

Dictatorship 2.0

RedesAyuda presenta:

- Record and study of events that violate, restrict and criminalize freedom of expression on the internet in Venezuela during 2018.

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www.redesayuda.org

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REDESAYUDA CIVIL ASSOCIATION

Dictatorship 2.0

IN VENEZUELA 2018

Record and study of events that violate, restrict and criminalize freedom of expression on the internet in Venezuela during 2018

2019

www.redesayuda.org



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Report of RedesAyuda

Dictatorship 2.0 in Venezuela 2018

Record and study of events that violate, restrict and criminalize freedom of expression on the Internet in Venezuela during 2018.

REDESAYUDA

The Non-Governmental Organization RedesAyuda was founded in 2014 with the intention of contributing to the promotion and strengthening of the creation of human social networks (digital or analog) free and independent as an indispensable instrument for the promotion and defense of human rights in a democratic society.

Among its main areas of interest are: Human Rights, freedom of expression, the media, access to the internet and the strengthening, preparation and training of activists, leaders, and defenders in the field of digital security and information.

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MOTIVE OF THE REPORT

Taking into account that the United Nations (hereinafter UN) enshrined 'internet access as a human right' by resolution A/HRC/20/L.13 of 29 June 2012; and based on Venezuela's current context where traditional media are harassed by government pressures, thousands of citizens have opted to stay informed through social networks and internet portals, situation that has been taken advantage of by the authorities to establish controls and criminalize the discontent expression of those who use these mechanisms.

This study aims to analyze specific events that occurred over the year: situations, actions, and policies in which the internet and 2.0 expression have been violated, these being the new communication paradigms used to intimidate and criminalize protest. It also seeks to demonstrate the advanced and established censorship that exists on the internet in Venezuela, as well as the communications and mechanisms that the State implements as blockages of these means of communication so that in this way information and communications are increasingly restricted to the citizens and thus perpetuate the communicational hegemony.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Democracy and freedom of expression are almost non-existent in Venezuela, which is why the role played by private digital media and social networks in overcoming communicational hegemony and breaking the censorship established as a law of the State is fundamental. Those are the only sources of information, dissemination and denounces in a real and reliable way for society.

From 2007 to date, the State has made an advance for the closure and informative censorship of traditional media. As a result of these progressive events that violated and criminalized freedom of expression, and the beginning of the rise of the internet and social networks, dozens of digital media are created that have also been threatened, censored, blocked and violated by the State with the purpose of controlling and criminalizing freedom of opinion and news diffusion. The aforementioned measures are also suffered by journalists, deputies, civilians, personalities and public opinion in general that question and denounce the Venezuelan regime.

At RedesAyuda, year after year we seek to record, study, analyze and monitor all digital events that undermine freedom of expression on the internet, the guarantee of access to the internet as a Human Right and access to real and reliable information. We also study the evidence of the social, political and economic context in Venezuela; and the power of the internet as the main way to know and demand reality in a country with a humanitarian, economic and political crisis.

We work for the defense and guarantee of the internet; and free, secure and neutral communications as a Fundamental Human Right in Venezuela.

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

In 2018, the consequences of the absence of a Rule of Law and the complex Humanitarian Emergency that the country is going through were only made visible by the digital media that positioned itself as the main source of information in Venezuela. Among the notorious events in which Human Rights and constitutional guarantees were violated are *The Massacre of El Junquito*, the presidential elections convened by the National Constituent Assembly (hereinafter ANC, acronym in Spanish), the arbitrary arrests of citizens, military and politicians such as the Congressman Juan Requesens and the Councilman Fernando Albán, the latter deceased for an alleged suicide in State custody.

The increase of censorship in traditional communication channels (radio and television) led the digital media to position itself as a tool for the dissemination of information about actions taken by the Venezuelan government and different national events, as well as being a source of common information for citizens. Consequently, mechanisms were implemented to criminalize, repress and limit public opinion, freedom of expression, press freedom and access to information on the internet; which represents the deepening of the dictatorship on the web, misinformation and the violation of the free exercise of Digital Rights.

Access to the Internet is a Human Right since 2012, and in Venezuela it is not guaranteed. Citizens in the country have to face the low quality of connection to enter the web; which is positioned at 1.61 Mbps, a figure cataloged as the lowest in Latin America by the MLAB database service and the Press and Society Institute (IPYS, acronym in Spanish).

In addition to the different mechanisms that lack in democracy and whose objective is to obstruct freedom of expression in digital media, such as the army of trolls to control public opinion on the internet, the Constitutional Law against Hate for Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance was implemented to counteract information, sanction information portals, prohibit news and opinions spreading, and even detain those who use media 2.0 to express themselves. The preliminary draft of the Constitutional Law of Cyberspace of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela was published and aims to further reduce the freedom of expression on the internet and essentially acts against the privacy of citizens on the web.

Dominance and control over the freedom of expression of public employees were made visible when, in a press release, the company of Petróleos Venezuela prohibited their workers to follow social media accounts that were not verified by this entity. The refusal to publish information on politics *El Universal* resulted in the resignation of journalists from this newspaper for the promotion of self-censorship.

From *RedesAyuda*, hacking cases to the news media, journalists and public figures were reported; who, after publishing information, articles or videos referring to national events and the decisions of the State, had their social media accounts arbitrarily usurped. On the same topic, cyberattacks on media and informative web pages occurred when sharing information about decisions of public interest made by the Venezuelan government; so that for hours and even days, citizens could not be informed through these means.

Blocking by Internet Service Providers increased this year. *RedesAyuda* registered 14 arbitrary blockades to digital media as a mechanism for citizens not to keep themselves

informed, in addition to blocking tools that aim to evade censorship as *The Onion Router*. Also, through the Bureau of Banking Institutions (Sudeban, acronym in Spanish), the State blocked access to bank accounts through *Virtual Private Networks* inside and outside the national territory. On the other hand, the *Constitutional Law Against Hate for Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance* was enacted in 2017; and during 2018 six citizens were detained under the provisions of this regulation, one was dismissed from his job.

During the development of this report, RedesAyuda registered in 2018 more than 40 cases where the violation and criminalization of freedom of expression was evident; in addition to the dictatorship's deepening on the internet, the limitations and restrictions faced by digital media, journalists, activists and citizens in general in the process of informing and being informed. This figure represents a significant increase over last year (discussed in RedesAyuda Annual Public Report 2017), where there were 25 cases, although the objective remains the same: a way of repressing opinion, minimizing the exercise of freedom of expression, limit the dissemination of information and restrict access to it.

CHAPTER II REPRESSIVE CONTEXT

DEEPENING OF THE DICTATORSHIP

SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

Venezuela is in a delicate social context, the country is facing an absent Rule of Law in all situations that afflict its citizens: shortage of medicines, poor public health conditions, inflation that according to the International Monetary Fund will reach 10,000,000% in 2019¹, and food shortages that had caused a child malnutrition rate of 60% on July 2018². The Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict (hereinafter OVCS, acronym in Spanish) took a record of 2,810 demonstrations against the decay of public services³ and 10,733 for other various reasons such as the mobilization of poorly paid personnel, complaints of increases in food prices, allegations of torture and cruel and inhuman treatment of opposition political leaders.

Faced with an absent State of Law and the non-acceptance of Humanitarian Aid by the government, Venezuela is in a Complex Humanitarian Emergency; and the digital media became a window to make visible all the consequences of the crisis. That is the reason why independent and informative websites, together with social media, became targets of censorship to prevent the Venezuelan population from being informed.

Throughout 2018, different events marked Venezuela's history. They represented an increase in the violation of Human Rights, the non-compliance and deterioration of constitutional guarantees, arbitrary decisions and the deepening of the dictatorship. Digital media became a source of information about the following landmarks:

The Massacre of El Junquito

On January 15, 2018, a group of people was victims of extrajudicial executions by Venezuelan police officers. Among them was Óscar Pérez, police officer and pilot of the Center for Scientific, Criminal and Criminal Investigation (hereinafter CICPC, acronym in Spanish), who made himself known on June 27 2017 for having thrown stun grenades and stealing a helicopter and flying it over the Supreme Court of Justice (hereinafter TSJ, acronym in Spanish) as a call to action on article 350 of the national Constitution. Subsequently, along with a group of people, Pérez was part of the theft of weapons to officials who were stationed in San Pedro de Los Altos' Command of the Bolivarian National Guard (hereinafter GNB, acronym in Spanish). In none of the acts carried out by Óscar Pérez were any victims.

Operation Gedeón was promoted by the Venezuelan government, who classified Óscar Pérez and his group as a *terrorist cell*, and killed 10 people: Daniel Enrique Soto Torres, Abraham Israel Agostini, José Alejandro Díaz Pimentel, Jairo Lugo Ramos, Abraham Lugo Bouquet, Lisbeth Andreina Ramírez Montilla. Two officers of the Special Actions Force

¹ ASTOLFO, Villaruel (2018) "IMF projected inflation of 10,000,000% for Venezuela in 2019" Punto de Corte. <https://bit.ly/2RMNiV7>

² El Nacional Web (2018) "Infant malnutrition rate reached 60% in July." <https://bit.ly/2onYI4m>

³ Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social "Venezuela: Record in social protests". <https://bit.ly/2Fn6UgI>

(hereinafter FAES, acronym in Spanish) also died: Roger González, Andreu Garate, and Heiker Vásquez. Vásquez was a *colectivo* (common name for pro-government armed supporter) of the group "Tres Raíces", from the 23 de Enero parish.

During the operation, Óscar Pérez and his team proved their willingness to surrender on several occasions in videos uploaded online which allowed their immediate visibility. On January 19 -4 days after Operation Gideon- forensic doctors issued the death certificates of the victims, and according to Tal Cual Digital, several journalists had access to them at the Bello Monte morgue. The certificates report deaths by bullets in the head⁴, denoting the character of extrajudicial executions of the operation.

As of January 30, 2018, 32 people were arbitrarily detained⁵ for allegedly being involved in Óscar Pérez's actions. The digital media served as a source of information on every detail of this case and those involved,⁶ victims of the violation of the right to life.

Presidential Elections

The presidential elections of 2018 were initially convened by the National Electoral Center (hereinafter CNE, acronym in Spanish) for April 22 following the ANC orders, an exclusive competence of the CNE as the Electoral Power. The elections were postponed until May 20. The electoral process as a whole lacked international observers and national guarantors to verify the authenticity of the results. The non-participation of opposition parties such as Voluntad Popular and Primero Justicia for non-renewal of the electoral credentials and the disqualification of candidates was made visible.

According to an article by El Nacional Web, the Venezuelan Electoral Observatory director highlighted: "*The process begins with the wrong foot, with many irregularities that leave its legitimacy in doubt*". On the other hand, Luisana Subero, National Coordinator of Voto Joven said: "*The scenario is set for a single party to participate; they are not taking into account alternative political organizations to the government's ideology (...). The announced stages do not have the necessary times to be possible, this means that the process can not be truly audited.*"⁷

The current president, Nicolás Maduro, was re-elected with 5,823,72 votes. After these results were known, Venezuelan journalist Eugenio Martínez -expert in political elections for Proavinci, El Pitazo, Diario Las Américas and VivoPlay- expressed through his Twitter account that there was a 71% abstention in the re-election: "*As Chavismo loves percentages, it is worth saying that the votes that the CNE awards to @NicolasMaduro correspond in reality to 29% of the citizens qualified to vote. That is, 71% of citizens did not vote for the re-election of Maduro.*"⁸

⁴ Tal Cual Digital (2018) "Caídos en la masacre de El Junquito murieron por disparo en la cabeza" <https://bit.ly/2DQ9o2K>

⁵ El Nacional Web (2018) "32 personas han sido detenidas por caso de Óscar Pérez" <https://bit.ly/2JLkcW0>

⁶ MAYORCA, Javier (2018) "Anotaciones sobre la masacre de El Junquito, por Javier Mayorca" <https://bit.ly/2DzQBYS>

⁷ El Nacional Web (2018) "Lapsos para elecciones no permiten las garantías mínimas". <https://bit.ly/2siVQdZ>

⁸ MARTÍNEZ, Eugenio (2018) <https://bit.ly/2B2Kufd>

It is important to note that Venezuelan elections are carried out through electronic voting and its transparency is carried out by the CNE, an organization that lacks autonomy. Before the 2018 presidential elections, the CNE conducted an audit⁹ where representatives of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (hereinafter PSUV, acronym in Spanish), the Organized Committee of Independent Electoral Parties (COPEI, acronym in Spanish) and Esperanza para el Cambio were present, as well as national telecommunications companies CANTV and Movilnet.

The political propaganda in favor of Nicolás Maduro turned out to be invasive for internet users. Advertisement inviting people to vote for Maduro in the May 20 elections appeared on social media, digital applications, games, and YouTube videos constantly. Online ads must be paid in foreign currency. Google Ads allows the payment of this service, specifying the cost of each click to the advertising, the number of times it appears to users and sites selected by the client.

An article by Efecto Cocuyo related to political propaganda in digital media establishes: "*Electoral propaganda with such a high presence must suppose a high enough payment for that kind of exposure, due to the economic incentive wanted for page managers.*"¹⁰. There was not an audit process to know the origin of the money used in political propaganda.

During the presidential elections, the IPYS registered, through measurements made by citizens around the country "*who carried out 374 tests from their broadband and mobile connections*", that during the electoral process Venezuelans browsed the internet from mobile devices at only 0.45 megabits. "*The slowness in mobile browsing during the elections shows a progressive deterioration in the speed of connection in Venezuela,*"¹¹ according with their reports.

Arbitrary Detention to Congressman Juan Requesens

During 2018, the arrests of political prisoners and arbitrary detentions of active members of the military have increased, as established in a report on repression in Venezuela by the Venezuelan Criminal Forum (FPV, acronym in Spanish). On July 31, 2018, a total of 248 political prisoners were registered.¹²

On August 7, Congressman Juan Requesens was arbitrarily detained by officials of the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (hereinafter SEBIN, acronym in Spanish) at his home. Several Non-Governmental Organizations (hereinafter NGOs) and digital media made Requesens' detention visible, a detention made without previous raid of his immunity as a member of the Parliament.

After two days of detention, through Requesens Twitter account, it was announced that the cellphone number he used in the instant messaging application WhatsApp was

⁹ Telesur (2018) "Audit minute electoral data transmission". <https://bit.ly/2SD0hIN>

¹⁰ GUTIERREZ, Jeanfreddy (2018) "Maduro's electoral propaganda floods everything on the Internet" Efecto Cocuyo. <https://bit.ly/2zRyqge>

¹¹ Instituto de Prensa Y Sociedad (IPYS) (2018) "Presidential re-election with the media in crisis | Special Elections 2018". <https://bit.ly/2smBqq7>

¹² Foro Penal Venezolano (2018) "Report on the repression in Venezuela (May, June and July 2018)". <https://bit.ly/2EogtuF>

allegedly activated by SEBIN officials. Subsequently, on August 10, two videos were made public: in one of them, Congressman Requesens claims to have collaborated with Julio Borges in the presumed attack on the president. In the second, Requesens comes out half naked wearing dirty underwear. A source from Primero Justicia assured El Nacional Web that Requesens was drugged to force him to testify.

Requesens' lawyer, Joel García, reported via Twitter on November 12 that for the second time the Congressman had access to his defense: "*The Congressman remains morally strong and convinced in the fight for democracy and freedom of Venezuela.*"¹³

The detention of Congressman Juan Requesens reveals the arbitrariness of the Venezuelan government: due process was not carried out, his parliamentary immunity was violated, and he was held isolated and subjected to torture; which goes against what is established in Articles 44, 46, 49 and 200 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Detention and death of lawyer and Councilman Fernando Albán

On October 5, 2018, at the Simón Bolívar International Airport in Maiquetía, Fernando Albán was arbitrarily detained by SEBIN officials. After his capture, his whereabouts were unknown for 48 hours. Albán was arrested allegedly for attempted assassination, terrorism, treason, frustrated homicide in the person of the President and the military high command, and association to commit a crime.

Subsequently, on October 8, 2018, Ombudsman Tarek William Saab, through the Venezolana de Televisión State channel (hereinafter VTV, acronym in Spanish), announced Albán alleged suicide at SEBIN headquarters in Plaza Venezuela. Through traditional and digital media, different NGOs -like Provea- published a statement saying that the Councilman's death is a "direct consequence of State terrorism".¹⁴ Moreover, RedesAyuda alongside Humano Derecho Radio Station, issued a statement through www.redesayuda.org requesting an investigation of the case by international organizations and the direct responsibility of the State. The statement reads, among other things, as it follows:

"(...) we urge the International Red Cross to go to the SEBIN headquarters in Plaza Venezuela to make sure the physical and mental state of people arrested there (...). We call on the international organizations that protect the Rule of Law and promoters of Human



@JuanRequesens Date: 08/09/2018
Source: Twitter

¹³ GARCÍA, Joel (2018) Twitter @joelgarcia69. <https://bit.ly/2SxkOi6>

¹⁴ Provea (2018) "Death of Councilman Albán: consequence of State terrorism". <https://bit.ly/2rrYqez>

Rights of the inter-American and universal system, so they can speak out about the forced disappearance of the Councilman and his subsequent death."¹⁵

The judicial process to explain and clarify the death of Fernando Albán is still open. Joel García, lawyer of the Councilman, expressed irregularities in the investigation and assured that the prosecutor documents show that Albán was assassinated: "Saab declares that it is a suicide; If so, I invite him to see the order of initiation of the investigation(...) in which the commissioned prosecutor points out homicide as the cause of death."¹⁶

Control over digital media

By becoming the main source of information for Venezuelans, digital media also became a target for the control and monitoring of information and opinions that are spread through these electronic media. A project outside of all legal frameworks carried out by the Venezuelan government called "*Training Project of the Trolls Army of the Bolivarian Revolution*"¹⁷ arises to confront "the media war" in digital information spaces.

The Trolls Army has the following hierarchy: squad (1 person who manages 25 accounts), platoon (10 people who manage 230 accounts), company (50 people who manage 1,150 accounts), battalion (100 people who manage 2,300 accounts) and brigades (500 people who manage 11,500 accounts). Specifically, the squads are subdivided into press (content creators), design (audiovisual content creators) system (creators of hacker and cracker web applications), incubators (creators of fake accounts in social media) and attack (aimed at creating false positives to confuse the opposition).

The Trolls Arm project specifies the types of squad as follows: pro-government, opponents, neutrals, distraction and fake news. To reinforce control and surveillance in digital media, this project includes 500 false accounts destined to spread confusing and fictional information distributed as follows: 100 "Chavistas", 100 "Neutral", 100 "Sexy women", 100 "Flamer", 100 "News".

The creation of a project whose main objective is to increase surveillance and control in different digital communication media leads to self-censorship and communicational hegemony through harassment; which violates democratic principles, freedom of expression and free-thinking of Venezuelans.

On the other hand, the ANC -formally installed on August 4- 2017 enacted on November 8 of that same year the "*Constitutional Law Against Hate for Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance*"¹⁸, although enacting laws is not within the functions of an ANC.

Pedro Alfonso del Pino, constitutionalist lawyer for the informative web portal Efecto Cocuyo explained: "*There is no type of legal security. The citizen is more exposed to the authorities discretion (...). When we speak of hate it is a highly abstract concept, and the*

¹⁵ RedesAyuda (2018) "Statement: The crime of Fernando Albán is responsibility of the State". <https://bit.ly/2RNODe8>

¹⁶ El Nacional Web (2018) "Family lawyer: "Acts of the Albán case say it was a homicide". <https://bit.ly/2zSfKxR>

¹⁷ Project of Trolls Army Training. <https://bit.ly/2A953rb>

¹⁸ Published in Official Gazette N.º 41.274. Date: November 8, 2017.

line between what is hate and what is freedom of expression becomes dangerous to define.”¹⁹

The Law Against Hate is not recognized for its illegitimacy and unconstitutionality, and for being enacted by the ANC. The law does not determine the criminal types and which crimes are part of "incitement to hatred". It has a characteristic of discretion: 15 constituents will determine who will be punished and charged for "inciting hatred". All of the above goes clearly against democracy, freedom of expression and the right to information.

Although the *Law Against Hate* was approved in 2017, it was not until January 10, 2018, that authorities began charging citizens with *incitement to hatred*. There are 7 open cases of Venezuelans who were arrested and arbitrarily dismissed in accordance with the provisions of article 20 of said regulation.

Article 20: Anyone who, publicly or through any means suitable for public dissemination, encourages, promotes or incites hatred, discrimination or violence against a person or group of persons, on account of their real or presumed belonging to a certain social, ethnic, religious, political, of sexual orientation, and gender identity, gender expression or any other discriminatory reason will be punished with imprisonment of ten to twenty years, without prejudice to civil and disciplinary liability for damages caused.

State decisions and actions regarding the digital context go beyond what is established in Article 57 and 58 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; in addition to criminalizing, suppressing, censoring and violating democracy and freedom of expression in Venezuela, Human Rights being that must be guaranteed.

Article 57: Everyone has the right to freely express their thoughts, ideas or opinions orally, in writing or through any other form of expression, and to make use of any means of communication and dissemination without establishing censorship. Whoever makes use of this right assumes full responsibility for everything expressed. Anonymity, war propaganda, discriminatory messages, and those that promote religious intolerance are not allowed.

Article 58: Communication is free and plural, and involves the duties and responsibilities indicated by law. Everyone has the right to timely, truthful and impartial information, without censorship, in accordance with the principles of this Constitution, as well as the right of reply and rectification when they are directly affected by inaccurate or offensive information. Children and adolescents have the right to receive adequate information for their integral development.

CHRONOLOGICAL REGISTER OF DIGITAL EVENTS 2018

DIGITAL SUCCESS REGISTER 2018

REDESAYUDA ANNUAL PUBLIC REPORT

JANUARY

- January 13: Dismissal of Metro worker under the Law Against Hate
 - January 15: National Assembly and Capitolio TV social media hacking
-

¹⁹ LEON, Ibis (2018) "Law against hate threatens six Articles of the Constitution, according to experts" Efecto Cocuyo. <https://bit.ly/2EcNidb>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January 26: Diosdado Cabello harasses journalists during his VTV show • Hacking of Venezuelan cartoonist Rayma Suprani's website • January 30: El Universal censors politics related content on its social media • January 31: Resignations at El Universal over self-censorship in its social media
FEBRUARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • February 22: PDVSA forbade its employees to follow accounts on social media
MARCH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 01: Venezuela has the slowest internet connection in Latin America, according to IPYS • Cyberattack on Runrunes website • March 08: Two Universidad de Los Andes student leaders imputed for crimes contemplated in the Law Against Hate • March 09: Mayerlin Villanueva, journalist of Diario Católico, went to the Prosecutor's Office after being threatened
APRIL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blocking to El Pitazo by CANTV • DDoS attack to El Pitazo
MAY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May 08: DDoS attack to Vendata, open data portal in Venezuela • May 10: Detention of Twitter user for posting presidential plane route • May 15: Vendata back online • May 22: CONATEL initiates a sanctioning procedure against El National Web under the Law Against Hate
JUNE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June 06: Media reports about the disappearance of Twitter user Pedro Patricio Jaime Criollo • June 06: Blocking to La Patilla by CANTV • June 06: How to set up your internet connection against CANTV blocking by La Patilla - #LaPatillaBloqueada • June 07: Blocking to El Nacional by CANTV in several cities • June 14: Blocking to several pornography websites by CANTV • June 21: Blocking to TOR by CANTV • June 22: Manuel Rosales denounces "illegal take" of Un Nuevo Tiempo political party's Twitter account
JULY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July 01: Cyberattack on El Pitazo website • July 02: Caracas Press Club rejects arbitrary blocking of websites in Venezuela • July 12: El Nacional meets more than a month blocked



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- July 12: Cyberattack to Punto de Corte website
 - July 18: RedesAyuda explanation on TOR censorship
 - July 19: DDoS attack to runrún.es
 - July 27: Blocking to CaraotaDigital by CANTV
 - July 31: Cyberattack on Armando.Info and Crónica.Uno websites

AUGUST

- August 04: New computer attack on El Pitazo website
- August 08: New computer attack on Armando.info website
- August 15: Blocking to Armando.Info through http from private servers and CANTV
- August 15: Convide reports the fourth attack to his website
- August 21: Twitter users report blocking to El Nacional website
- August 22: New blocking to El Nacional
- August 22: Blocking to LaCabilla by CANTV + DDoS attack
- August 22: Guide to access content of La Patilla website
- August 24: La Patilla remains blocked
- August 26: LaCabilla invites its users through Twitter to use a VPN to access the portal

SEPTEMBER

- September 08: Blocking to Blog del Grupo Ávila by CANTV
- September 08: CANTV reinforces blocking to El Pitazo website domain
- September 11: CONATEL prohibits Armando.info to publish information about Alex Nain Saab (entrepreneur linked to CLAP)
- September 11: Cyberattack on the website of the Observatory of Human Rights of the University of the Andes from China
- September 15: Hacking to Kevin Monsalve (El Politigato)
- September 17: Firefighters imputed for "incitement to hatred"
- September 25: Blocking of Presidential Press Twitter account
- September 26: Article by Sebastiana Barráez, a journalist from Caraota Digital: "This is how military officials are held in the DGCIM."
- September 27: Hacking to Sebastiana Barráez Twitter account, CaraotaDigital journalist

OCTOBER

- October 01: Blocking of Noticia al día website
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- October 02: Investigation of IPYS: "Intercut Intermittent Blockings in Venezuela"
 - October 03: Twitter thread on "Training Project of the Trolls Army of the Bolivarian Revolution"
 - October 25: Restricted access to Armando.info website
 - October 26: Restricted access to Armando.info website
 - Google launches app against censorship in Venezuela

NOVEMBER

- November 09: DDoS attack to TalCualDigital

DECEMBER

December 24: Sudeban blocks access to banks through VPN



CENSORSHIP: DIGITAL CONTEXT

In 2017, the news broadcasted in traditional media led to the cancellation of airing concessions of international television channels and radio stations in Venezuela by a decision of the National Telecommunications Commission (hereinafter CONATEL, acronym in Spanish). As a result, the Venezuelan population migrated from the television and radio to digital media in their search for information. That year, RedesAyuda registered more than 25 cases where freedom of expression and access to information were violated.

During 2018, informative websites and social networks were positioned, even more, as an informative medium to denounce and make visible the consequences of the State's actions. That is why the demand for information through these means increased steadily, which meant the growth of censorship, restrictions and arbitrary decisions by the Venezuelan regime to limit, control, repress, punish and criminalize opinion and information, and to weaken access to different digital media.

Armando.info is an independent and informative website dedicated to publish and broadcast journalistic investigations. On several occasions, Armando.info has published information related to the Local Supply and Production Committees (hereinafter CLAP, acronym in Spanish), in which Colombian businessman Alex Nain Saab Morán is mentioned as part of acts of alleged corruption. These reports caused a demand by Saab Morán to 4 journalists: Roberto Deniz, Joseph Poliszuk, Ewald Scharfenberg and Alfredo Meza.

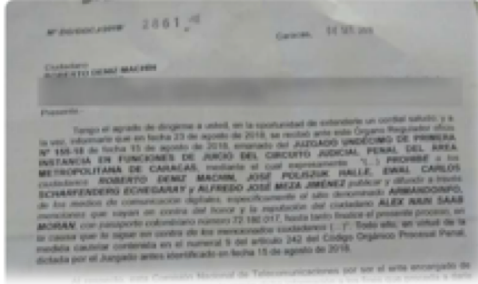
The Venezuelan government, through the telecommunications regulator in Venezuela (CONATEL), sent the Armando.info journalists sued by Saab Morán, a document which states the following:

"(...) exhorts them to comply with the decision issued by the Eleventh Court of the First Instance of the Criminal Judicial Circuit of the Metropolitan Area of Caracas" which prohibits from spreading and publishing information associated with the businessman that "goes against honor and reputation.."²⁰

²⁰ Tal Cual Digital (2018) "Conatel prohibits Armando.info portal from mentioning CLAP supplies provider". <https://bit.ly/2Ntz7p9>

SNTP @sntpvenezuela Seguir

El #SNTP rechaza y denuncia el hostigamiento judicial contra los periodistas de [Armando.Info](#) y los ataques contra la plataforma digital, como represalia oficial por la investigación que han hecho sobre hechos de corrupción en la importación de alimentos para los CLAP

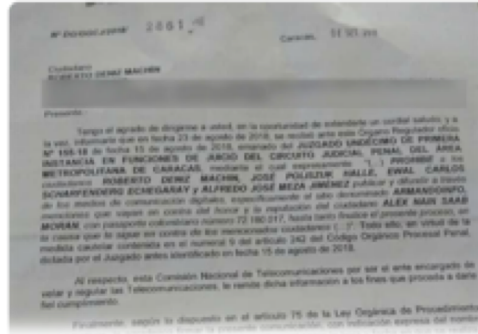


@sntpvenezuela Date: 09/11/2018

Source: Twitter

Joseph Poliszuk @jopoliszuk Seguir

Conatel ahora toca las puertas de nuestras casas para censurar no a medios sino a periodistas... Apelan al "honor" de un "empresario" para callar el derecho a saber qué comen los ciudadanos más vulnerables de un país con hambre.



@jopoliszuk Date: 09/11/2018

Source: Twitter

After the publication of the report on the CLAP, different tweets were emitted through Twitter account @pepepragavzla threatening the journalists²¹. At the time, they do not reside in Venezuela, although they continue to do journalism for Armando.info.

The domain, control, and violation of the freedom of expression of public workers in Venezuela was made evident in a statement signed on February 20 by Alexis Chacón, legal consultant of the state-owned company Petroleos de Venezuela (hereinafter PDVSA, acronym in Spanish) which establishes the following:

"It is strictly forbidden to follow people on social networks (Twitter, Facebook or any other) except the ones authorized by the Corporation as official."

The Management of Prevention and Control of Losses is in charge of monitoring employees social media accounts, and those who do not comply with the provisions of the aforementioned statement will be subject to sanctions and dismissals for not following the guidelines.



PDVSA Statement Date: 02/20/2018

Source: Espacio Público

²¹ Instituto de Prensa Y Sociedad (2018) "Journalist is victim of threats for reporting a case of corruption that links the president of the Republic." <https://bit.ly/2SizYkP>

Another digital media victim of censorship was El Nacional Web when on May 22 the Venezuelan government (through CONATEL) initiated a sanctioning procedure²² for the alleged breach of Article 27 of the Law of Social Responsibility in Radio and Television and Article 14 of the *Law Against Hate*.

In the statement, the telecommunications regulator in Venezuela²³ accuses El Nacional Web of "spreading messages that disown the legitimately constituted authorities." Facing the sanctioning procedure, the President editor of El Nacional, Miguel Henrique Otero, said:

*"The government shows its desperation in trying to silence the media and cause them to self-censor, but in this case, they will not achieve it."*²⁴

In September, Diosdado Cabello, president of the ANC, in his program "El Mazo Dando" broadcasted on the public national television channel VTV, said that a journalism university could be built at El Nacional headquarters; after making a reference to an article published by this media by the title "President of Colombia assured that he will not extradite Julio Borges".²⁵

When a journalistic document about the State's actions is published in digital media, censorship, blockades, and sanctions occur with more frequency. This is not accidental: in Venezuela censorship represents prohibitions and limitations of information and opinions.

Internet in Venezuela: Figures, statistics and providers.

In Venezuela, the exercise of digital rights is restricted because of the lack of investment in infrastructure (fiber optics, repeaters, servers, equipment). Control over access to foreign currency for the maintenance and improvement of Internet Service Providers (PSI, acronym in Spanish) and hyperinflation limits the possibility for Venezuelans to browse the internet in optimal conditions of connection speed, uploads, and downloads. It is necessary to create public policies and strategies and to implement new technologies as a response to the increase in the demand for internet access by Venezuelans and the flux of information in digital media. According to a study conducted by Tendencias Digitales, "Penetration and Internet use in Venezuela"²⁶, by 2018 there were a total of 18,778,584 users, taking into consideration that this service does not reach rural areas or indigenous communities in the country.

However, a study conducted in 23 states of the country by IPYS and the MLAB, associated with the New America's Open Technology Institute, Google Open Source Research and Princeton University's Planet Lab, determined that Venezuelans access the network "at an average of 1.61 Mbps in the Fixed Broadband (BAF, acronym in Spanish),

²² El Nacional Web (2018) "Conatel initiates sanction procedure against El Nacional Web".

<https://bit.ly/2kf9ubf>

²³ Conatel (2018) "Conatel initiates sanctioning administrative procedure to the electronic medium". El Nacional Web. <https://bit.ly/2Puwu32>

²⁴ El Nacional Web (2018) "Procedure against El Nacional is a political retaliation." <https://bit.ly/2GGqczO>

²⁵ El Nacional Web (2018) "President of Colombia assured that he will not extradite Julio Borges."

<https://bit.ly/2QXpjSV>

²⁶ Tendencias Digitales (2018) "Penetration and uses of the internet in Venezuela". <https://bit.ly/2CFrwhd>

the lowest figure in Latin America."²⁷ According to IPYS, after data collection through a speed test on its website, "the 6,181 collected tests are an indicator of the precariousness of navigation in the country".

Internet servers

In 2018, PSI presented different malfunctions: many users in different areas were left without internet connection either due to cable theft, fiber optic, equipment damage, or signal loss and poor connectivity.

According to the study conducted by IPYS and MLAB "Navigation to the minimum expression, internet situation in Venezuela", PSI presented limited connections or poor quality, which prevented Venezuelans from accessing the network in optimal conditions and freely. The tests performed to the different internet providers yielded the following results:

PSI	CANTV	SUPERCABLE	MOVILNET	MOVISTAR	DIGITEL	INTER
UPLOAD	5,7 Mbps	5,3 Mbps	13,6 kbps	5,7 Mbps	1,01 Mbps	9,0 Mbps
DOWNLOAD	2,2 Mbps	1,04 Mbps	0,8 kbps	2,8 Mbps	0,2 Mbps	2,5 Mbps

Given the connection precariousness of different internet service providers in Venezuela, users have reported a lack of customer service and demanded the recovery of internet connection; denouncing that many of them have remained without internet service for very long periods of time. Venezuelans used digital media to express their dissatisfaction with PSI.



Source: Twitter

Date: 10/20/2018

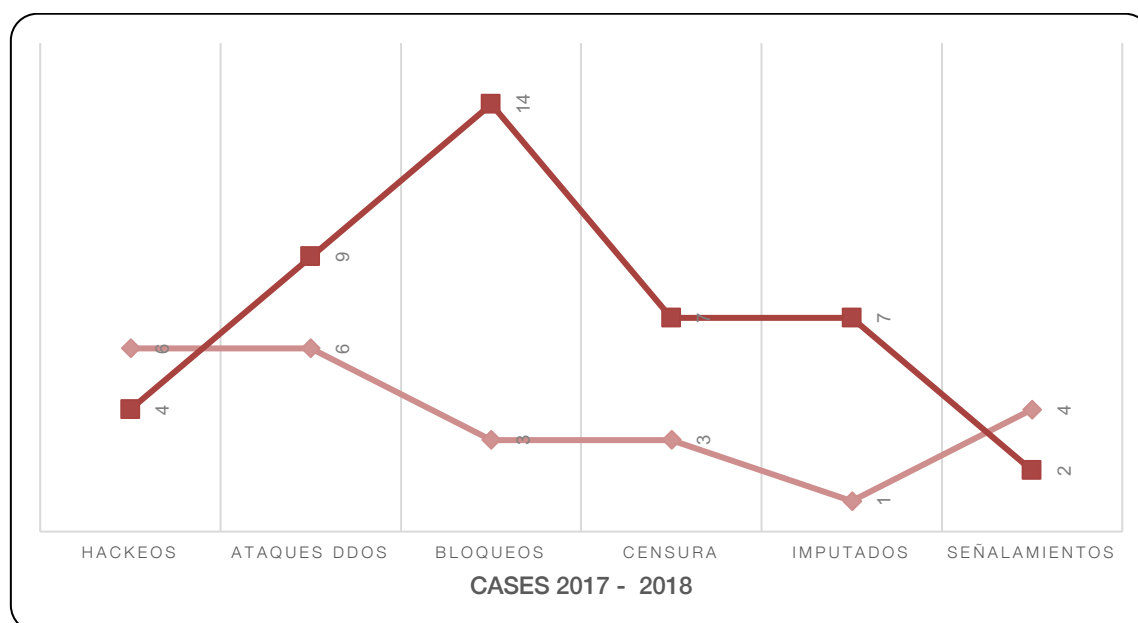
Source: Twitter

²⁷ Instituto de Prensa Y Sociedad (2018) "Navigation to the minimum expression". <https://bit.ly/2oBduEC>

CHAPTER III VIOLATION AND CRIMINALIZATION TO DIGITAL SECURITY AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Throughout 2018, censorship increased in the world 2.0: freedom of expression and free thinking have been criminalized, in addition to the restriction access to information and freedom of the press; which represents the lack of democracy in Venezuela. Compared with 2017, in a context of public protests and strong repression, more than 20 cases of violations of digital rights were recorded. In 2018, 40 cases were registered including hacking, cyber-attacks, blocking of webpages and informative websites, imputations, censorship, and harassment. The mechanisms of censorship in digital media to limit citizens' access to information increased compared to the previous year.

CASES	HACKING	DDOS ATTACKS	BLOCKINGS	CENSORSHIP	IMPUTATIONS	THREATS	TOTAL
2017	6	6	3	3	1	4	23
2018	4	9	14	7	7	2	43



HACKING CASE:

All cases of hacking into webpages and public figures in 2018:

CAPITOLIO TV

- Occupation: Public access national television news channel
- Case: Website and social media hacking
- Date: January 15

Capitolio TV is an information channel that was born from the need to show Venezuelans all parliamentary sessions in the National Assembly, elected through universal direct and secret vote in December 2015 elections. Previously, the National Assembly Television channel (hereinafter ANTV, acronym in Spanish) was in charge of transmitting the National Assembly meetings. After the parliamentary elections of 2015, under Diosdado Cabello orders, the ANTV airing concession passed to the channel's workers and it was renamed to the "National Audiovisual Television Foundation ANTV". To this day, this TV channel transmits sessions of the ANC and cultural shows.

On January 15, 2018, Capitolio TV social media accounts (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube) were hacked. They served as an information outlet of the current National Assembly. According to a statement issued by <http://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve>, this action prevented more than 120 thousand subscribers from being informed about the parliamentary sessions. *"This criminal action left more than 121 thousand subscribers without being able to live witness the ordinary sessions held by the National Assembly; without considering the more than 11200 followers that read, tweet after tweet on the little blue bird platform, all the incidents that happen in the Federal Legislative Palace."*²⁸

CapitolioTV Twitter account (@ElCapitolioTv) does not broadcast information since January 10, 2018, and its YouTube channel "El Capitolio TV", with 120,464 subscribers, does not broadcast a parliamentary session since January 9, 2018: after the hacking, no information has been published. However, in order to keep citizens informed, they created the My Assembly application, whose purpose is to provide information about the debates, laws, agreements and everything related to the parliamentary sessions.



@AsambleaVE Date: 01/15/2018

Source: Twitter



@olviaylozano Date: 10/16/2018

Source: Twitter

²⁸ Prensa Asamblea Nacional (2018) "Hacked social networks from the National Assembly channel, El Capitolio TV". <https://bit.ly/2G8uuhl>

RAYMA SUPRANI

- Occupation: Cartoonist
- Case: Website hacking
- Date: January 27

Rayma Suprani is a Universidad Central de Venezuela journalist and cartoonist that worked on several Caracas' newspapers such as *El Diario*, *Economía Hoy*, *el Diario de Caracas* y *El Universal*. Suprani was dismissed from *El Universal* on 2014, after 19 years publishing her cartoons, for making a drawing that "showed Hugo Chavez's signature and was critic of the health system in Venezuela". She is currently not living in Venezuela.

On January 27, 2018, Suprani's website was hacked, and she reported it through her Twitter account (@raimacaricatura): "Someone hacked the website I think they didn't like today's cartoon ... we are working to activate it. "

The website was hacked after the Venezuelan journalist published a cartoon in which she referred to the appearance of the villa where the official Oscar Pérez and his team were extrajudicially executed in *The Massacre of El Junquito*.

"For this caricature the webpage was hacked... you can help me for everyone to see it thanks."²⁹ Rayma Suprani reported via Twitter. To this day, her website is available and was fully recovered.



Caricatura Rayma Suprani Date: 01/27/2018

Source: Twitter

²⁹ SUPRANI, Rayma (2018) @raimacaricatura Twitter. <https://bit.ly/2Eb5S5l>

SEBASTIANA BARRAEZ

- Occupation: Journalist
- Case: Twitter account hacking
- Date: September 28

Sebastiana Barráez is a Venezuelan journalist for Quinto Día y Punto de Corte. On September 28, 2018, her Twitter account (@SebastianaB) was hacked. RedesAyuda communicated with the journalist to expand the details of her case.

RedesAyuda communicated with the journalist to expand the details of her case. Barráez told RedesAyuda that she realized her account was hacked "when she was sending various tweets related to an article where she denounced the cruel treatment that military detainees were receiving in the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence."

She expressed that she did not know what method was used to hack the account but noted that it presented problems when quoting tweets, since in doing so what appeared as quoted was a tweet with pornographic content or a text in a foreign language. Barráez stressed: "When I tried to change the password by opening the account on another device that is not my iPad, I realized that I didn't have access to the password nor the email that supports that Twitter account. I kept using Twitter with the account I had on the iPad, but I couldn't follow some people that interested me".

The journalist's account was hacked after publishing the article "This is how military officials are held in the DGCIM"³⁰ in which she talks about the mistreatment and torture in the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM, acronym in Spanish); although when interviewing he said: "I don't know if the article was the cause of the intervention on my account, but it happened right at the moment when I was spreading that article about torture to the military officials."

When asked about the reason why she believes the hacking happens to people dedicated to making the different situations of the country visible, the journalist said: "Without a doubt, all of us with an anti-power position and who denounce events that bother the power are subject to receive such aggressions that seek to censor or silence us."

Although the journalist received help from IPYS, the hacked account could not be recovered and she now has a new account to continue reporting and writing. As closing remarks, she said: "There are many resources through which governments try to silence the work of the press and in modern times one of the most used tactics is the hacking of accounts."



@SebastianaSin Date: 09/28/2018

Source: Twitter

³⁰ BARRAEZ, Sebastiana (2018) "This is how military officials are held in the DGCIM". <https://bit.ly/2xEaPQa>

KEVIN MONSALVE "EL POLITIGATO"

- Occupation: Editing professor at the National Film School
- Case: Instagram account hacking
- Date: September 15

Kevin Monsalve is the creator of El Politigato, a peculiar character represented by a feline who speaks clearly, sarcastically and through humor to another Chavista character on different national issues such as Petro (Venezuelan crypto-active), presidential elections and inflation.

On September 15, 2018, he reported via his Twitter (@GamerKevMo) that his Instagram account had been hacked.

Monsalve declared for RedesAyuda that he realized the hack when he got a message with a verification code from the application and it was in another language: *"When I checked my account, it was disabled and couldn't access"*.

Monsalve stated that the method used to hack into his account was probably access to his cell phone *"through some application"* that he himself could have downloaded. The process to recover the account was *"slow and tedious"*. Initially he tried to recover it directly through Instagram; however, he said: *"the means (the app) enables are not very good for this type of claims."* He then contacted Access Now Organization on the recommendation of Melanio Escobar, Director of RedesAyuda, and highlighted: *"They already taught me how to put a multi-lock to my account (...)"*. Monsalve's account could be recovered thanks to the help of Gaby Castellano, who guided him throughout this process. He considered that this hack was harmless *"for what could really have been"* since he did not lose valuable information and it did not erase its content. *"It's not something I consider rare in this country. The government wants to control information and any kind of dissident thinking. Any opportunity they have to affect the opposition speech, they will take advantage of it,"* he said.

The creator of El Politigato said he is using methods to protect himself in case he faces a similar situation, and he considers that *"perhaps the theme and scope"* he has achieved with his videos was the key point for the hack: *"I'm no longer well below the radar, and that inevitably brings unwanted attention."*

Finally, Monsalve stressed that he will not leave aside the videos of El Politigato: *"I do not plan to stop at the moment. Beyond entertainment, these videos are a personal way of channeling the whole situation, it's like my therapy..."*



Source: Twitter

ATTACKING CASE:

All cases of DDOS attacks to websites in 2018:

A DDoS Attack or a Denial of Service Attack consists of sending large amounts of access requests to the website server, at the same time from different IP addresses, which results in access requests overloading the capacity of the server causing the page to stop working and preventing users from accessing it.

RUNRUNES

Runrunes is a digital media dedicated to broadcasting news and research about different events in the country. On March 5, 2018, it was published through its twitter account (@RunRunesWeb) that the servers of the page <http://runrun.es/> were being attacked since March 3. Despite this, they assured they will continue to use social media to inform users. As of today, their website is available.



@RunRunesWeb Date: 03/05/2018

Source: Twitter

EL PITAZO

El Pitazo is a digital news outlet working under the slogan: "Where El Pitazo sounds, others are silent." They are dedicated, thanks to a team of journalists, to spread the news about the events that occur in the country. Although they allow Venezuelans to be informed, they were victims of more than 3 Denial of Service attacks during 2018.

The first cyberattack was made on April 23 at 4 in the afternoon. According to reports, large amounts of computers requested access to the information website from foreign IP addresses, mostly from Argentina and Brazil. Through a statement, they explained that "is the fourth attack in 13 months recorded by the news site." El Pitazo also used its Twitter account (@EIPitazoTV) to inform citizens about the event.



@EIPitazoTV Date: 04/23/2018

Source: Twitter

The second attack occurred on June 2018 between Friday 29 and Saturday 30. Through their website <https://elpitazo.com> they reported that they suffered two DDoS attacks, where there was a request to enter from 1,800 different IP addresses. El Pitazo uses three domains (elpitazo.com, elpitazo.info, and pitazo.ml) and the attacks were directed to each one of them. They reported that the first was directed to elpitazo.com with the request for access to 800 IP addresses, and the second was against elpitazo.info and the pitazo.ml; the latter they said "was directed from 1,000 different IPs".³¹

³¹ El Pitazo (2018) "El Pitazo suffered two new massive attacks on its servers." <https://bit.ly/2EaylrV>

The latest cyber attack recorded against El Pitazo occurred on November 11, 2018. Reports said, "this time the attacks came from IP addresses located in Germany, Brazil, Poland, and even the US, although with the use of VPN the location can be hidden."³²

In that opportunity users could not access from 11:00 am on Friday to 9:00 am on Saturday, according to a statement at <https://elpitazo.com>.

VENDATA

Vendata is an open data platform created by IPYS and Transparencia Venezuela Organization that "makes available to Venezuelans, in a reusable format, official information that is only available in closed format." On May 8, 2018, Vendata reported through their Twitter account (@Vendata_org) that they were victims of a DDoS attack which prevented access to the platform. In this attack, according to the IPYS "the connection files with the server were reconfigured" until May 15 that the platform was back online thanks to Access Now Organization and Vendata's technical staff. Through a statement, the Irish Front Line Defenders Foundation demanded that Venezuelan authorities "initiate an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the cyberattack on the VENDATA website: <https://vendata.org/site/>"³³



Source: Twitter

³² El Pitazo (2018) "El Pitazo goes through a new cycle of computer attacks". <https://bit.ly/2QKX8th>

³³ Instituto de Prensa Y Sociedad (2018) "Front Line Defenders | The Venezuelan human rights organization, VENDATA, was the target of a cyber attack" <https://bit.ly/2Eb3JX9>

PUNTO DE CORTE

Punto de Corte is a digital media focused on news and press releases about Venezuela, on its page they establish they are an "information agency". On July 11, 2018, their website server suffered a cyber attack, which prevented users from accessing it for more than 20 hours. This happened after Punto De Corte published on its website an interview by the Venezuelan journalist Sebastiana Barráez by the title "**The Secrets of Maduro's Government recounted by Luisa Ortega Díaz.**"³⁴



@NicmerEvans Date: 07/11/2018

Source: Twitter

In the interview, former Venezuelan Prosecutor speaks, among other things, about a call with Diosdado Cabello (current President of the ANC) on December 28, 2012, reporting the death of former President Hugo Chávez; despite the fact his death was reported to the public on March 5, 2013.

In an interview for Espacio Público Organization, Punto de Corte Director Nicmer Evans explained: "*The page must migrate from the server in order to continue working, the extent of the attack has forced for additional measures to be taken that allow for greater security.*"³⁵

ARMANDO.INFO - CRÓNICA UNO

On July 29, 2018, Armando.info published the report "**HIV discrimination wins the battle in the barracks**"³⁶ which deals with the discrimination that exists in the National Armed Forces (hereinafter FAN, acronym in Spanish) towards HIV patients. After this publication, on July 30 website's server was attacked by a series of access requests that exceeded its capacity, which caused the page to be offline and preventing access to it.

That same day, the server of the digital media Crónica Uno also faced a DDoS attack. The website's Director, Carlos Correa, informed Espacio Público Organization that "*after a review process we could verify that it was an attack denial of services*".³⁷ This attack, according to what was established by Crónica Uno, was carried out after they published several reports that deal with Venezuela's education system, the migration of children from private to public schools, as well as Venezuelans who migrate because of the Humanitarian Emergency.

On August 8, Armando.info suffered another DDoS attack, this being the second in less than a month. Venezuelan journalist and Co-Editor of the information portal, Ewald Scharfenberg, reported on his Twitter account (@Ewalds6): "*Friends users: the site <http://Armando.info> is still under a massive DDoS attack. Some countermeasures have*

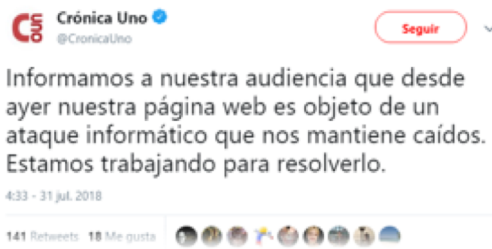
³⁴ BARRAEZ, Sebastiana (2018) "The Secrets of Maduro's Government recounted by Luisa Ortega Díaz" Punto de Corte. <https://bit.ly/2rvHP9r>

³⁵ Espacio Público (2018) "Punto de Corte remains offline." <https://bit.ly/2G6aX1n>

³⁶ Armando.info (2018) "HIV discrimination wins the battle in the barracks." <https://bit.ly/2EpgyqY>

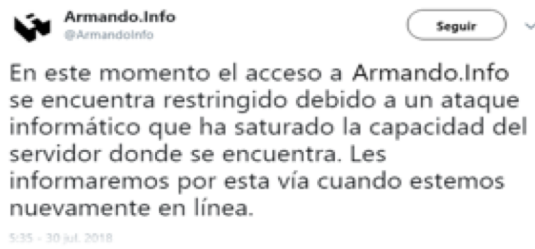
³⁷ Espacio Público (2018) "Computer attack leaves the Crónica Uno news portal offline." <https://bit.ly/2EjIFyA>

been taken to keep it running, but its performance will still present some anomalies."³⁸ Currently, both pages are online.



@CronicaUno Date: 07/31/2018

Source: Twitter

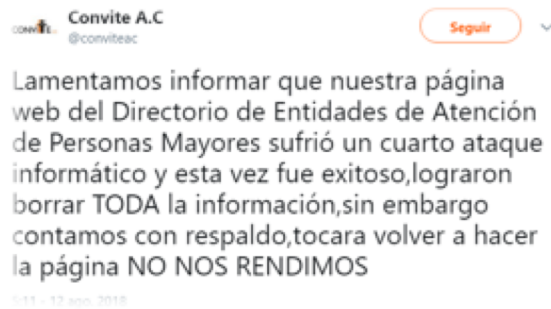


@ArmandoInfo Date: 07/30/2018

Source: Twitter

CONVITE

Convite is a Civil Association that works for the defense of Human Rights and uses digital media to denounce about their violation. On August 12, 2018, they informed through their Twitter account (@Conviteac) that the "website of the Directory of Senior Care Entities suffered a fourth computer attack and this time it was successful, they managed to erase ALL the information, however, we have support, we will remake it WE DO NOT SURRENDER." Despite the attack, they assured they have a backup to recover the lost information



@Conviteac Date: 08/12/2018

Source: Twitter

³⁸ SCHARFENBERG, Ewald (2018) @Ewalds6 Twitter. <https://bit.ly/2Eb4rnh>

LA CABILLA

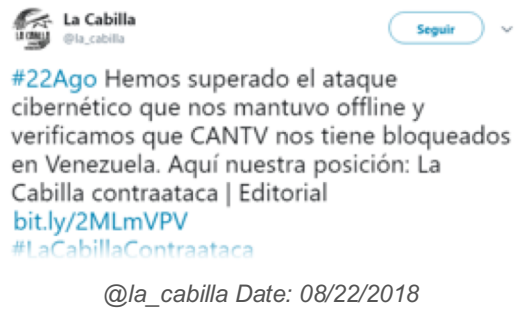
La Cabilla is a free information digital newspaper. On August 22, 2018, their website server suffered a DDoS attack that prevented access to the portal by taking it offline. In a statement published by La Cabilla, they said that thanks to the page's technicians, access to information was recovered for all users; and they also stated the following:

*"And here we are: we continue online, we continue in the analysis and criticism. We are still in a combat position. And we have nothing left but to announce that our counterattack is already underway and will be felt."*³⁹

ODH ULA

The page of the Observatory of Human Rights of Universidad de Los Andes is dedicated to publishing figures, bulletins and information regarding the violation of Human Rights in Venezuela; it also promotes the defense of Human Rights and constitutional principles. In 2018, the server of its website suffered two cyberattacks, the first recorded on February 24 led the page offline for 24 hours: by then, the hacker left a signature -H4XR3- and a message in English that read: *"be careful."*⁴⁰

The second attack occurred on September 7. The webmaster of the Observatory declared to Espacio Público Organization how it happened: "The page was attacked by the source code method, the defensive mechanisms were activated and prevented it from taking control of the site (...) The attack started from an IP located in China."⁴¹



Source: Twitter



@Uladdhh Fecha: 11/09/2018

Fuente: Twitter

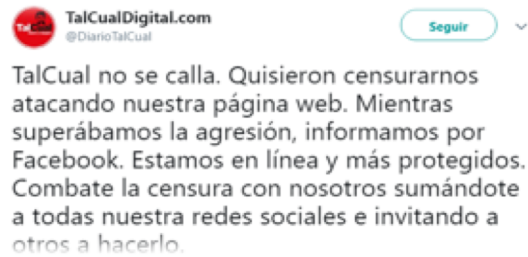
³⁹ La Cabilla (2018) "La Cabilla Contraataca". <https://bit.ly/2BZ3ahC>

⁴⁰ Observatorio Derechos Humanos Universidad de los Andes (2018) "Desde China atacaron portal web del ODH-ULA". <https://bit.ly/2L8WUXu>

⁴¹ Espacio Público (2018) "Portal del ULADDHH es víctima de ataques por segunda vez". <https://bit.ly/2B3i8lq>

TAL CUAL DIGITAL

Tal Cual Digital is a digital media founded by Teodoro Petkoff that spreads news, reports, analysis, and opinions. On November 8, a cyberattack prevented access to the news site for much of that day's afternoon. Through a statement published by Tal Cual Digital on their Twitter account (@DiarioTalCual), they reported that on November 9 they were online and users could access all of their content. They also assured: "*TalCual does not stay quiet. They wanted to censor us by attacking our website.*"



@DiarioTalCual Date: 11/08/2018

Source: Twitter

BLOCKING CASE:

All allegations and studies of digital blockings in 2018:

When access to a page is restricted it is because the PSI implements blockades by DNS, IP or HTTP, which means that when entering the website a warning is displayed saying the page was not found. In Venezuela, PSIs implement these mechanisms to block informative websites, preventing access to information.

The National Telephone Company of Venezuela (hereinafter CANTV, acronym in Spanish) is the main telecommunications company in the country belonging to the Venezuelan State. Throughout 2018, it became the main Service Provider to block access to informational pages and even tools that help circumvent censorship. This represents the violation of the right to freedom of information, freedom of expression, access to the internet and democracy. RedesAyuda registered at least 13 cases of blockings in 2018:

EL PITAZO

In the course of 2018, El Pitazo was the victim of 3 cyber attacks. Regarding the blockades, during 2017 the PSI ABA-CANTV, Digitel and Movistar blocked access to the address <https://elpitazo.com>; for this reason and to overcome censorship, the digital media created an alternative domain (<http://elpitazo.info/>) so that those who use these internet providers could be informed. But on April 10, 2018, CANTV again blocked access to the portal by blocking the alternative domain. Through a statement, El Pitazo declared: "*This action occurs without CONATEL or the aforementioned supplier companies notifying the measure in violation of the rights of freedom of expression and information established by the Constitution.*"⁴²

⁴² El Pitazo (2018) "Blocked access to the El Pitazo website". <https://bit.ly/2ru8tzS>

El Pitazo resorted to another alternative domain (<http://elpitazo.ml>) to continue overcoming censorship. However, according to what was expressed by the digital media and an IPYS study, “more than 8 out of 10 measurements showed censorship -by DNS or HTTP- in El Pitazo three somains.” On September 8, the technicians of the informative portal assured “the little traffic coming from ABA-CANTV practically disappeared,” affirming that CANTV reinforced the blockade to their three domains.

El Pitazo Director said: *"It's like they don't want our reporters, in all the states of the country, to report the inconveniences that pensioners and workers face in order to receive their payment. The Government fears an informed population."*⁴³

LA PATILLA

The CANTV State company was the protagonist of another blockade, this time to the informational website La Patilla. This occurred on June 6, 2018, when Twitter users from different areas of the country reported not being able to access the information page.

David Morán, Editor of La Patilla, declared for El Estímulo: "Until one o'clock in the afternoon, it was not yet possible to enter the through Internet ABA (Broadband Access, from CANTV) or through Movilnet (State-owned mobile telephone company, subsidiary of CANTV). It's terrible because there goes 35 to 40 percent of La Patilla traffic."⁴⁴

On the other hand, the National Association of Journalists indicated in its Twitter account (@CNPCaracas): "CANTV blocks access to @la_patilla. This represents a direct violation of freedom of expression. Goes against the right to inform and be informed. The government insists on attacks on journalists and media."⁴⁵

This website is currently blocked for users who have the state company CANTV as an Internet Service Provider.

EL NACIONAL WEB

News media El Nacional joined the group of portals blocked by CANTV on June 7, 2018; this was stated by the Editor-in-Chief, Miguel Henrique Otero, on his Twitter account: *"Breaking. CANTV (main Internet internet provider in Venezuela) blocks <http://www.el-nacional.com> in several areas of Venezuela @elnacionalweb."*⁴⁶ Likewise, different users



Source: Twitter

⁴³ El Pitazo (2018) "Aba CANTV reinforced blocking on El Pitazo domains". <https://bit.ly/2zRILKa>

⁴⁴ El Estímulo (2018) ""CANTV blocks La Patilla in several areas of Caracas". <https://bit.ly/2QKLCox>

⁴⁵ Colegio Nacional de Periodistas (2018) @CNPCaracas Twitter. <https://bit.ly/2G9vaDI>

⁴⁶ El Nacional Web (2018) "CANTV blocked access to El Nacional Web in some areas of Venezuela." <https://bit.ly/2Hwu2W4>

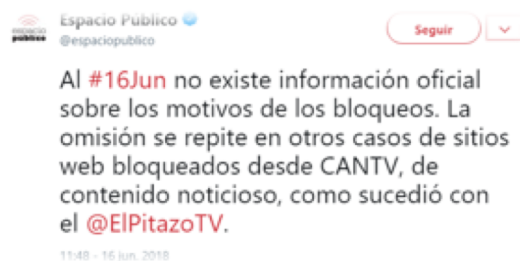
used the aforementioned social network to voice their annoyance by not being able to access the website.

By July 12 (more than a month after the initial blockin) El nacional team indicated in a statement that citizens on Twitter reported that when trying to access the site, it appeared as a website that does not exists: "This event represnets a new form of internet censorship that operates in Venezuela through blocking by HTTP, which prevents response to connection requests directed to the servers where these websited are hosted."⁴⁷

Although citizens resorted to change the DNS to evade censorship, on August 22 (more than two months after the initial blocking) users on Twitter reported that this process no longer worked to enter the page. Currently, CANTV users cannot access <http://www.el-nacional.com> without using a tool such as a VPN⁴⁸.

PORNOGRAPHIC SITES (PORNHUB - YOUTPORN - XVIDEOS)

On June 14, pages with adult content Pornhub, YouPorn and Xvideos were blocked by CANTV as indicated by Espacio Público Organization on their Twitter account. Like blockings to informative digital media, there was no official information explaining the reasons for the blockade.



@espaciopublico Date: 06/16/2018

Source: Twitter

THE ONION ROUTER (TOR)

The Onion Router (TOR) is a network that works through a browser that allows users to anonymously access content or censored websites that can not be accessed in a traditional way. TOR was created in 2003, and the system of this network diverts the PSI connection used by the person through nodes, which are randomly provided by TOR and have a different IP address each. TOR then provides a bridge of sorts to prevent the PSI from detecting that the user requests access to censored content.

On June 27, 2018, CANTV blocked access to this network. RedesAyuda explained through its social media how the blockade of the state telecommunications company works towards this tool:

"The government's protocol was to host these IP addresses to a blacklist where they automatically block them for Venezuelan users who use CANTV as an Internet provider."⁴⁹

In the Access Now article "**Venezuela blocks access to the TOR network,**" they specify that "the direct access traffic in the TOR network increased constantly in Venezuela

⁴⁷ El Nacional Web (2018) El Nacional Web has been blocked for more than a month."

<https://bit.ly/2Qm1doh>

⁴⁸ El Nacional Web (2018) "Denounced new blocking to El Nacional Web." <https://bit.ly/2SxkUpK>

⁴⁹ RedesAyuda explanation about TOR hacking (2018). <https://bit.ly/2ROYaSa>

during the last two months, and even more this month through the TOR bridges; along with a new wave of online censorship by Maduro's government."⁵⁰

For the same article, RedesAyuda Director, Melanio Escobar, said: *"It seems that the Venezuelan government has discovered how to make a very sophisticated block for the TOR network. (...) Not only on the direct access channels, but also on the bridges that TOR offers to avoid this blockade."*

Although state company CANTV censored a tool that citizens use to evade censorship, through its Twitter account (@torproject), TOR reported that Venezuelans can continue to use the tool: *"selecting meek-azure, to dodge censorship and stay connected to the internet"*.⁵¹

CARAOTA DIGITAL

The national news portal informed different reports from citizens who use CANTV as a PSI and could not access their website. They declared in a statement: *"Our technicians and webmaster have worked during the last few days to detect the origin of this failure, which does not allow the public to obtain the information."*⁵² As of today, CANTV has blocked this digital media, which prevents Venezuelans from being able to inform themselves truthfully and without restrictions.

ARMANDO.INFO

According to a balance published by IPYS, Armando.info website dedicated to publishing investigative journalism suffered from blockings by private and state PSIs, which prevented users from accessing their content.

According to IPYS, on August 13, 2018, this digital news media was not online in broadband and mobile connections for users of CANTV, Movistar and Digitel IPS: *"Under the OONI methodology, IPYS Venezuela confirmed blockages by DNS and HTTP, which prevents digital users from Venezuela to consult journalistic content related to acts of corruption and the political crisis faced by the country."*⁵³

IPYS stressed that it was not "absolutely" offline since Armando.info was online for users of CANTV and Movistar, but "in other tests was blocked by HTTP."

LA CABILLA

On August 22, 2018, the same day the information portal La Cabilla suffered a cyber attack, CANTV blocked access to it: *"In effect CANTV, the regime's telecommunications company, which offers Internet service for the majority of the country, has blocked La Cabilla to prevent its subscribers from reading us."*⁵⁴

In this way, La Cabilla is part of the group of digital media victims of censorship by CANTV, which violates the right of citizens to be informed. After the blocking, Daniel Lara Farías, who directs the content of the website said that "the response to censorship is to

⁵⁰ Access Now (2018) "Venezuela blocks access to TOR network." <https://bit.ly/2N2d3Pb>

⁵¹ The Onion Router (2018) @torproject Twitter. <https://bit.ly/2Pr1ctT>

⁵² Caraota Digital (2018) "Caraota Digital users report that they can not access through aba CANTV." <https://bit.ly/2UwqL0l>

⁵³ Instituto de Prensa Y Sociedad (2018) "Telemarketers continue to block digital media in Venezuela." <https://bit.ly/2BbJiJX>

⁵⁴ La Cabilla (2018) "La Cabilla Fights Back | Editorial." <https://bit.ly/2BZ3ahC>

continue working by all possible means to get people to know what is really happening in Venezuela."⁵⁵

GRUPO ÁVILA BLOG

Grupo Ávila is composed of several international relations professionals, diplomats, and Venezuelan specialists. On September 8, 2018, CANTV blocked access to its information blog, which prevented Venezuelans from using this internet service provider from entering freely.

Grupo Ávila issued a statement in which they denounce this event and affirm that they will not stop working to report freely:

*"(...) Grupo Ávila will not cease in its efforts to truthfully inform, comment and make proposals freely on the topics of its area of knowledge and experience, by the means at its disposal."*⁵⁶

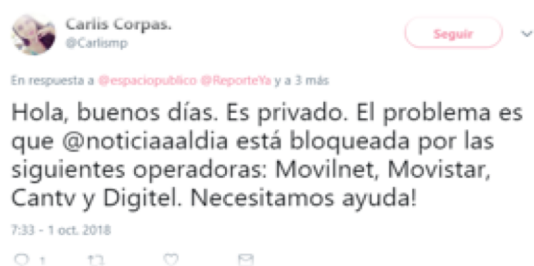
PRESIDENTIAL PRESS

On September 25, 2018, the @PresidencialVen Twitter account was temporarily blocked. This account is dedicated to publishing all the procedures and communications of the Venezuelan government. The Minister of Popular Power for Communication and Information, Jorge Rodríguez, reported in this same social network that this restriction *"flagrantly violates our right to inform. We demand that it be restored immediately."*⁵⁷

According to the news portal El Estímulo, the day before the blocking the account *"(...) tweeted very quickly recounting statements by President Nicolás Maduro. The time interval between tweets varied between 3 and 6 minutes."*⁵⁸ As of this day, the aforementioned account is available.

NOTICIA AL DÍA

The website denounced through its Twitter account (@noticiaaldía) that access to its website <https://noticiaaldia.com/> was blocked by Movistar, Digitel, CANTV, and Movilnet. Carlis Copas, a Venezuelan journalist who is part of the editorial team of the portal, also reported the blocking through her Twitter account (@Carlismo): "Hello, good morning. It is private. The problem is that @noticiaaldia is blocked by the following operators: Movilnet, Movistar, CANTV, and Digitel. We need help!", said Copas.



@Carlismo Date: 10/01/2018

Source: Twitter

⁵⁵ MARTÍNEZ, Marianne (2018) "CANTV blockade to La Cabilla portal reported." <https://bit.ly/2zS7Rs9>

⁵⁶ El Imparcial (2018) "Grupo Ávila denounces blocking of its portal by Venezuelan government." <https://bit.ly/2B5sKA6>

⁵⁷ RODRÍGUEZ, Jorge (2018) Twitter @jorgerpsuv. <https://bit.ly/2QaA03B>

⁵⁸ El Estímulo (2018) "Government denounces that the Presidential Press Twitter account was blocked." <https://bit.ly/2QnFdcl>

ACCESS TO BANK ACCOUNTS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE NATIONAL TERRITORY

One of the reasons for the Venezuelan migration is that those who move abroad wish to send money to those who remain in the national territory. This is why bank accounts management by Venezuelans abroad through a Virtual Private Network (VPN) is very common. In spite of this, Sudeban reported on a new regulation for financial entities. These guidelines include the restriction on access to bank accounts through VPN, both outside and within the national territory. The statement by the Sudeban explains the following:

*"(To access Venezuelan online banking, users) must do so through companies that provide this service or have obtained Internet Protocol (IP) addresses from the Regional Internet Registry for Latin America and the Caribbean (Lacnic) and have received part of the National Commission of Telecommunications (CONATEL) the administrative authorization, concession and corresponding permission for such purpose."*⁵⁹

The purpose of this new government measure is *"to push for remittances that arrive in the country go only through authorized channels (exchange houses)"*. With respect to this regulation, the article on Banca y Negocios website *"Sudeban blocked access to online banking through VPN, even within Venezuela"* states that *"CONATEL debugged a list of IP addresses arbitrarily, which was delivered to the Sudeban. If your IP is not in that list, you will not be able to enter electronic banking,"* this according to what was exposed by journalist Fran Monroy Moret.⁶⁰

The NGO Espacio Público, through a statement, demanded that the State: *"Refrain from applying illegitimate conditions or obstacles to the free use of bank accounts, and respect and guarantee the obligation to preserve a free, open and decentralized internet as a space for the exercise of human rights online"*⁶¹. On the other hand, the financial entity Banesco authorized as of November 28 the request for notification to operate by this bank from abroad,⁶² only for natural persons as an essential requirement to conduct transactions from outside Venezuela.

Blocking digital media, dedicated to communicating to the Venezuelan population the different national events and the State's actions, are a limitation to exercise the right of citizens to information. Blocking information portals is part of policies and decisions that violate the right to free information, freedom of expression and democracy; which also positions censorship as a tool to suppress, limit and restrict information.

Caracas Press Club spoke about the blockings to different digital media through a statement in which they establish their rejection of website blockades by CANTV, *"as well as from private operators, for violating the right of citizens to seek, receive and disseminate information through the internet."*⁶³ In addition, faced with the violation of freedom of expression in Venezuela and the limitations faced by citizens when it comes to information, Caracas Press Club establishes the following demands and rejections in its statement:

⁵⁹ Banca y Negocios (2018) "Government closes access to online banking through VPNs."

<https://bit.ly/2FN8HvK>

⁶⁰ NTN24 (2018) "Sudeban blocked access to online banking by VPN inside and outside Venezuela."

<https://bit.ly/2UjhhW9>

⁶¹ Espacio Público (2018) "Espacio Público rejects blockade of Venezuelan bank operations abroad."

<https://bit.ly/2RQa6TJ>

⁶² Banesco Banco Universal (2018) "BanescOnline enables option of Notification to Operate by Digital Banking from outside of Venezuela for Natural Persons". <https://bit.ly/2SDCLvn>

⁶³ Efecto Cocuyo (2018) "Caracas Press Club rejects arbitrary blockades of websites in Venezuela."

<https://bit.ly/2RJ3V44>

- It requires the Venezuelan State and private companies to cease arbitrary blockings that hinder the search and dissemination of content on the web.
- Rejects the opacity with which it is handled, from the public and private sphere, telecommunications management; as well as the deliberate omission of these entities in regards to requests for information about blockades.

These blockings documented by RedesAyuda are arbitrary. The digital media with restricted access agreed that there was no communication or statement about why private service providers and the state company CANTV decided to block the websites

CENSORSHIP CASE:

All complaints of censorship imposed online in 2018:

Censorship became the main tool of the Venezuelan government to restrict access to information, sanction and limit the exercise of digital rights, suppress opinion and violate the freedom of expression of digital media of Venezuelans.

DISMISSAL OF METRO DE CARACAS WORKER UNDER THE LAW AGAINST HATE

The Constitutional Law Against Hate for Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance was enacted by the ANC in 2017. This regulation specifies sanctions for traditional and digital media, as well as penalties of up to 20 years for those who promote or incite hatred.

Wuilis Florentino Rodríguez was dismissed from his job at the Metro de Caracas Company under the Law Against Hate. Rodríguez, on January 13, 2018, published in his Facebook account that his salary was not enough to buy detergent to be able to wash his work uniform. In the dismissal letter the director of the Metro de Caracas, César Ramón Vega González, specified "*with the act he (Rodríguez) did not observe the Ethics and Good Customs Manual that a public servant must maintain.*"

In addition, the letter signed by Gonzalez states that "the basis of the dismissal is in accordance with the provisions of Article 79 literal f. of the Organic Labor Law and Workers, in accordance with Article 20 of Constitutional Law Against Hate for Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance."

Rodríguez's dismissal represents the violation of the free exercise of freedom of expression: the opinion of a citizen who expressed through social media the dissatisfaction with the salary he works for was sanctioned, as well as being an event that promotes and encourages self-censorship. In addition, it goes beyond what is established in Article 57 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which in its first lines establishes: "*Everyone has the right to freely express their thoughts, ideas or opinions by voice, by written means or by any other form of expression and to make use of it for any means of communication and dissemination, without establishing censorship.*"



Wuilis Rodriguez

7 de enero a las 13:13 · 🌐

12 años de servicios. Cobro 130Bsf. Quincenales, mi uniforme esta sucio necesito ACE... SALGO a buscarlo 195Bsfquince dias continuo trabajando para comprar un ACE,,,,,PARA ir a trabajarte... valora el talento humano sinceridad para tus trabajadores... se te estan yendo 3mil. Lineales abre los ojos.

👍 Me gusta

💬 Comentar

➦ Compartir

Wuilis Rodríguez Date: 01/07/2018

Source: Facebook

EL UNIVERSAL

The responsibility of news outlets is to inform about the different events of public interest. Despite this, on January 28, 2018, the Social Media Board of informative media El Universal delivered a memorandum to its work team in which it establishes a measure that censures news of political content: "Everything

related to politics should be excluded from every digital platform programming (Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook) except if it is approved by the editorial board".

This censoring decision was taken to, in accordance with the provisions of the press release, "ensure a clear, coherent and positive brand image in social media." The news portal Tal Cual Digital published on its website <http://talcualdigital.com> a statement in which they publish the resignation of several El Universal journalists after the decisions regarding political issues on social media: "In the halls of The Universal there are still journalists with dignity, those in the social media department who marked distance from the censorship policy are an example."⁶⁴

The fact that a media outlet wants to project a positive image on social networks should not interfere with the fact of reporting freely and truthfully. The Universal is, through these decisions, limiting and censoring information and restricting the right to freedom of expression in digital media.



SNTP
@sntpvenezuela

Seguir

En la escalada de la #censura, @ElUniversal prohíbe la publicación de informaciones de naturaleza política en sus redes sociales. La medida anunciada en este memo ha generado el descontento y la renuncia de un grupo de trabajadores #30Ene

@snpvenezuela Date: 01/30/2018

Source: Twitter

⁶⁴ Tal Cual Digital (2018) "Resignations at El Universal due to self-censorship on their social networks." <https://bit.ly/2Uysen9>

PDVSA EXERTS CONTROL OVER THE ACCOUNTS THEIR WORKERS MUST FOLLOW ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The legal consultant of the State Enterprise Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA, acronym in Spanish), Alexis Chacon, signed a statement issued on February 22, 2018, which states that workers of the company can not follow unauthorized accounts: *"It is strictly forbidden to follow users on social media, (Twitter, Facebook or any other) except the ones authorized by the Corporation as official."*

If the employees do not comply with the provisions, they may be victims of *"disciplinary sanctions or dismissals"*, which represents control over the exercise of the freedom of expression of public employees in social media.

VENEZUELA POSSESS LATIN AMERICA'S SLOWEST INTERNET CONNECTION

1.61 Mbps is the average connection in Venezuela Fixed Broadband, a figure cataloged as the lowest in Latin America. **"Navigation to the minimum expression"**⁶⁵ is a study carried out by the IPYS and the MLAB Internet Data Laboratory which, thanks to 6,000 connection speed tests in the 23 states of the country, made visible the limited and deficient conditions of the internet connection in Venezuela. Regarding Mobile Broadband, tests carried out by the IPYS and MLAB determined that the connection is only of 2.3 Mbps.

Regarding the capital, the IPYS determines that Venezuelans in Caracas access the network with a connection of 2.8 Mbps of load and 4.3 Mbps of download; but in rural areas of the Trujillo, Lara and Zulia states they determined lower connection figures. Those who have Digitel company as an internet service provider browse the net with 0.09 Mbps download and 0.05 Mbps upload.

The quality of internet service, as established by IPYS, has fallen 0.3 Mbps in the last two years, which placed Venezuela in the last place of the 10 countries to which MLAB follows (even below of Bolivia and Suriname). The study **"Navigation to the minimum expression"** establishes that *"the quality of Venezuela's internet connection is smaller to the one of Costa Rica, Panama, Peru, Guyana, and Ecuador."*

Possessing the lowest amount of internet connections demonstrates the restrictions that Venezuelans face in order to access the net, and also highlights the absence of the State to invest and improve telecommunications in the country. The slow connection represents a type of censorship and violation since citizens can not exercise their digital rights optimally and without limitations.

SANCTIONING PROCEDURE AGAINST EL NACIONAL WEB

CONATEL initiated on May 22, 2018, a sanctioning procedure against El Nacional Web⁶⁶ for allegedly going against what is established in Article 27 of the Law of Social Responsibility in Radio, Television and Electronic Media, and Article 14 of the Constitutional Law Against Hate for Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance for *"spreading messages that do not recognize the legitimately constituted authorities."*

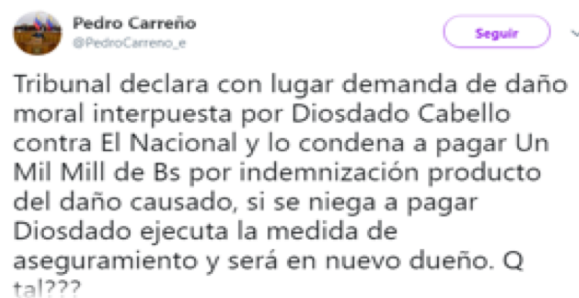
⁶⁵ Instituto de Prensa y Sociedad (IPYS) "Navigation to the minimum expression | Quality conditions of internet in Venezuela." <https://bit.ly/2oBduEC>

⁶⁶ El Nacional Web (2018) "Conatel initiated sanctioning procedure against El Nacional Web." <https://bit.ly/2kf9ubf>

In a statement published by CONATEL, the media was accused of inciting and promoting hatred, and they also establish that the sanction is "to refrain from publishing news and messages that may attempt against the tranquility of the citizenry."

This type of "sanctioning procedure" demonstrates political control over an entity that must be autonomous in its decisions, violates freedom of expression and promotes censorship and self-censorship by not specifying which news or messages can be classified as incitement to hatred.

In 2015, Diosdado Cabello, current President of the ANC, denounced El Nacional Web for moral damage for spreading a report from the ABC newspaper of Spain which points him as "ringleader of the Soles cartel" and "narco-State operator." As a result, the Third Court of First Instance in Civil, Commercial, Transit, and Banking of the Metropolitan Area of Caracas took on the demand, so the media must cancel one billion



@pedrocarreno_e Date: 06/06/2018

Source: Twitter

bolívares "for damages caused." Pedro Carreño, President of the Public Power Commission of the ANC communicated through his Twitter account "if (El Nacional) refuses to pay, Diosdado executed the assurance measure and will be the new owner."

CONATEL PROHIBITS ARMANDO.INFO FROM PUBLISHING INFORMATION ABOUT ALEX NAIN SAAB MORAN

On September 11 2018, CONATEL sent a statement to Armando.info's journalist Roberto Deniz Machín, which establishes the prohibition of four journalists from the information website (Roberto Deniz Machín, Joseph Poliszuk, Ewald Scharfenberg, and Alfredo Meza) to "*publish and disseminate through digital means specifically the site ARMANDOINFO informations that go against the honor and reputation of the citizen Alex Nain Saab Moran.*"

Saab is a Colombian citizen mentioned in various Armando.info reports about alleged corruption related to the CLAP. Saab sued the 4 journalists mentioned in the CONATEL statement. Scharfenberg, one of the journalists, said: "*The great novelty today that is CONATEL has been intervened (...) They have sent us trades in which they tell us that we can not name Alex Saab in Armando.info and at the same time are sending trades to some electronic media and internet providers warning them not to talk about the case.*"⁶⁷

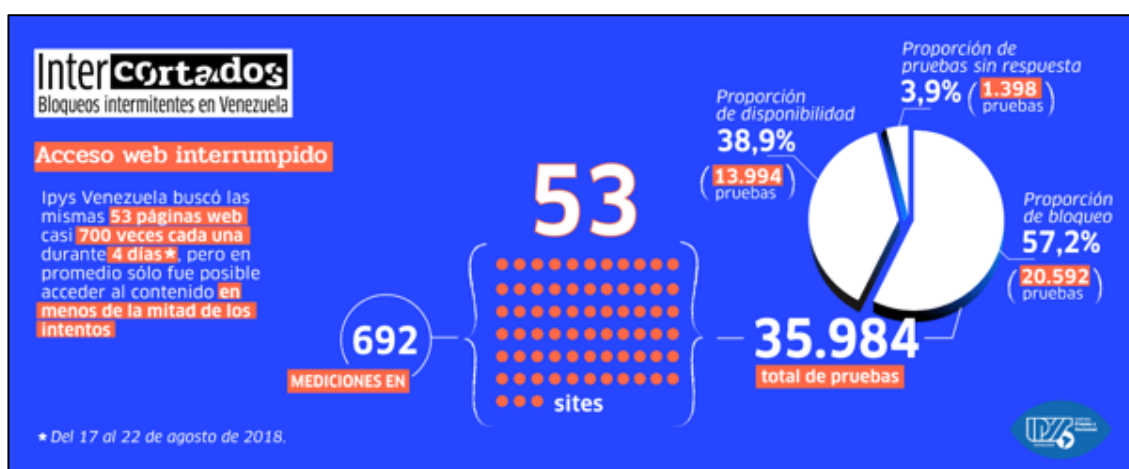
The censorship of CONATEL against the media violates citizens' right to be informed.

⁶⁷ Espacio Público (2018) "Armando.Info is banned from publishing about Alex Nain Saab." <https://bit.ly/2rqBQmy>

INTERMITTENT BLOCKING

Throughout 2018, blocking access to digital media became a very common modality to censor and restrict access to information spread through different websites. The IPYS carried out a study called "Intercortados"⁶⁸ where they entered 53 different digital pages almost 700 times each for four days and determined that they could only access the content "in less than half of the attempts".

The PSIs that obtained a higher frequency of intermittent blockings, according to the IPYS study "Intercortados", were Digital (70.7%) Movistar (68.7%) followed by CANTV (45.4%) and Movilnet (41.7%). These tests were conducted in 14 states of the country and helped determine that "7 out of 10 access interruptions (...) occurred under the DNS blocking modality". They also detected three types of blocking (DNS, HTTP, TCP / IP).



Intercortados

Source: Instituto de Prensa Y Sociedad

PRESENTATION OF PROPOSED DRAFT OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL LAW OF THE CYBERSPACE OF THE BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA

On December 5, 2018, the media outlet La Patilla published on its website the preliminary draft of the "Constitutional Law of Cyberspace of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela,"⁶⁹ a document developed "behind closed doors and without popular consultations." The object of the same is exposed in Article 1 and reads as follows:

"The purpose of this Law is to develop constitutional rights, guiding principles, processes, bases and guidelines of the cyberspace of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in order to help generate the conditions that guarantee the security of the Nation, safe access through the optimal operation of the Infrastructures of Information Technologies that constitute it, the protection of data and information, the security and quality of the content that are in it."

Although this document represents the preliminary draft of a new Constitutional Law, it is not approved. La Patilla specified that it means "the combination of identification, surveillance and investigation technologies to configure a system of coercion in which those who have the legal or factual power of access to that database can know the essentials of

⁶⁸ Instituto de Prensa Y Sociedad (2018) "Intercortados". <https://bit.ly/2E3p722>

⁶⁹ Draft of the Constitutional Law of Cyberspace of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. <https://bit.ly/2Ea7a0e>

what each person does in the network and outside it,"⁷⁰ which represents an unconstitutional event, the absence of a Rule of Law that goes against freedom of expression, and the violation of privacy of citizens.

IMPUTATION CASE

All people charged for exercising their right to freedom of expression 2.0:

During 2018, 5 people who used social media to express or disseminate information were detained; 4 of them under the Constitutional Law Against Hate for Peaceful Coexistence and the Law promulgated by the ANC and published in the Official Gazette on November 8, 2017. These imputations of legal charges registered by RedesAyuda violate the right to free expression in digital media.

Johann Lobo y Michael Labrador

On March 8, 2018, SEBIN officials detained two law students from the Universidad de Los Andes (hereinafter ULA, acronym in Spanish) for **"aggravated hatred incitement"** (established in Article 20 of the Law Against Hate). The arrest took place because, in a program of the Andina de Mérida television station, they made a call to the competent authorities to solve the transportation strike in the city. In addition, they made an invitation to a rally in Plaza Bolívar de Mérida to peacefully protest the country's hunger and poverty. When leaving the television station, the students were arbitrarily detained by SEBIN officials.

Lawyers Antonio José Rivas Jerez and Frank Márquez of Foro Penal were the Defense of the students and opposed the accusations for various reasons: *"these are two students who were invited to a TV show to speak about the public transportation problem in Mérida and to attend a peaceful protest rally, and upon leaving were intercepted by SEBIN officials without their uniform, identification, and witnesses; for what it is a kidnapping, not and apprehension."*⁷¹

After three months in jail, the students were released on June 11, according to Venezuelan journalist and reporter Leonardo Padrón via his Twitter account (@Leoperiodista): *"Foro Pena Mérida: Today in hearing of guarantors of Michael Labrador and Jhoann Lobo, ULA law students, the Control Court issued the release of these young people."*



@leoperiodista Fecha: 11/06/2018

Fuente: Twitter

⁷⁰ La Patilla (2018) ""This is the preliminary draft of the Law of the Cuban constituent that would end with internet freedom in Venezuela (document)."
<https://bit.ly/2QEK3l6>

⁷¹ El Pitazo (2018) "Law Against Hate applied to two students of the ULA-Mérida."
<https://bit.ly/2PxsdvM>

FIREFIGHTERS: RICARDO PRIETO - CARLOS VARÓN

After the alleged recording and dissemination of a video on social media, where they compare the Venezuelan President with a donkey, firefighters Ricardo Antonio Prieto Parra and Carlos Julio Varón García were arrested on September 13, 2018, by Military Counterintelligence officials; this was registered by the Observatory of Human Rights of the ULA.

Prosecutor Silvio Villegas accused the firemen of the crime of promotion and incitement to aggravated hatred (established in Articles 20 and 21 of the Law Against Hate) since it was considered an offensive video, for which they were imprisoned. According to the information published by the Observatory of Human Rights of the ULA on their Twitter account, after more than a month imprisoned the firefighters were released under restrictions: "*Firefighters retire with their family. They are imputed with new crimes of vilification against the President and public instigation contemplated in Articles 147 and 285 of the Penal Code. They are released with restrictions. Satire is not a crime.*"

The Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights spoke about this case through his Twitter account: "*We are facing the consequences of the application of a vague and ambiguous criminal law, approved by the Venezuelan dictatorship.*"



ObservatorioULA.DDHH
@Uladdhh

Bomberos detenidos en Apartaderos #13sept por funcionarios de la Dirección de Contrainteligencia por supuesta difusión de video, considerado ofensivo a la figura de @NicolasMaduro se encuentran en este momento en el circuito judicial para audiencia preliminar #16Sept #DDHHMerida

8:56 · 16 sept. 2018

@uladdhh Date: 09/16/2018

Source: Twitter



ObservatorioULA.DDHH
@Uladdhh

Finaliza audiencia de presentación de detención en flagrancia, de los dos bomberos detenidos por supuesta difusión de video alusivo a Nicolás Maduro. Fiscal Silvio Villegas imputa delito de promoción e incitación al odio con agravante, y privativa de libertad #16Sept #DDHHMerida

11:24 · 16 sept. 2018

@uladdhh Date: 09/16/2018

Source: Twitter



Edison Lanza
@EdisonLanza

Estamos ante las consecuencias de la aplicación de una ley penal vaga y ambigua, aprobada por la dictadura venezolana. Confina a prisión a dos presuntos difusores de un video satírico que en cualquier parte no daría ni para la polémica:

@EdisonLanza

Source: Twitter

DETENTION OF TWITTER USER PEDRO CRIOLLO

Venezuelan Twitter user Pedro Patricio Jaimes Criollo was arbitrarily detained on May 10, 2018, by SEBIN officials for publishing on May 3 through his Twitter account (@AeroMateo) the presidential airplane route going from Simón Bolívar International Airport in Maiquetía to Aragua state for the Campaign for the May 20 presidential election.

Trina Jaimes, sister of Pedro Jaimes, told VivoPlay that the officials entered his brother's house without any order: "We asked for the restriction or apprehension order, but they said that because they were SEBIN officials they didn't need it."⁷² She stated her brother was taken from his house with assaults, officials kicked him in the rib.

According to the information provided by Espacio Público Organization, Jaime's relatives did not know of his whereabouts until July 15, 2018, when he was able to contact them and say he was in El Helicoide. Jaimes reported having suffered physical abuse and physical injuries: "All this time she has been constantly deceived about her brother's place of confinement, officials have not answered her questions,"⁷³ Espacio Público reported.

On October 12, the Special Rapporteur for freedom of expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Edison Lanza, spoke on the case through Twitter: "*The @CIDH adopted precautionary measures in favor of Pedro Patricio Jaimes Criollo, private of freedom for having published on Twitter the flight route of the presidential plane, information of public access on the internet. @RELE_CIDH follows the case with serious concern.*"

⁷² VivoPlay (2018) "This is the case of Pedro Jaimes, a prisoner for tweeting." <https://bit.ly/2EpByVg>

⁷³ Espacio Público (2018) "Twitter user incarcerated for publishing the route of the presidential plane." <https://bit.ly/2Ed8VKe>



@AereoMeteo Date: 05/03/2018

Source: Twitter



@EspacioPublico Date: 06/15/2018

Source: Twitter



@EdisonLanza Date: 10/12/2018

Source: Twitter

The tweeter's lawyer, Armando Vivas, declared for VivoPlay that Jaimes' Human Rights are being violated since he has not received medical attention and due process has not been fulfilled. He assured that the hearing has been postponed five times, the last one was to be held on November 22. As reported by VivoPlay, the next hearing must be scheduled in 20 working days from November 22.

Pedro Patricio Jaimes Criollo also published information on climate and aeronautics on his Twitter account: "*The disclosure of the flight route that is public can not be classified as an alleged plan against the president,*" said Espacio Público on the case..

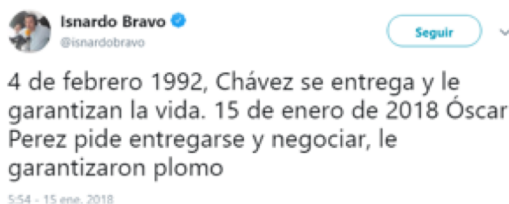
HARASSMENT CASE:

All people harassed for exercising their right to freedom of expression 2.0 in 2018:

DIOSDADO CABELLO INSULTS JOURNALIST IN HIS VTV PROGRAM

Diosdado Cabello, president of the ANC, during his program El Mazo Dando transmitted by VTV, insulted and harassed Venezuelan journalists Isnardo Bravo, Ibéyise Pacheco and Alba Cecilia Mujica for their Twitter statements about what was considered the *Massacre of El Junquito*.

In his show, Cabello had a board showing the tweets of the journalists, and while he was reading them, he made offensive comments such as "fibbers, dumbs". Ibéyise Pacheco's tweet, one of the harassed journalists, read the following: "*Without journalists. Without cameras. The only known testimony was made by the victim Oscar Pérez and by many he is disqualified as part of a show. That's the trap of the regime. Let no one believe. That disinformation prevails.*" Diosdado Cabello said: "*What is wrong with you, ma'am? Stop it! It's an operation where there is real fire.*"



@IsnardoBravo Date: 01/15/2018

Source: Twitter



@ibepacheco Date: 01/015/2018

Source: Twitter

MAYERLIN VILLANUEVA AMENAZADA POR REDES SOCIALES

Mayerlin Villanueva is a Venezuelan journalist who works for Diario Católico newspaper. In March 2018, Villanueva went to the Office of the Prosecutor after being threatened through social media. As reported by the Venezuelan National Press Workers' Union: “@soynewmanperez publishes offensive material against Diario Católico Táchira journalist, Mayerlin Villanueva. They made public her number because of a comment she made in her social media about groceries delivered by local Government of #Tachira #18Feb.”

Although the tweets were deleted, a campaign was carried out through Instagram and Twitter with the hashtag #MayerlinVillanuevaEstafadora. According to the digital portal Analítica, the journalist stated: “(they published) on social media photographs of me with the word thief, swindler, and accomplice after I told them on Twitter that they were not with the information they released against a popular food market that Táchira state carries out.” In addition, her telephone number was published and she was even threatened with death



@FranshescaMach2 Date: 02/18/2018

Source: Twitter



@sntpvenezuela Date: 02/18/2018

Source: Twitter

CHAPTER IV OVERCOMING CENSORSHIP

CAMPAIGNS FOR THE ACCESS TO INFORMATION FROM THE MEDIA

RedesAyuda, as an NGO in charge of defending Human Rights and showing the work of Civil Society through technology and digital media, carried out together with the IPYS a campaign called "We demand #InternetSinLimites" (We demand #InternetWithoutBoundaries), which started on May 17, 2018, on World Internet Day.⁷⁴

The #InternetSinLimites campaign with the IPYS consisted of 4 videos. The first was aimed at demonstrating the restrictions faced by Venezuelans when carrying out basic tasks on the internet, such as sending a document, paying for basic services and talking to relatives through video calls. The videos show how the poor quality of connection and deterioration of the PSI infrastructure interrupts and represents a limitation to access the network and perform these tasks.

The objective of the second video was to demonstrate that access to the internet is a Human Right and therefore citizens have the duty to demand improvements and the guarantee thereof. The third video, on the other hand, highlights the blocking of digital media and the creation of laws and instruments, such as the Law Against Hate, the Digital Militia and the Army of Trolls, as a way to promote censorship and self-censorship, in addition to controlling and criminalizing freedom of expression. The last two videos show that in Venezuela access to the Internet is poor: the average speed connection is 1.6 Mbps according to a study conducted by the IPYS and MLAB, which represents a limitation for Venezuelans when accessing the web in optimal conditions, without censorship, and with freedom. The purpose of the "We demand #InternetSinLimites" campaign, which was also accompanied by a series of tweets, aimed to share the fact that access to the internet is an inherent right of every citizen and that in Venezuela that right is not guaranteed.

APPS AND TOOLS TO OVERCOME CENSORSHIP

Because of the blockings registered to different portals and informative websites in Venezuela, which represents an increase in censorship and the decrease of freedom of expression and democracy, RedesAyuda has been focused on spreading through its social media the use of tools that help citizens evade censorship and enables them to access information, such as VPN, Proxy, DNS and TOR

Change of Domain Name System (DNS)

PSIs provide an IP address that identifies each person within the internet. Websites are also hosted under a singular IP address, different for every website.

To access a web page, the first step is to open a browser and enter the name of interest. The browser, with the automatic IP address, sends the access request to the PSI, which decrypts the DNS; but if they are in the access library denied by the PSI, the request will not be allowed. When the DNS is changed, the request is sent to a new DNS server, which probably does not have the same locks as the original.

⁷⁴ RedesAyuda (2018) "¡We demand #InternetSinLimites (#InternetWithoutLimits)" <https://bit.ly/2SziUI4>

For example, CANTV has blocked the DNS of different pages. To access them, you must change the DNS server of the Internet Provider for another server that does not have the portal or webpage you want to access blocked. It is advisable to change them to Google DNS servers (8.8.8.8 and 8.8.4.4). When you try to enter blocked pages, the request will not be sent to the PSI that has the blocked information portals but to Google, allowing access. It is important to note that the change of DNS does not guarantee anonymity, that is, your PSI can still see what are the access requests you make.

Proxy

The usual navigation means the browser is requested to enter a webpage. This request is addressed to the PSI that is used; but when the page is blocked it can not be accessed. The is, the process to enter a page goes from Point A (who makes the entry request) to Point B (who receives the request and allows or denies access). A proxy basically functions as an intermediary in this request. For example:

If the usual navigation is from Point A to Point B, the Proxy would become Point C in the request to access a page, which means that it acts as an intermediary. This tool can "cheat" the PSI since this tool makes the request from a different IP address which will allow entry to the blocked page. The disadvantage of Proxy is that, even if it gives you anonymity, it does not protect the entire process and the information sought, and there is a possibility that the PSI can see the requests for access to blocked content were made from Point A through a Proxy.



@RedesAyuda Date: 10/06/2018

Source: Instagram

Virtual Private Network - VPN

The Virtual Private Network is another application used to evade censorship. It is also an intermediary allowing access to blocked or restricted content by the PSI using IP addresses from different countries. A VPN, in addition to allowing access to censored content under anonymity, provides security because it encrypts or protects the information sought and the entire process of entering a page. Even with the use of a VPN, the PSI can detect someone entering blocked content through a tool. Basically, it works like a tunnel, where the PSI can not detect who is requesting access to the websites or censored information.

The use of a VPN is promoted by portals and informative websites blocked by different PSIs, as a way to access censored content anonymously and safely. Among these pages stand out: La Cabilla, La Patilla, and El Nacional Web.



@la_cabilla Date: 09/27/2018

Source: Twitter

El Pitazo App

El Pitazo is a digital media that was the victim of cyberattacks and blocking of its website during 2018, and access to its content is limited and restricted. This is why, and with the aim of guaranteeing Venezuelans to be informed, El Pitazo launched "El Pitazo" app, which can be downloaded on mobile devices. According to a press release, the application "facilitates the entrance to news, investigative reports, photos, videos, infographics and podcasts produced by the 50 correspondents that El Pitazo has deployed in all the states of the country."⁷⁵



El Pitazo Date: 11/29/2018

Source: El Pitazo

⁷⁵ El Pitazo (2018) "Enter El Pitazo from your cell phone with the new mobile news app." <https://bit.ly/2net6NO>

The Onion Router (TOR)

The Onion Router is a network that was created in 2003, which aims to create a communications network on the internet in a private and secure way. It is a tool that guarantees anonymity and allows access to blocked or censored content. The TOR system diverts the PSI connection used to access blocked content through nodes that are part of this network. Each of these nodes has a different IP address that is provided by TOR randomly. This tool provides a bridge that prevents the PSI from detecting who makes the entry request. Unlike a VPN, TOR works through a browser. In addition, it allows the request to travel through several IP addresses, which means that the process of accessing a page is even more secure.

The use of these applications guarantees, in addition to anonymity and security, when accessing the internet, the possibility of accessing blocked and censored content so citizens can exercise their right to information, even if it is not in a usual or traditional way. RedesAyuda as an Organización is still committed to broadcast events of censorship, in addition to using its social media as a window to promote the use of these tools to help citizens to access restricted content.

CHAPTER V CONCLUSIONS AND PROJECTIONS

The foregoing, documented and analyzed above shreds of evidence the increase in censorship of information exposed and broadcasted in digital media. The hacking, blocking, cyberattacks, accusations and imputations occurred after news and opinions about the consequences of the Venezuelan regime's efforts were disseminated. With respect to the previous year, there was a significant increase in cases that violate the security and privacy of rights related to democracy such as freedom of expression, press, and access to information: the development of the dictatorship imposed on the web.

As projected in RedesAyuda 2017 Annual Report, cases that criminalize, minimize and sanction information and opinion in the digital media increased considerably. The decline of PSI in Venezuela, both public and private, continues as a consequence of the lack of strategies and public policies that guarantee the optimal functioning of the providers of this service so that citizens can exercise their digital rights in optimal conditions of freedom and without limitations or restrictions.

On the other hand, the establishment of the Law Against Hate by the ANC incarcerated 6 people for expressing themselves through digital media in 2018, which ratifies the objective of this law: criminalizing public opinion and dissemination of information in order to minimize it. In this context of law enactments by the ANC, this year was presented the preliminary draft of the Constitutional Law of Cyberspace of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which goes against freedom of expression and privacy of citizens on the internet, establishing censorship and regulation of content under penal figures.

The internet in Venezuela is in a fragile context, with the slowest connection in Latin America. The regulations and mechanisms implemented by the government to increase censorship and promote self-censorship make the action of reporting in digital media increasingly limited, which in turn leads to misinformed citizens in a social context where to be informed are vital.

Venezuela is going through a repressive situation towards the digital media that aims to make visible the non-guarantee of Human Rights in Venezuela, the absence of a Rule of Law and the consequences of a Complex Humanitarian Emergency that has not been addressed by its perpetrators. The objective of NGOs and Civil Society to make visible the Venezuelan reality remains firm.

RedesAyuda will continue to raise awareness among citizens about the importance of exercising digital rights in freedom. It will continue to promote applicable practices in the digital context for security and privacy, as well as the use of tools to evade censorship. It will continue alliances and the commitment to defend the Digital Rights in Venezuela, to inform. It will continue denouncing violations to the freedom of expression on the internet, the bad access conditions and the constant limitations faced by Venezuelans that, as it happened this year, increased in the hands of a State focused arbitrary actions to continue controlling and minimizing freedom of expression on the web.

Lastly, and regarding the ideas previously exposed, RedesAyuda demands and/or suggests the following:

1. The derogation of the Constitutional Law Against Hate for Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance (Ley Constitucional Contra el Odio por la Convivencia Pacífica y la Tolerancia)

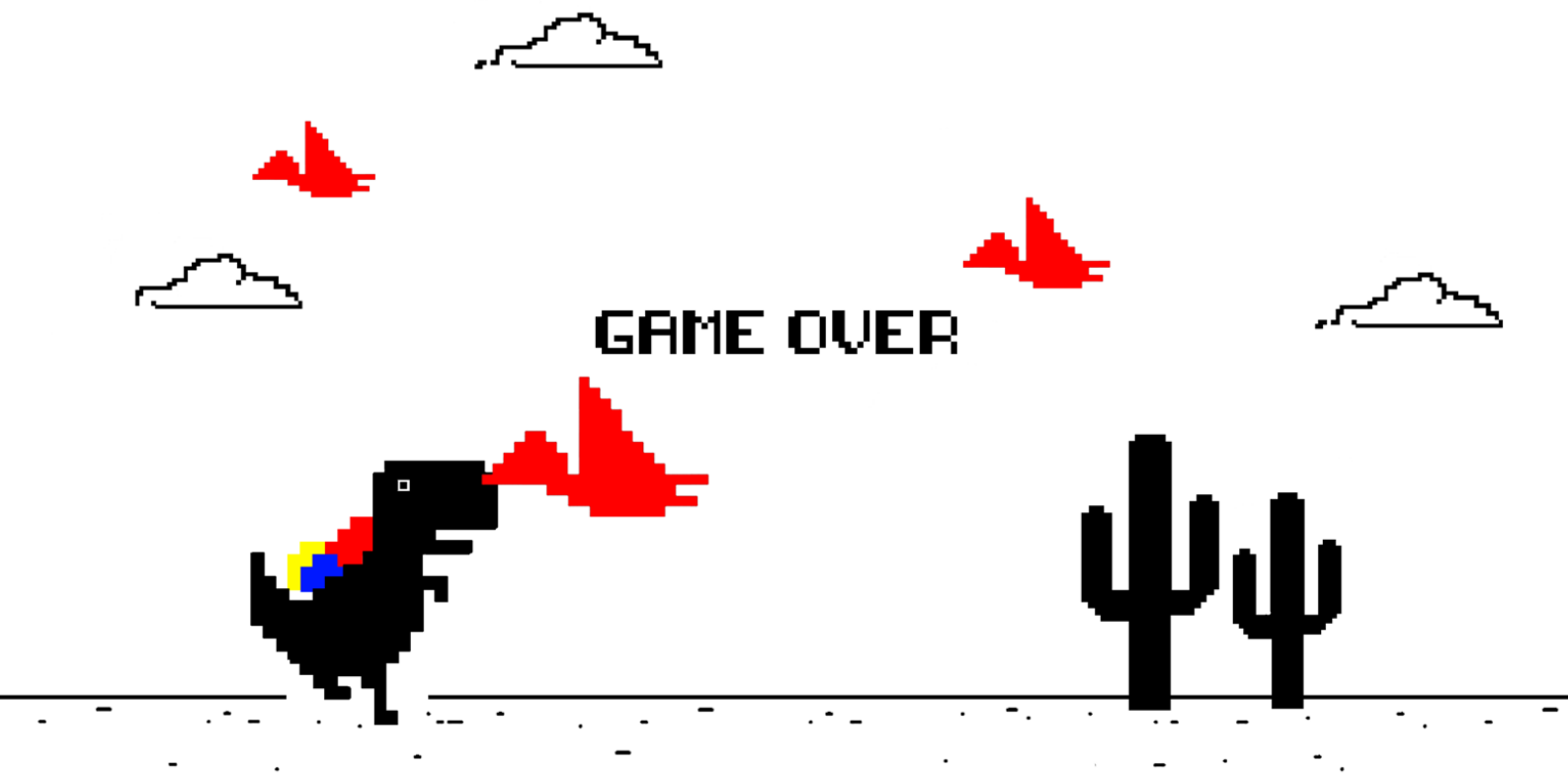
because of the arbitrary imputations against those who have expressed themselves through digital media. Regarding this issue, we demand the release of those who were imprisoned for going against the establishments of this law.

2. The refusal to approve and promulgate the Law of Cyberspace of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (Ley del Ciberespacio de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela), which purpose is to keep minimizing the freedom of speech in digital media and to harm the idea of the internet as a Human Right.

3. The establishment of guarantees that helps the development of Digital Rights in Venezuela. The creation of public politics that boost the improvement of infrastructure of Internet Service Providers and, with that, the promotion of the usage of internet to practice the freedom of speech with no limitations nor censorship.

4. The improvement of alliances between Civil Society and digital media to promote the usage of tools that help evade censorship. In addition, these alliances could develop projects with the purpose of rebuilding internet freedom.

5. The continuous usage of social media as a source to keep society informed despite the enforced restrictions and censorship.



www.redesayuda.org