

## Tunisian protests escalate online

Print

By Tim Bradshaw in London

Published: January 12 2011 18:54 | Last updated: January 12 2011 18:54

The battles between [Tunisian youth and the government](#) are now being fought on the internet, as much as on the streets of the controlled North African country.

While activists accuse the authorities of hacking into e-mails, blogs and Facebook accounts, some are fighting back, launching cyberattacks against government websites in the same way that supporters of [WikiLeaks](#) had done last month.

The Committee to Protect Journalists, an international campaign group, this week called on the Tunisian president, Zein al Abidine Ben Ali, to stop censoring coverage of the unrest in a country where the media is tightly controlled.

Lina Ben Mhenni, who has posted photos of the protests on her blog *A Tunisian Girl*, said last week that "some stupid person has hacked my e-mail then, my Facebook account", saying two other campaigners had also been "hacked".

7ellblog, a site that encourages young Tunisians to set up their own blogs, also had its Facebook page deleted, losing more than 3,000 fans and many photographs in the process.

Other campaigners have reported having the contents of their blogs deleted after being hacked. Facebook said it was investigating the issues reported by some of its members in Tunisia but declined to comment further.

Danny O'Brien, the CPJ's internet advocacy co-ordinator, said "all the evidence points to a [state-controlled operation](#)" behind the hacking attacks. Login details are being intercepted or "phished" by an invisible piece of code, inserted into the web page, apparently by the state-run Tunisia Internet Agency, the local internet service provider.

The code sends users, along with their usernames and passwords, to a fake Facebook page, which Mr O'Brien says would allow any ISP monitoring web browsing to capture the data without having to break into Facebook's own servers directly.

In response, one Tunisian internet activist has created an add-on for the Firefox web browser, which can prevent the phishing attacks.

Over the weekend, the loose collection of internet activists that calls itself Anonymous made revenge hits against several Tunisian government websites. Anonymous rose to prominence late last year after launching "denial of service attacks" on PayPal, Amazon, MasterCard and Visa, after these organisations withdrew services from WikiLeaks.

Anonymous – which campaigns for freedom of expression online as well as more mischievous causes of its own – used similar tactics to drive Tunisian pages off line, through overwhelming amounts of traffic, or deface them, in what it dubbed "OpTunisia".

Although the attacks have eased for now, one Anonymous member told the FT: "As far as I know, [the] attacks will keep going as long as necessary . . . that is as long as the Tunisian government keep acting the way they do."

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2011. Print a single copy of this article for personal use. [Contact us](#) if you wish to print more to distribute to others.