanced skills in discerning credible from unreliable news during periods of crisis.

III. Recommendations

Freedom of Expression

The strong endorsement of freedom of expression by Moroccans highlights the urgency of strengthening this fundamental human right. Achieving this involves underscoring the critical role of freedom of expression in democratic societies and encouraging citizens to embrace it not just as a right, but as a foundation for fostering an involved and transparent community.

Creating a safe space for free speech requires an environment where individuals can express their views and ideas confidently and without fear, while respecting a plurality of opinions. This means addressing concerns about potential external pressures and ensuring people can articulate their thoughts freely without fear of repercussions.

An outstanding finding from this research is the considerable lack of legal awareness regarding press and publishing laws in Morocco. Educational programs are crucial to enlighten citizens about their rights and the legal frameworks protecting freedom of speech.

The safeguarding of freedom of expression requires ongoing cooperation among government entities, civil society organizations, and judicial systems. Establishing partnerships and fostering open conversations among these stakeholders are critical to cultivating a more secure environment for the practice of this right.

In today's digital landscape, the vast expansion of digital media, with social media platforms at the forefront, plays a pivotal role in disseminating information and news. Thus, it is imperative to guarantee that the tenets of freedom of expression are upheld in the digital realm. This includes vigilance and action against any online threats to free expression and the encouragement of responsible digital conduct.

In conclusion, promotion of public dialogue and inclusion of all sectors of the society in the dialogue about freedom of expression are of the highest priority and should be persistently advocated. Engaging every community segment in the creation of policies and norms concerning freedom of expression is essential. This inclusive approach ensures the reflection of a broad range of viewpoints, avoiding bias towards particular ideologies or agendas.

Access to Information

Access to information is a fundamental right that should be protected by legal systems that define its scope and conditions of use. Therefore, it is essential to increase awareness of the

Access to Information Law No. 31.13 in Morocco. Open dialogues and awareness campaigns targeting citizens and officials regarding this law and its importance should be organized. Everyone must understand that the right to access information is not just a privilege, but a fundamental right that contributes to enhancing transparency and democratic participation.

The government should enhance its level of transparency in providing public information and data. When this information becomes more widely available to citizens, they will be able to monitor government performance and contribute more effectively to formulating policies and making decisions. These processes should be open and transparent to ensure that information is easily accessible to all.

The complexity and lengthiness of the procedures related to the right of access to information pose a barrier to efficiently exercising this right. It is necessary to conduct a comprehensive review of these procedures, simplify them, and make them clearer and more accessible for the Moroccan citizen. The systems and procedures should be designed to be less complicated and more effective.

The citizen is a fundamental element in the democratic process, and therefore should be encouraged to participate in public dialogue and community discussions. This is because the role of the citizen in policy formulation and decision-making is essential in advancing society and achieving progress.

Access to Information During Crises

In the context of access to information during crises, a significant diversification in information sources has been observed. Therefore, in times of crises like earthquakes, it is recommended to expand information sources to ensure comprehensive and reliable information is obtained. Citizens can primarily rely on national sources while being prepared to use international and local sources for information verification.

The importance of enhancing media awareness during crisis periods like earthquakes has also emerged, as people's interest in information and news increases. Therefore, individuals should develop media literacy and verification skills to distinguish between reliable news and false news.

The prominent use of the Arabic language in the media coverage of the earthquake reflects the importance of this language as an effective means of conveying information to the public. However, the presence of a significant number of Amazigh speakers in Morocco should also be

considered. These languages are an essential part of Morocco's cultural and linguistic heritage and should be included in media coverage to ensure comprehensive information provision to the entire community.

Combating the spread of false information has become essential during crises. Special attention must be given to this issue, as false news can lead to confusion, panic, and anxiety among citizens, sometimes leading to security lapses. Citizens must develop the ability to distinguish between reliable information and false news to ensure rumors do not spread and to rely on trusted sources. This will help maintain calm and direct attention towards the correct sources, enhancing effective crisis response and reducing chaos and confusion.

Conclusion

The consensus among all surveyed groups is that freedom of expression is a relative concept rather than an absolute one. Journalists, however, regard it as the essence of all rights, making it a fundamental principle and the benchmark of their profession.

Freedom of expression holds varied significance across different professional landscapes. Within civil society, it is promoted as a platform for active engagement. In contrast, within the realms of professional and bureaucratic settings, its scope is legally demarcated, delineated by legislation and organizational hierarchies.

The cultural and social concepts that inform an individual's liberty and their interaction with institutions and the wider community are inseparable from the participants' views on public expression. The responses indicate that public debate often endures diverse levels of societal oversight, both in actuality and as a representational gesture.

Additionally, participants attribute substantial ethical importance to freedom of expression. It is regarded as an ethical component that facilitates the transition from absolute to relative freedom. This principle is considered a foundational pillar for advancement and innovation in all fields, including science, bounded by ethical obligations and a framework of values and norms. Here, freedom is delineated by communal and societal agreements, evolving from a definitive entitlement to a negotiated concept.

Testimonies from the research suggest that freedom of expression surpasses legal boundaries, permeating into social public interactions and shaped by prevailing customs, traditions, and norms. The political climate frequently influences public discourse, necessitating that expressions of freedom remain in concordance with the nation's three fundamental principles. This delineates a space where engagement with Moroccan political discourse and adopting certain positions become part of exercising this freedom.

An outstanding finding of the research is the pronounced deficiency in legal awareness among participants, particularly concerning legislation tied to freedom of expression and information accessibility. Even where awareness exists, it is often limited to a superficial understanding.

In an era shaped by digital advances, the dissemination of information pivots on the nature and sensitivity of the content. Access to information, too, is governed by its sensitivity.

Participants concur on the imperative of employing technical resources to enhance citizen access to information, underscoring the role of information ownership and availability in empowering advocacy when necessary. Nonetheless, the relevance and promptness of information access are seen as relative, contingent upon political and bureaucratic sensitivities. The consensus suggests that access to information should be subject to conditional restraints and legal oversight, with a stress on the necessity of legal provisions to safeguard personal data and privacy.

In the face of crises such as Morocco's Great Atlas earthquake in September 2023, the prompt and competent action of citizens and governmental bodies is paramount. Such exigencies can illuminate pressing societal needs and readiness to manage crises. The Great Atlas earthquake crisis underscored the criticality of access rights and information veracity in these times.

The research also emphasizes the role of media and social networks in relaying information to the public during emergencies, mirroring the increased demand for information and the essential need to refine news verification competencies to discern factual news from misinformation.

The focus on language inclusivity in crisis reporting is vital. With Arabic and Amazigh as Morocco's primary official languages, their incorporation into media coverage is essential to ensure comprehensive reach.

In essence, crises underscore the need to enhance information access rights and focus on media literacy improvement and the discernment of trustworthy news. These elements are pivotal in fortifying both individual and collective crisis responses, mitigating chaos, panic, and confusion.

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