



CAMBODIA

	2012	2013
INTERNET FREEDOM STATUS	N/A	PARTLY FREE
Obstacles to Access (0-25)	n/a	14
Limits on Content (0-35)	n/a	15
Violations of User Rights (0-40)	n/a	18
Total (0-100)	n/a	47

POPULATION: 15 million
INTERNET PENETRATION 2012: 5 percent
SOCIAL MEDIA/ICT APPS BLOCKED: No
POLITICAL/SOCIAL CONTENT BLOCKED: No
BLOGGERS/ICT USERS ARRESTED: No
PRESS FREEDOM 2013 STATUS: Not Free

* 0=most free, 100=least free

KEY DEVELOPMENTS: MAY 2012 – APRIL 2013

- In May 2012, the government announced it was in the process of drafting Cambodia’s first ever cybercrime law, which netizens fear could extend traditional media restrictions online (see **VIOLATIONS OF USER RIGHTS**).
- At least three antigovernment blogs remain inaccessible on most ISPs, after an apparent government ban in 2011, implemented without transparency, (see **LIMITS ON CONTENT**).
- In November 2012, the government told internet cafés near Phnom Penh schools to relocate or close, threatening access throughout the capital (see **OBSTACLES TO ACCESS**).

INTRODUCTION

New media and increased internet access are transforming the information environment in Cambodia, where press freedom is traditionally curtailed. Through the use of new media and digital tools, young activists of both genders are able to disseminate views on important social and political issues, including the country's besieged environmental resources. Social media websites are quickly becoming an integral tool for sharing information and opinion.

The Royal Government of Cambodia,¹ led by Prime Minister Hun Sen since 1998, restricts access to sexually explicit content but has yet to systematically censor online political discourse, leading some observers to hope Cambodia is entering an era of "digital democracy."²

Yet the tide may be turning. Authorities have begun to interfere with information and communications technology (ICT) access, blocking at least three blogs hosted overseas on multiple ISPs for content that criticized the government since 2011. In 2012, government ministries threatened to shutter internet cafes too near schools—citing moral concerns—and instituted surveillance of cafe premises and cell phone subscribers as a security measure that could foretell the emphasis of the country's first cybercrime law, which the government began drafting in May 2012. Online activists continued to raise public awareness around a number of causes such as the imprisonment of veteran journalist Mam Sonando, who was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment after documenting land seizures in 2012, then released on probation in 2013. Yet the very success of such campaigns may be spurring the leadership's efforts to curb internet freedom in the same way they do traditional media.

OBSTACLES TO ACCESS

The International Telecommunication Union reported internet penetration in Cambodia at just 5 percent in 2012.³ Other estimates are higher: Cambodia's Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MPTC) reported 2.7 million Internet users in March 2013, around 18 percent of the population of around 15 million.⁴

The absence of an extensive landline network has historically restricted internet penetration, since the fixed landlines that broadband internet services depend on are often unavailable in rural areas. Wireless broadband, which emerged in 2006, has helped bridge the digital divide between rural and urban internet users.

¹ Cambodia is a constitutional monarchy. King Norodom Sihamoni succeeded his father as head of state in 2004.

² Sopheap Chak, "Digital Democracy Emerging in Cambodia," *UPI Asia Online*, November 11, 2009, <http://bit.ly/1fyzWq3>.

³ International Telecommunication Union, "Percentage of Individuals Using the Internet, 2000-2012," <http://bit.ly/14IlykM>.

⁴ Suy Heimkhemra, "Cheap Data, Better Tech Putting More Cambodians Online," *Voice of America*, March 25, 2013, <http://www.voanews.com/content/cheap-data-better-tech-putting-more-cambodians-online/1628531.html>. The consulting firm "We Are Social" put penetration at 16 percent in a late 2012 report. See, Simon Kemp, "Social Digital and Mobile in Cambodia," *We Are Social* (blog), November 7, 2012, <http://wearesocial.net/blog/2012/11/social-digital-mobile-cambodia/>.

There are at least 24 internet service providers (ISPs) operating in the Cambodian market—government accounts cite as many as 27⁵—and they offer competitive rates for high-speed internet, at around \$12 a month.⁶ Affordable smart phones, tablets and other devices have also contributed to the rise in the number of Cambodian internet and mobile users. About 98 percent of internet users today have mobile access, either via satellite networks or Wi-Fi connections, according to the MPTC. However, insufficient electricity supplies often result in nationwide blackouts—which impose constraints on computer and internet use.

Mobile phone users surpassed the number using fixed landlines surprisingly early in Cambodia, and have gained in popularity since 2000, even at the bottom of the economic pyramid, due to their affordability.⁷ As of September 2012, mobile penetration was at 131 percent, because some people own more than one device.⁸ The figures are the outcome of intense competition among 10 mobile service providers, who offer free SIM cards, affordable handsets and bonuses in their efforts to secure more market share. In April 2013, the MPTC attempted to pass a resolution banning all providers from offering these bonuses, apparently to protect companies with links to officials from losing out to their competitors, but backed down after a public outcry.⁹

Thanks to these low prices, mobile phones have become indispensable in Cambodia, preferred over traditional communications including landlines and the postal service. With poor transportation infrastructure and electricity coverage, mobile phones offer the most convenient access to a range of services including radio, music and video, and increasingly web access. Beyond that, mobile phones have had a great impact on mobilization and collective actions. In the run-up to the 2007 and 2013 elections, political parties used short-message service (SMS) text messaging as the cheapest and most effective way of spreading their message, while election monitoring groups also used SMS to gather data. With technical support from the Cambodian NGO Open Institute and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, the Cambodian National Election Committee (NEC) launched a voice-based information service to provide pre-recorded details for voters, free of charge, in advance of the National Assembly election scheduled in July 2013.¹⁰

Language is another obstacle to access, since few online applications are coded in Khmer. Technology companies and ICT experts have made a significant investment to improve Cambodia's infrastructure, including the development of Khmer language applications. The Khmer Unicode font become widely available after the government recognized it as a standard in 2010.¹¹ After five

⁵ O.U. Phannarith, Head of CamCERT and Permanent Member of Cybercrime Law, Working Group of National ICT Development Authority, "Cambodia Effort in Fighting Cybercrime in the Absence of Law," slideshow presented at the Asia Pacific Regional Mock Court, Jakarta, Indonesia, September 18-19, 2012.

⁶ "Cheap Data, Better Tech Putting More Cambodians Online," VOA News, March 25, 2013, <http://bit.ly/109eoTm>.

⁷ Sopheap Chak, "Mobile Technology gives Cambodians a Voice," *UPI Asia Online*, 23 April 2010, <http://bit.ly/a6vs0S>.

⁸ International Telecommunication Union, "Mobile-Cellular Telephone Subscriptions, 2000-2012."

⁹ Kaing Menghun and Joshua Wilwohl, "Ban on Generous Mobile Top-Up Offers Lifted," *Cambodia Daily*, May 7, 2013, <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/archive/ban-on-generous-mobile-top-up-offers-lifted-22713/>. See also, Menghun and Wilwohl, "Mobile Bonuses Axed after Firm Complaint," *Cambodia Daily*, May 2, 2013, <http://bit.ly/16zRyyd>.

¹⁰ Open Institute, "IVR-based Information for the 2013 National Assembly Election Available," 18 March 2013, <http://www.open.org.kh/en/node/528>.

¹¹ Sebastian Strangio and Khouth Sophak Chakrya, "Unicode opens door for Khmer computing," May 2, 2008, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/special-reports/unicode-opens-door-khmer-computing>.

years of collaboration by software developers, the release of Google’s Khmer translation feature is anticipated by the end of 2013.¹² In addition, developers Sous Samak and Kim Sokphearum launched their own Automatic English-Khmer Translation System in March.¹³ With these efforts, it is hoped that Khmer speaking netizens will be able to read non-Khmer content and vice versa, connecting Cambodian netizens to a wider audience.

The government welcomes and supports such technology and infrastructure developments. However, despite public claims to support freedom of expression by Information Minister Khieu Kanharith and others,¹⁴ officials have taken steps to interfere in internet access. In early 2010 the government planned to introduce a state-run exchange to control all local ISPs with the declared aim of strengthening internet security against pornography, theft and cybercrime.¹⁵ This plan, however, has been postponed due to popular opposition—even from inside the government.¹⁶

There is no independent regulatory body overseeing the digital landscape in Cambodia, and controls are implemented through ad hoc internal circulars.¹⁷ In early November 2012, a government circular called for the relocation of all internet cafés within a 500-meter radius of schools and educational institutions in the capital, Phnom Penh.¹⁸ The circular cited young people’s growing addiction to “all kinds of [internet] games” which it categorized as illegal along with terrorism, economic crime, and pornography.¹⁹ Penalties for violating the circular include forced closure, the confiscation of equipment, and arrest, though it did not specify potential sentences. The rules would affect almost every cybercafé in the city, threatening internet access for those with no personal computer, according to a map-based visualization produced by the non-profit web portal Urban Voice Cambodia, which puts nearly every building in the capital within 500 meters of one school or another.²⁰ Internet users worry this indicates the kind of heavy-handed regulation that might feature in an upcoming cyberlaw, which the government announced it would draft in May 2012. So far, though, the circular has yet to be implemented.

LIMITS ON CONTENT

At least three popular Cambodian blogs hosted overseas were blocked for perceived antigovernment content in 2011, and most users within the Kingdom are still unable to access them

¹² Arne Mauser, “Google Translate now Supports Khmer,” *Official Google Translate Blog*, April 18, 2013, <http://bit.ly/18efRin>.

¹³ Prak Chanseyha, “Two Young Cambodian Women Develop an Automatic Translation System” [In Khmer], March 26, 2013, <http://news.sabay.com.kh/articles/391769>.

¹⁴ “Minister: Democracy Exists Without Opposition Newspapers,” *Cambodia Herald*, May 3, 2013, <http://bit.ly/18zuUnz>.

¹⁵ Sopheap Chak, “Cambodia’s Great Internet Firewall?” *Global Voices Online*, March 2, 2010, <http://bit.ly/brP14M>.

¹⁶ Brooke Lewis and Sam Rith, “Ministers Differ on Internet Controls,” *Phnom Penh Post*, February 26, 2010,

<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/index.php/2010022632744/National-news/ministers-differ-on-internet-controls.html>.

¹⁷ A Circular is a measure endorsed by a Minister or the Prime Minister and is used to explain a point of law or to provide guidance with regards to a point of law. It is advisory in nature, and does not have binding legal force, though it can include penalties for non-compliance.

¹⁸ LICADHO, “New Circular Aims to Shut Down Internet Cafes in Cambodia,” press release, December 13, 2012, <http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/pressrelease.php?perm=298>.

¹⁹ Cambodian Center for Human Rights, “Cambodian Government Seeks to Shut Down Internet Cafés in Phnom Penh Thereby Posing a Threat to Internet Freedoms,” briefing note, December 14, 2012, <http://bit.ly/17cObuG>.

²⁰ Urban Voice Cambodia, “Save the Internet Cafes Campaign,” March 15, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1bR8pxp>.

without the use of circumvention tools. While this has not yet resulted in more systematic censorship, these blocks revealed a troubling degree of cooperation between ISPs and officials, a lack of transparency, and a refusal to heed public opinion, which generally remains against government regulation of online content. In other cases, however, online activism has raised awareness of compelling issues in the public interest.

Compared to traditional media in Cambodia, new media, including online news, social networks and personal blogs, enjoy more freedom and independence from government censorship and restrictions. However, the government has proactively blocked blogs and websites, either on moral grounds, or for hosting content deemed critical of the government.

Since early 2009, websites and blogs showing pornography or sexually explicit images have been subject to blocking. Notably, Reahu, a US-based site selling images of models depicting traditional Apsara or Cambodian goddesses in erotic poses, is inaccessible in Cambodia.²¹ In early 2010, news reports cited plans to gather bi-monthly meetings of a government morality committee, including MPTC, Ministry of Women's Affairs and Ministry of Interior representatives, to review websites and block those in conflict with national values. An official said this monitoring was necessary in light of the rapid spread of ICTs nationwide.²² No restrictions have been reported as a result of such a plan, but the government's intent appears unchanged: In early 2011, So Khun, Cambodia's Minister of Posts and Telecommunication, asked mobile phone operators to "co-operate" in blocking web sites "that affect Khmer morality and tradition and the government," according to *The Phnom Penh Post*, citing internal MPTC minutes.²³

Politically-motivated blocking has not yet been systematically applied, although it has been observed on a case by case basis. In 2009, the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) reported the AngkorNet ISP was blocking access to a report by the UK-based NGO Global Witness, because it criticized government corruption. AngkorNet confirmed its subscribers could not access the content,²⁴ but said it was due to a technical error.²⁵ Since then, however, international NGOs and news websites have been widely available.

Blogs hosted overseas, in contrast, became subject to blocks within Cambodia in early 2011 when all ISPs blocked the international host service Blogspot, apparently in reaction to a December 2010 post on KI-Media, a blog run by Cambodians both inside and outside of the Kingdom. The site, which is often critical of the administration, described the prime minister and other officials as 'traitors' after opposition leader Sam Rainsy alleged they had sold land to Vietnam at a contested

²¹ Brendan Brady, "Govt Moves Raise Censorship Fears," *Phnom Penh Post*, March 3, 2009, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/govt-moves-raise-censorship-fears>.

²² Sen David and Brooke Lewis, "Cambodian Government Panel to Target Racy Images," *Phnom Penh Post*, February 3, 2010, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/govt-panel-target-racy-images>.

²³ Thomas Miller, "Ministry Denies Blocking Website," *Phnom Penh Post*, February 16, 2011, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/ministry-denies-blocking-website>.

²⁴ Sebastian Strangio and Vong Sokheng, "NGO Site Barred by Local ISP," *Phnom Penh Post*, February 9, 2009, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/ngo-site-barred-local-isp>.

²⁵ "Provider Denies Blocking Watchdog's Web Site," *VOA Khmer*, February 9, 2009, <http://www.voacambodia.com/articleprintview/1354564.html>.

national border. All ISPs except Metfone subsequently restored service to the sites following customer complaints, according to CCHR.²⁶ In February 2011, however, multiple ISPs including Online, WiCam, Metfone and EZECOM reinstated blocks on individual Blogspot sites, including KI-Media, Khmerization—another critical citizen journalist blog—and a blog by the Khmer political cartoonist Sacrava.

The government denied responsibility for ordering the blocks. However, the same month, *The Phnom Penh Post* leaked the contents of an e-mail sent from the account of Sieng Sithy, deputy director of MPTC policy regulation, extending appreciation to ten ISPs for blocking access to KI-Media, Khmerization and Sacrava, among other sites.²⁷ The *Post* also cited official minutes documenting the ministry asking ISPs to impose the blocks. In the leaked email, Sieng Sithy urged non-compliant service providers WiCam, Telesurf and Hello to abide by the request: “We found that you are not yet taken an action [sic], so please kindly take immediate action [...] Again and again, in case of not well cooperation is your own responsibility [sic].”²⁸ Sieng Sithy declined the *Post*’s request to comment on the email, but other ministry officials denied its veracity, describing it as a publicity stunt by the bloggers.

ISPs proved similarly evasive when reporters tried to narrow down the source of the blocks. An EZECOM spokesman denied being asked to restrict access to specific sites, characterizing the blocking as a technical problem. An unnamed WiCam employee, on the other hand, confirmed receiving the emailed request to block the sites; WiCam users trying to visit KI-Media were notified the content was “blocked as ordered” by the MPTC until mid-February, when the notice was replaced by a generic error message, according to the *Post*.

The incident was a worrying indication to civil society groups that the government was seeking to control online content as it does traditional media.²⁹ Despite their protests, however, media coverage of the censorship died down in 2012, though the affected sites remained largely inaccessible within Cambodia in May 2013.

Besides blocking content, government bodies have also sought to restrict text messaging in the past. The NEC and the MPTC requested three main mobile service providers shut off SMS services nationwide the day before 2007 polls, justifying the action under a law prohibiting campaigning on the day of or the day immediately before a vote. Opposition parties and human rights groups said the ban would hamper freedom of expression.³⁰ Ironically, the Cambodian People’s Party—who implemented the ban—themselves embraced SMS as part of a successful 2008 election campaign,

²⁶ Cambodian Center for Human Rights, “Fundamental Freedoms Series: Internet Censorship,” factsheet, June 2011, http://www.cchrcambodia.org/admin/media/factsheet/factsheet/english/Internet_Censorship_Factsheet_Dove_en.pdf.

²⁷ T. Miller, “Tangled Web Revealed,” *Phnom Penh Post*, February 16, 2011. See also, VOA News, “Cambodia Blocks Anti-Government Websites,” February 16, 2011, <http://bit.ly/16zRlel>.

²⁸ Miller, “Tangled Web Revealed.”

²⁹ Freedom House, “Cambodia Country Report,” *Freedom on the Press 2013*, <http://bit.ly/159AgGQ>.

³⁰ Preetam Rai, “Cambodia: SMS blocked During Elections,” *Global Voices*, March 31, 2007,

<http://globalvoicesonline.org/2007/03/31/cambodia-sms-blocked-during-elections/>.

People Daily’s Online, “Cambodian election authority bans SMS on election day,” March 30, 2007,

http://english.people.com.cn/200703/30/eng20070330_362308.html.

fuelled in part by a nationalistic movement stemming from disputed claims to temple on the border with Thailand. The party won acclaim when it denounced Thai claims to the temple as an invasion of Cambodian territory, though they subsequently had to distance themselves from popular SMS campaigns urging Cambodians to boycott everything Thai. No attempts to limit SMS have been documented since then. However, as the use of mobile technology continues to grow, officials cited May 2012 rumors of a violent political clash in Phnom Penh circulating via SMS among the justifications for the cybercrime law now in its draft stages.³¹

Despite these restrictions, the internet has contributed to the social and political development of Cambodia. A range of netizens and grassroots activists have used new media and other online tools to mobilize and make an impact. Facebook has a total penetration of 5.11 percent and is growing fast, with Cambodian Facebook subscriptions increasing by 31 percent between May 2012 and March 2013, according to one source.³² Such a sharp increase—albeit from a low starting point—has evidently given the government cause for concern. As July 2013 elections approached, the NEC issued a statement in May requesting social media users to avoid providing wrong information about election procedures and dates.³³ On the same day, in remarks made to students, Information Minister Khieu Kanharith warned those who are active on Facebook not to use the tool to impugn the reputation of others.³⁴

Personal blogging is popular in Cambodia. Most bloggers are aged between 20 and 29 and are well educated, but the majority blog about personal experiences, rather than political events.³⁵ There are a number of political blogs and websites available to Cambodian youth, however. Users continue to read even those blogs which are blocked, like KI-Media, through software that allows proxy access, although no data is available indicating how widespread this practice is. A number of blog causes have also emerged, such as “Prey Lang – It’s Your Forest Too,” a blog to provide public updates on conservation activities surrounding an endangered forest.³⁶ Several online campaigns and petitions have met with success. Veteran human rights defender and journalist Mam Sonando, who was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment after reporting on land seizures in 2012, was released on probation in March 2013 after sustained online and offline activism and international attention caused the court to drop some of the charges against him.³⁷ Internet users also protested against the arrest of activists from the Boeung Kak community, who defend Phnom Pehn’s urban wetlands,³⁸

³¹ Cambodian Centre for Human Rights, “Cambodian Government is drafting the first ever Cyber Law,” alert, May 24, 2012, http://www.cchrcambodia.org/index_old.php?url=media/media.php&p=alert_detail.php&alid=21&id=5.

³² Social Bakers, “Facebook Statistics: Cambodia,” accessed March 27, 2013, <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/cambodia>.

³³ National Election Committee of Cambodia, “Statement on the Usage of Social Media” [In Khmer], May 23, 2013, http://www.necselect.org.kh/nec_khmer/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1064&Itemid=340; “NEC Says Statement on Bloggers Not Attack on Free Speech,” *Cambodia Daily*, May 27, 2013, <http://bit.ly/15aHXsj>.

³⁴ *Cambodian Express News*, “Khieu Kanharith Reminds Facebook users to be Careful Writing Misinformation and Affecting Others’ Reputations” [In Khmer], May 23, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1biONCZ>.

³⁵ Department of Media and Communication, “*Empowering Cambodian Women Psychologically Through Blogging*,” Cambodia Communications Review 2010, December 2010, 18.

³⁶ Prey Lang is the “largest primary lowland dry evergreen forest remaining both in Cambodia and on the Indochinese Peninsular.” See, “Our Prey Lang,” (Blog) accessed July 2013, <http://ourpreylang.wordpress.com/>.

³⁷ International Federation of Journalists, “Joint Statement: Cambodia: Mam Sonando Released,” March 22, 2013, <http://asiapacific.ifi.org/en/articles/joint-statement-cambodia-mam-sonando-released>.

³⁸ See, for example, *Free the 15*, (Blog), accessed July 2013, <http://freethe15.wordpress.com/>.

and helped document Cambodia's rising number of traffic accidents, stirring debate on how to improve public safety.

There have been several blogosphere and technology gatherings among individuals who are passionate about ICTs and personally invested in improving Cambodia's ICT development. Organizers of events such as BarCamp have extended even beyond Phnom Penh, thanks to international donors and the private sector. Cambodia also hosted BlogFest Asia, a community-organized gathering of around 200 individuals from several Asian countries, in early November 2012.

VIOLATIONS OF USER RIGHTS

The news that the government was drafting a cybercrime law was the most concerning development for Cambodian internet users in the past year. While the legislation will ostensibly combat cybercrime, the use of existing criminal defamation and incitement laws to limit free expression and punish traditional journalists sets a troubling precedent for future abuses by the state. Neither is the government transparent about existing measures which govern the online space: a circular ordering cybercafés and telecommunications providers to store user data and provide it to police investigating threats to national security—without judicial oversight—has been in place since February 2012, though it only came to light in August 2012.

The right to freedom of expression is enshrined in Article 41 of Cambodia's constitution, and protected by international treaties that the country has ratified and incorporated into its domestic law.³⁹ However, Cambodia has a poor record of honoring the right in practice. Politicians past and present have sought to intimidate and suppress critics: Insofar as traditional media is concerned, Cambodia appears to be pluralistic, yet the government and its allies exercise tight control over print and broadcast news outlets, particularly those they perceive to be aligned with the political opposition.

The government uses legal provisions governing criminal defamation and incitement to punish those who use traditional media to share views that run counter to their own. In a 2012 report, Human Rights Watch, citing local NGOs, reported 12 imprisonments on those counts handed down by Cambodian courts since December 2010.⁴⁰ These punishments serve as a disincentive to individuals and organizations who wish to express their own views, encouraging self-censorship.

Since the last general election in 2008, the government has worked to increase the legislative arsenal available to the judiciary in the pursuit of government critics.⁴¹ A new penal code, which

³⁹ Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, Article 31 states that "the Kingdom of Cambodia shall recognize and respect human rights as stipulated in the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of human Rights, the covenants and conventions related to human rights, women's and children's rights."

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2012: Cambodia," <http://bit.ly/1dPDNdO>.

⁴¹ Cambodian Center for Human Rights and ARTICLE 19, "Cambodia: Freedom of Expression and the Point of No Return," Press Release, February 14, 2011, available at Scoop.co.nz, <http://bit.ly/e6bkli>.

came into force in December 2010,⁴² contains nine provisions which criminalize various forms of expression, while forthcoming laws that regulate unions and non-governmental organizations threaten to further undermine freedoms of association and expression.⁴³

In that context, internet users face the prospect of new legislation governing the online space with trepidation. In May 2012, the government announced it was in the process of drafting Cambodia's first ever cyber law,⁴⁴ with the stated intention of cracking down on online crimes so that it can “protect formal, private and copy-righted data from hacking, or the destruction of users' formal data, especially banks and related institutions.”⁴⁵

Besides legal measures, official harassment creates a climate of self-censorship on offensive or politically-sensitive topics among Cambodia's human rights and free expression communities. CCHR documented 123 cases of anti-media harassment between 2007 and 2011.⁴⁶ Among them, police were reported arresting journalists, preventing them from entering public events, confiscating or damaging their property, and threatening closure of their news outlets; other journalists were subject to physical violence in retaliation for their work. Cambodian publishers and editors have an active policy to cover less sensitive—and often less interesting—stories, “in order to stay out of harm's way.”⁴⁷

While bloggers have yet to be targeted in the same way as their traditional media counterparts, this restrictive information environment helps explain why comparatively few netizens are politically vocal. Furthermore, a 2010 conviction of a UN Food Program employee in Phnom Penh who printed articles from KI-Media for colleagues served as a warning to internet users. The Phnom Penh Municipal Court sentenced Seng Kunnaka to six months' imprisonment and a fine of 1 million riel (\$250) on charge of incitement to commit a felony under Article 495 of the new penal code,⁴⁸ though he had shared the information with just a handful of associates. Since this is an offense anyone using digital tools to distribute information is liable to commit daily, observers believe the conviction was intended as a deterrent. A more recent case also demonstrates the extension of offline tactics of control to new media. In early 2013, after a teacher described Phnom Penh police impounding his new motorbike on his personal Facebook account, police used the threat of a

⁴² Human Rights Watch, “Cambodia: New Penal Code Undercuts Free Speech”, December 23, 2010, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/12/22/cambodia-new-penal-code-undercuts-free-speech>.

⁴³ “Draft Law on Trade Unions,” available at *Sithi*, accessed August 2013 http://www.sithi.org/temp.php?url=law_infrastructur.php&tab_id=&type=1&lg; and “Draft Law on Non-governmental Organizations and Associations,” available at *Sithi*, accessed August 2013 http://www.sithi.org/temp.php?url=law_infrastructur.php&tab_id=&type=1&lg.

⁴⁴ Cambodian Center for Human Rights, “Human Rights Chronology,” *Sithi*, December 10, 2012, http://sithi.org/temp.php?url=crono_era.php&lg.

⁴⁵ Faine Greenwood, “As the Internet Raises Civic Voices in Cambodia, a Struggle Brews over Net Control,” *Techpresident*, March 27, 2013, <http://techpresident.com/news/wegov/23659/internet-civic-voices-cambodia-struggle-net-control>.

⁴⁶ “Harassment of Media,” *Sithi*, accessed July, 2013, http://www.sithi.org/temp.php?url=jour_case/jour_case.php&lg. No data has been published for the coverage period.

⁴⁷ “Soldiers for Free Speech,” *Phnom Penh Post*, January 6, 2010.

⁴⁸ International Federation for Human Rights, “Cambodia: Assault on Freedom of Expression Continues with Conviction of UN Staff,” December 23, 2010, <http://www.fidh.org/Cambodia-Assault-on-freedom-of-expression>.

defamation case against him to extract a signed statement that he would no longer discuss the topic over Facebook.⁴⁹

In February 2012, a joint Ministry of Interior and MPTC circular ordered internet cafes to set up surveillance cameras and store footage for three months; phone shops and telecommunications operators were told to register subscribers' national ID cards or international passport and visas, on the grounds such measures would "better promote protection of national security, safety and social order for the country."⁵⁰ The operators "are obliged to provide necessary documents including users' identity cards and used data"—which must be stored for six days—to designated officials "for purposes of investigation of any offense which is involved in issues of national security, safety and social order." Under the internal circular—which only came to public notice in August 2012—providers must also notify existing subscribers of the new requirements and are entitled to temporarily suspend service if they fail to produce ID within a month. As of April 2013, in accordance with Cambodia's habitually slow pace of adopting new regulation, the requirements have yet to be implemented, though civil society groups fear the impact of such supervision for public debate and social activism. The circular's vague definition of what constitutes an offense involving these issues, the lack of judicial oversight over officials' requests for user data, and the threat to impose unspecified fines or revoke licenses for telecommunications operators who fail to comply, all represent a lack of respect for digital rights.

Government websites have been vulnerable to technical violence in the form of cyberattacks since 2002. Targets in 2012 and 2013 included the Supreme Court and the national police.⁵¹ The same month, the hacktivist collective Anonymous released thousands of government documents online, including official personnel and expense records, details of lost Cambodian passports, and law enforcement exchanges with Cambodian-based embassies and consulates, in what the group described as retaliation for the arrest of the absconding Swedish founder of file-sharing website *The Pirate Bay*. Cambodian authorities deported Gottfrid Svartholm Warg under an international warrant in September 2012 to serve a one-year jail term in Sweden in relation to a 2010 conviction for copyright violations.⁵² While experts say many technical attacks go unreported in Cambodia, analysts have not identified systematic targeting of civil society groups or government critics.

⁴⁹ Cambodian Center for Human Rights, "Phel Phearun Accused of Defamation over a Facebook Post," Case Study Series, March 2013, http://cchrcambodia.org/index_old.php?url=media/media.php&p=factsheet_detail.php&fsid=54&id=5.

⁵⁰ John Weeks, "Cambodia's Default Internet Law – Draft Translation," *Jinja.Apsara*, July 5, 2012, http://jinja.apsara.org/2012/07/cambodias_default_internet_law-%E2%80%93-draft_translation/.

⁵¹ Ellyne Phneah, "Two More Cambodia Govt Sites Hacked and Defaced," *ZDNet*, January 10, 2013, <http://www.zdnet.com/two-more-cambodia-govt-sites-hacked-and-defaced-7000009622/>; Denise Hruby and Neou Vannarin, *Cambodia Daily*, January 10, 2013, <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/archive/government-websites-a-haven-for-hackers-7577/>.

⁵² Conal Urquhart, "Pirate Bay Co-founder Gottfrid Svartholm Warg Arrested in Cambodia," *Guardian*, September 3, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2012/sep/02/pirate-bay-founder-arrested-cambodia>.