
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Weaponized Information Landscape during an Unprecedented Public Education Crisis in Morocco

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| ABSTRACT

The introduction of the new statute for education in Morocco in September 2023, officially known as decree law No. 2.23.819, unleashed a mixed feeling of utter dismay and indignation amongst the teaching community throughout the country. October 5, 2023 marked the beginning of massive teachers' strikes that swept the country into January 2024. This article explores the involvement of teachers, syndicates and the government in the dissemination of various types of information disorder to influence the power dynamics to their advantage. Based on responses from a survey completed by teachers and a focus group discussion with 7 members of coordination committees, we present a clear perspective about the various forms of information disorder that were disseminated in social media during teachers' strike. Our conclusion is that candid, transparent, and regular dialogues can boost trust between the three stakeholders and improve the information landscape in the country.

| KEYWORDS

Decree law No. 2.23.819, teachers' strike, public education, information disorder

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The introduction of the new statute for education in Morocco in September 2023, officially known as decree law No. 2.23.819, unleashed a mixed feeling of utter dismay and indignation amongst the teaching community throughout the country. As soon as the parliament passed the highly disputed statute on 27 September 2023 and was published in the official bulletin on 9 October 2023, a real crisis in the public education sector started looming large on the horizon. The celebration of Teachers' Day on 5 October 2023 was the beginning of massive strikes, which gained momentum into the end of the year. Like any major event capturing the attention of the general public, whether that is a natural disaster, a war, or an election, the unprecedented crisis in the public education sector witnessed a widespread dissemination of different types of information disorder on various social media platforms; hence the need for addressing the phenomenon and examining its underlying dynamics. Before discussing the main causes of the crisis, it is essential to define some key concepts that are instrumental to understanding the phenomenon. Our focus will be on how the parties involved—the government, syndicates, and teachers—got caught up in an information environment full of falsehood and where each party tried to influence the power dynamics to their advantage. This paper will close with the analysis of a survey distributed to 114 teachers about their take on the information landscape during the strike. For more insight into the issue, we will also present the perspective of 7 members of coordination committees.

2. Information disorder and related terminology

As a term, information disorder refers to "a condition in which truth and facts coexist in a milieu of misinformation and disinformation—conspiracy theories, lies, propaganda, and half-truths" (Source: Centre of Excellence on Democracy Human Rights and Governance. (2021). *Disinformation Primer*. p.1. <https://www.usaid.gov/democracy/documents/disinformation-primer>, accessed 17 January 2024). Defined as such, information disorder clearly encompasses a whole set of phenomena pertaining to problematic information. Claire Wardle (2019: 8-9) of *First Draft News* has made an important contribution to the understanding

of information disorder by breaking down the phenomenon into three distinct categories: misinformation, disinformation and malinformation.

Misinformation happens when someone spreads a false piece of information unintentionally. An example of this could be a journalist's inaccurate translation of a piece of news into another language. While the information lacks accuracy, it could in fact be believed and shared multiple times. Sometimes, however, people spread misinformation simply because the shared information is taken for granted due to the fact that it comes from people they trust, like family and friends. Things become worrisome when false information is intentionally disseminated to serve certain evil objectives. This is referred to as disinformation. It is for example the case of the US accusation of Iraq possessing WMDs in 2003 so as to justify the invasion of the country or Israel peddling falsehoods about Palestinians to demonize them. Malinformation is the third element of information disorder, and it refers to spreading true information on purpose to harm an individual, an organization, or a country. Leaks of classified information such as the Panama Papers (2016), the Facebook leak (2021), or Israeli company NSO's Pegasus spyware (2021) are three examples of secret information that was exposed to the public and as a result caused strong reactions around the world. The distinction between the three broad categories is done along the dimensions of falsehood and the intent to harm.

These categories could be further detailed into seven types of information disorder:

- **Satire:** though satirical content is intended to draw laughter through exaggeration, ridicule and irony, it can easily fool people into believing unreal things.
- **False connection:** an example of this is when headlines, visuals or captions do not support the content.
- **Misleading content:** framing content in a manner that misleads people through selective presentation. In so doing, important bits of information are deliberately ignored, hidden or omitted.
- **False context:** genuine content that is shared with false contextual information. For example, this can result from using a headline that does not reflect the content of an article.
- **Imposter content:** impersonation of genuine sources. It is concerning when a journalist's byline is used alongside an article s/he did not write, or an organization's logo appears in videos or images they did not create.
- **Manipulated content:** this happens when genuine content (image, video or text) is manipulated to deceive. Examples of this practice ranges from using the byline of a journalist.
- **Fabricated content:** completely false content, like the false claim that Pope Francis had endorsed Donald Trump for president in 2016.

3. The root causes of the strike:

Though the Moroccan government largely attempted to promote the idea that teachers had gone on strike mainly to demand salary increases, the truth is that the strike was a reaction to the introduction of decree law No 2.23.819 (Source: Official bulletin. (2023). Decree law No. 2.23.819 http://www.sgg.gov.ma/BO/AR/3111/2023/BO_7237_Ar.pdf, accessed 18 January 2024), which, according to teachers, had been considered unjust, frustrating, and detrimental to their interests. They complained that the new law set the stage for education authorities to assign teachers new tasks that are beyond their core duties of teaching and administering exams. According to Article 15 of the new law, the following tasks will be part of teachers' duties:

- Education and teaching;
- Assessment and school support;
- Cooperation and coordination within the educational team;
- Participation in the process of professional development and development;
- Participation in the administration of school exams, civil service exams and professional competence exams;
- Participation in school and extracurricular activities.

These newly-added roles were largely refuted by teachers, especially since they are not compensated for. Even more concerning is that Article 67 stipulates that: "The tasks specified in this decree shall be reviewed and detailed, or other tasks may be assigned to the stakeholders [including teachers], by a decision of the government authority responsible for national education." Compensation was a divisive issue in this law.¹ One of the grievances widely expressed by teachers was the lack of a compensation package for teachers, unlike administrators or teachers entrusted with administrative roles. As Article 91 indicates, compensation for administrative roles ranges between MAD 7,200 and MAD 56,046 per annum. Within the teaching community, this was construed as teachers fulfilling roles of lesser value than those of administrators.

Another contentious point in the law was the teacher's workload. Article 68 of decree law No 2.23.819 stipulates that: "The weekly teaching hours for teachers shall be determined by a decision of the government authority responsible for national education, endorsed by the government authority responsible for public service" (Article 68 can be consulted at:

<http://bdj.mmsp.gov.ma/Ar/Document/10592-D%C3%A9cret-n-2-23-819-du-20-rebia-l-1445-6-octobre-2.aspx?KeyPath=594/596/599/601/10592>, accessed 4 February 2024).

This article was received with much apprehension as it implied increasing instructional hours for public school teachers to match those of private school teachers, often for lesser pay.

Beside the aforementioned issues, job security also seemed to have fed the general worries of teachers in Morocco. For example, the plan to subsume both government teachers and contractual teachers of regional academies for education and training under the nomenclature of “human resources” (decree law No. 2.23.819, Article 1) fuelled speculation and conspiracy theories regarding the government’s intentions. It is important to remember in this respect that in a 2017-report the World Bank recommended that the state improves public service governance by opting for contractual hiring in place of job-for-life model of civil servants (The World Bank, 2017: 44). On a similar note, the International Monetary Fund’s 2019 report on Morocco’s economic growth pointed out to the need for a continued implementation of sound economic, financial and structural public policies. These policies, according to the IMF, should boost the economy and modernize the country’s civil service, of which the implementation and promotion of “the gradual introduction of contractual employment” figured prominently among the measures pledged by the Moroccan government (The International Monetary Fund, 2019: 30).

The general feeling within the teaching community is that the Moroccan government’s decision to resort to contractual employment in the national education sector reflects the influence of the Bretton Woods Institutions. Such feeling has been reinforced even more by the participation of Younes Sekkouri, Minister of Economic Inclusion, Small Business, Employment and Skills, in the rounds of negotiations held between the government and syndicates to diffuse the tensions in the sector of national education. In fact, the contractual employment approach adopted by the government since 2016 is strongly believed to make hiring and firing much easier in the national education sector. Thus, in the backdrop of these circumstances, a great deal of problematic information has spread on social media.

4. Weaponized social media:

During teachers’ strikes, spanning October 2023 through January 2024, a wide dissemination of falsehoods happened across various social media platforms. For example, on 13 October 2023, a TikTok user by the username @saisouidid2 posted a widely circulated videoⁱⁱ across other platforms, which claimed that teachers enjoy an attractive benefits package. Benefits include:

- Special health insurance coverage.
- Easy access to loans and foreign travel.
- Paid holidays reaching 120 days a year.
- 4-hour-a-day workload.

Aside from these privileges, the video purports that a teacher’s salary falls within the range of MAD 6 K and 13 K. This is inaccurate and misleading. According to a 2021-report published by The Higher Council for Education, Training, and Scientific Research (CSEFRS) (2021: 85), an entry-level teacher receives a salary of MAD 4.768, 4.973, and 5.774 in primary school, lower secondary school, and upper secondary school respectively. At the end of their careers, primary school teachers, who constitute the largest number of teachers in the country, receive a salary of MAD 11,199, middle school teachers get MAD 11,299, and high school teachers get MAD 13.747.

Regarding teachers’ workload, teachers have to do 30 hours of instruction in primary school, 24 in middle school and 21 in high school. That is more than 4 hours of teaching a day for primary school teachers, who make up the majority of teachers in Morocco.

The overall objective of the video tends to undermine the legitimacy of teachers’ strikes by exaggerating the advantages associated with the teaching profession, possibly to diminish public support or sympathy for teachers’ demands during the strikes.

Along with the video, the Ministry of National Education attempted to gaslight teachers by suggesting that they did not grasp the content of decree law No 2.23.819. To encourage teachers as well as the general public to believe this narrative, the Ministry launched a campaign on state TV channels like 2M and *Al Aoula* as well as on its official Facebook page to show the new decree



law in a positive light. Beside the Minister of National Education, the mission was also entrusted to high-ranking officials in the Ministry, Academies and Directorates.

As strikes continued into November through January, a number of Facebook pages and individuals joined the effort to discredit the legitimacy of teachers’ rights to better working conditions. This started happening especially in January when teachers started showing signs of giving up the fight, either due to tiredness resulting from the prolonged strike or the uncertainty of the Ministry’s response to the strike. Towards the

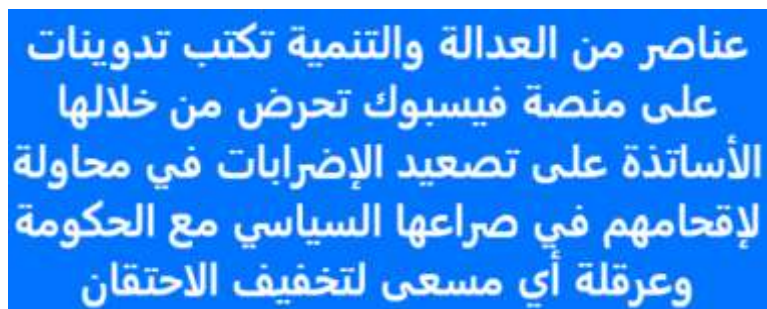


end of the first week of January, a series of posts ridiculing teachers started appearing on the Facebook group *Taâlim Infos ll أخبار التعليم بالمغرب*. Suspended teachers and sympathizers were described as immature, extremist, and anarchist along with other denigrating characterizations. It is interesting to note that the ridicule directed at the suspended teachers started prior to the time when the Ministry resorted to suspending teachers from work, at the beginning of January 2024.

Three profiles on the group *Taâlim Infos ll أخبار التعليم بالمغرب* attracted attention due to their contributions to information disorder regarding teachers’ strike. For ethical considerations, I have assigned names to refer to the three profiles, whose initials are only listed in the chart below:

Profile	Assigned names
A.E.	Hassan
S.K.	Amine
S.A.	Kamal

To begin with Hassan, he joined the group on December 31, 2023. Within January 2024, he created some 53 posts, all of which blamed coordination committees for mishandling teachers’ strike. He took the matter even further by addressing members of coordination committees and their supporters in very pejorative terms, like being ignorant, extremist, childish, lunatic, reckless, and immature. Furthermore, on 1 January 2024, Hassan created a post in which he accused the Justice and Development Party (PJD) of conspiring with members of coordination committees against the Akhannouch governmentⁱⁱⁱ by escalating tensions.



Teachers’ strike—a conspiracy by the PJD against the current government.

On the other hand, Amine, who joined the group on 15 January 2024, sounded on repeated occasions more interested in issues related to national security than national education. In the post below, Amine made the point that going on a long strike is a violation of national laws, or rather a threat to national security.



Amine shared this seemingly irrelevant post^{iv} to probably suggest that whoever tries to test the state's power to handle massive protests will fail. The post could also be perceived as "censorship by noise" which aims to drown out any serious discussion of issues that matter to the community of teachers. In a similar fashion, he also shared a short video lecture in which the speaker enumerates the virtues of the philosophy of the Frankfurt School (Source: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=389938573657664>, accessed 10 April 2024). Clearly, this school of thought has nothing to do with the context of Moroccan teachers going on strike, but the speaker wanted to make the point that the researchers associated with the German school of thought have attempted to bring about change in the world through critique and scepticism in a context fraught with nihilism and obscurantism. This, according to Amine, applies to the Moroccan context as not only do some Moroccans tend to belittle whatever effort made by the government to improve conditions in the country, but they also get allegedly involved in various information disorder campaigns against public figures in the country, of whom the Head of the General Directorate for National Security is one. In this context, strikers are alluded to as nihilists and obscurantists as well as defamation and disinformation mongers, who refuse to acknowledge the great efforts made to improve the public education system in the country. In fact, the allusion can be as serious as considering the strikers as an enemy to their own country and that the national security apparatus plays a major role to deal with them for the sake of a prosperous country.



Amine's attempts to label teachers with negative terms contradict a key slogan from the strikes. This slogan asserted the legitimacy of teachers' cause and refuted accusations of nihilism or obscurantism. The slogan ran thus:

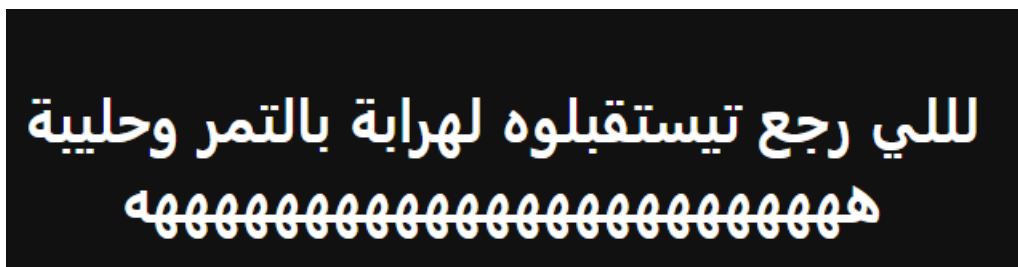
English	Arabic
1. Who are we? Teachers	1. وشكون حنا ؟أساتذة
2. What do we want? Dignity and fair pay	2. و شنو بغيينا ؟الدرجة / الكرامة والعدالة أجرية
3. Are we terrorists? No, no!	3. إرهابيين ؟لا لا
4. Are we troublemakers? No, no!	4. فوضاويين..... لا لا
5. Are we nihilists? No, no!	5. عديمين ؟لا لا
6. Who are we? Activists / teachers	6. و شكون حنا؟..... مناضلين / أساتذة وأستاذات
7. What do we reject? The sham agreement	7. شنو رافضين ؟الاتفاق المهزلة
8. What do we reject?..... Exclusion and marginalization.	8. شنو رافضين ؟ الاقصاء والتهميش
9. What do we want? Grade	9. شنو بغيينا ؟ الدرجة
10. What do we want? Dignity	10. شنو بغيينا ؟الكرامة
11. What do we want? Freedom	11. شنو بغيينا ؟الحرية
12. What do we want? Fair pay	12. شنو بغيينا ؟.....العدالة الأجرية

Kamal is yet another profile whose activity on the group raised much suspicion, given the amount of inappropriate content he posted. This user joined the group on January 1, 2024. From January 7 to March 11, Kamal created around 46 posts ridiculing and disparaging teachers on strike as the following post illustrates:



This caricature shows Kabir Kacha, a member of the National Federation of Education (*Fédération Nationale de L'Enseignement*), grovelling at the feet of his master, who is understood to be the Minister of National Education Chakib Benmoussa. The caricature portrayed the utmost humiliation and need for forgiveness felt by Kabir Kacha and by extension the community of teachers who went on strike.

On March 1, Kamal made the post below to ridicule strikers as cowards and scabs. The post reads: "suspended teachers are received by scabs with dates and milk as they return to work."



It is interesting to note that the three users—Hassan, Amine, and Kamal—joined the group at a time when teachers' strike started showing signs of abating and the Ministry of National Education started suspending teachers leading the protests. Combining this fact with the kind of offensive or provocative messages they had been posting on the group raised, then, suspicions about the existence of some coordinated behaviour targeting teachers on strike.

What reinforces this possibility is the fact that the group *Taâlim Infos II* أخبار التعليم بالمغرب, where they were active, presents misleading similarities with a Facebook page under the same name, which warrants addressing. The following chart shows where the two communities converge and diverge:

	Community 1	Community 2
Name	<i>Taâlim Infos II</i> أخبار التعليم بالمغرب	<i>Taâlim Infos II</i> أخبار التعليم بالمغرب
Content category	Public group	Page
History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created , April 12, 2022 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created - <i>Taâlim Infos</i> February 1, 2013 Changed name to <i>Taâlim Infos</i> أخبار التعليم September 15, 2015 Changed name to <i>Taâlim Infos II</i> أخبار التعليم بالمغرب September 22, 2015
Followers	4,8k	761k
Page focus	Education	Education

Beside the name and content, the two communities share the same cover photo as shown below:

Community 1:



Community 2:



5. Gatekeepers fuelling information pollution:

Some high-profile journalists also attempted to manipulate public opinion regarding teachers' strike. For instance, in October 2023 MFM Radio journalist Jamal Berraoui^v harshly attacked teachers on strike while he was on air in his show "Ach Waqa'a" (What's up?) (Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jEFYam3J4Wg>, accessed 12 May 2024. Berraoui described teachers as "mercenaries", "incompetent", and "silly" since their severe forms of protest harmed students' right to education.

Similarly, journalist Rachid Niny^{vi} was criticised for withdrawing his support for teachers' cause. On 29 October 2023, the journalist shared an article on his Facebook profile where he challenged the Ministry of National Education's narrative - and indeed the government's, as well - regarding the poor quality of education in Moroccan public schools, highlighting thereby how criticism often unfairly targets teachers by placing the blame solely on them for the country's educational difficulties. Niny also exposed falsehoods that the Ministry of National Education peddled to mislead the public opinion about teachers' promotions and compensation. According to him, it was high time the government restored the teacher's financial and moral dignity for the sake of a high-performing education system.



In November through December 2023, Niny's previous positive attitude towards teachers demonstrably turned hostile. For example, in his popular column *Chouf Tchouf*, featuring in *Alakhbar* daily, Niny discussed the takeaways from the lengthy strike. He claimed that teachers showed a disconcerting lack of educational competence, loss of moral compass, and absence of cultural awareness and understanding. For him, that was enough proof for the poor scholastic achievement of students and the negative image associated with the public school. While such an evaluation might lead one to consider existing issues related to teachers' quality of practice, it is clearly a harsh generalization amounting to an offence against teachers.



On 12 November 2023, Isaac Charia (Moroccan attorney and politician currently serving as the Secretary General of The Liberal Moroccan Party) shared the post below on his Facebook profile stating that the episode of Tele Maroc show "Face to Face" in which he had participated was pulled from broadcast due to government pressure on Rachid Niny's TV channel. This could help explain the shift in the journalist's stance on teachers strike.



6. Teachers weaponizing social media:

Examining teachers' use of social media during the strike, there is evidence that it oscillated between positivity and negativity. Social media platforms played a major role to unite teachers around the common goal of protesting decree law No. 2.23.819. Through WhatsApp, Facebook, and other platforms, teachers reached out to each other to sensitize the teaching community about the potential risks involved in the law. They also shared content to explain the objectives of the strike and to rally public support for their cause. However, such an effort involved the promulgation of much mis/disinformation. In December 2023, a number of social media users spread the post below about the number of full-time unionists in the public education sector in what seemed to be an attempt to discredit the work of unions to defend teachers' interests and question the integrity of their leadership. The

National Federation for Education (FNE) denied the allegation on its Facebook page while affirming that it upholds the highest ethical standards.



Some public figures were also the subject of mis/disinformation. For example, at times, Professor Omar Cherkaoui, of the faculty of law of Hassan II in Mohammedia, and FNE Secretary General Mr Abdellah Ghmimat's **views clashed with teachers' aspirations, leading to a decline in their popularity, as evidenced by the** following social media posts:



"Please report the YouTube channel of this profit-making seeker who drives wedges between activists."



"Where on Earth is betrayer Abdellah Ghmimat? Soon after being called for negotiations, the once-vocal advocate of teachers has gone suspiciously quiet."

In a climate full of tension and suspicion, a general feeling of distrust and betrayal seemed to gain ground among teachers, and a polluted information landscape marked the time. This was aptly captured by Professor Cherkaoui when he said, "It saddens me to see this culture of betrayal flourish in the teaching community. You might be a hero today, but a traitor tomorrow simply because your views do not please the masses."



The Minister Delegate in charge of the Budget Mr Faouzi Lekjaa was another public figure targeted by information disorder. In the following post, teachers satirically compared Lekjaa to a Santa Claus who had gifts for everyone, but teachers. This claim was made in a context where news about salary rises and compensations in other public sectors were leaked to the public. It was clear that the financial aspect of the rounds of negotiation between the government and the syndicates did not measure up to teachers' expectations.



At a certain time, there was a feeling that teachers were seeking interest in their strike from international media. This is clearly evidenced by the BBC impostor video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1HWP3KF1OC0>, accessed on 20 May 2024) shown below, where deepfake technology was used.



The video begins with BBC News startup theme along with the BBC on-screen graphics. The objective is obviously to create a strong impression that the video is a BBC production.



Reverse-image search on Google Lens, TinEye and Yandex did not yield any results of the newscaster. This indicates that the image is most probably synthetically generated.



The video includes scenes of teachers' protests from different cities in Morocco, but no commentary goes with that. This is a clear sign of the fakery of the video.

To conclude, of the seven types of information disorder listed by Claire Wardle and mentioned in the definition section above, satire, false connection, misleading content, false context and manipulated content were particularly recurrent. Along with these, there were some cases of trolling and conspiratorial thinking.

7. Survey analysis:

To gain more insight into the use of information disorder during teachers' strike, we administered an online survey in Arabic using Google Forms software. We ran the survey on WhatsApp between January 15 and February 15, 2024, and we received 114 responses. The link to the survey was mainly distributed through two WhatsApp groups of primary and secondary school teachers working in the region of Rabat, Sale, and Kenitra: FSD Kenitra (88 members) and Kenitra Province High School Teachers (313 members).

The major aim of the survey was to investigate the quality of information spreading within the public education sector in the wake of the introduction of decree law No. 2.23.819. We were more specifically concerned with finding out teachers' perspective on how mis/disinformation played out during teachers' strike. In this regard, we focused on the potential contributions of teachers, syndicates and the government to the information environment during the period of the strike.

To begin with teachers, our objective was threefold:

1. to assess their scope of understanding of decree law No. 2.23.819;
2. to examine their potential involvement in any form of information disorder; and
3. to learn about the motives for the strike.

Of the 114 respondents, 92.1% teachers read the proposed law, and 72.8% of the respondents stated that the scope of teachers' understanding of the content of the decree was good. Key to teachers' fairly good grasp of the decree law could be attributed to the use of social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook to connect with fellow teachers and discuss the content of the decree. In addition, the meetings that teachers used to hold in teachers' lounge almost every day were an opportunity for getting updates about the strike and learning about the decree law.

Regarding the possibility that teachers disseminated inaccurate information about decree law No. 2.23.819, only 5.3% of respondents answered affirmatively, contrasting sharply with the 83.3% who responded negatively. However, a significant number of survey participants (11.4%) expressed uncertainty. This could lead to the consideration of the scientific evidence suggesting that when people's emotions run intense, chances of them spreading mis/disinformation become high. This was visibly clear in the community of teachers in the wake of the introduction of the new statute.

Apart from emotions, trust is another predictor of the promulgation of mis/disinformation. 95 of the 114 teachers participating in the survey expressed dissatisfaction at the quality of the representation of education syndicates. The 3-month long strike revealed very low levels of trust between the community of teachers and their representatives in syndicates, which generated a great deal of information disorder.

For the majority of the teachers surveyed (71.9%), education syndicates' decision-making process reflected government influence. Not only does this probably explain the distrust teachers showed in syndicates, but it also raised some suspicions about government conspiring with syndicates against the interests of teachers.

Teachers also expressed deep distrust in the government providing the general public with accurate information about the crisis in the public education sector. This was the view of 94.7% of the respondents. The fallout of this is perhaps an official narrative discrediting teachers' narrative of the decree law being unfair. In fact, 91.2% of the teachers surveyed believed that the government used dirty tactics, including mis/disinformation, to manage teachers' strike. What is more, 101 teachers stated that the government even employed public figures and troll armies to influence teachers.

8. Focus group discussion:

Following the survey, we sought to probe deeper into the information landscape that dominated the time when teachers were on strike. 7 coordinators of the National Coordination of Secondary Education Teachers accepted to take part in a focus group discussion. We began the discussion with a question about teachers' motivations for the strike. All the participants agreed that teachers protested an unjust and demotivating new fundamental law. As some coordinators explained, the law spelt out new unremunerated tasks that rendered working conditions even more unsatisfactory. In addition, others stressed the causal link to the teachers' strike of a set of harsh disciplinary measures included in the new law as well as the common belief among teachers that the law paved the way for contractual employment and the privatization of national education. One participant added that the lack of teachers' involvement in the making of the new decree law No.2.23.819 was yet another cause of the strike.

On the possibility of teachers spreading mis/disinformation, 5 coordinators denied teachers' involvement in any promulgation of inaccurate information about the new law, while one participant believed that there were cases where teachers spread the information that teachers joining public service prior to 2016 (the year when the government embarked on contractual employment in the national education sector) would also be subject to contractual employment. To this coordinator, the Ministry of National Education's adoption of the nomenclature "human resources" instead of "the employees of the national education sector" was a good reason to believe that the government sought to undermine teachers' employment security.

Similarly, we asked the participants about whether the government spread any misleading or false information about teachers' strike. Of the 7 coordinators participating in the discussion, 6 agreed that the government and the Ministry of National Education repeatedly presented the public with inaccurate figures about the number of strikers. Moreover, the government dismissed teachers' strikes as a constitutional right, but rather unauthorized absence from work. According to the participants, the objective was twofold: 1) to mislead the general public about the seriousness of the educational crisis, and 2) to create a false feeling among teachers that the strike failed, which was meant to hasten an end to the strike. Moreover, the Ministry of National Education also touted the benefits of the new decree-law No. 2.23.819 repeatedly hoping teachers would stop their protest.

In a question about the stance of education syndicates on the strike, 6 of the coordinators stated that 4 of the 5 major syndicates, notably the National Union of Education (UMT), the National Education Syndicate Union (CDT), the Free Union of Education (UGTM), and the National Education Federation Union (FDT), were not transparent about the negotiations they conducted with the government and the Ministry of National Education. In fact, they were more supportive of the government than teachers. As a coordinator stated, the resignation of some members of the 4 syndicates attested to the syndicates' complicity with the government in ending teachers' strike. With the exception of the National Federation for Education (FNE), the four syndicates tried to save face by appearing to distance themselves from the government and place more focus on teachers' interests. The participating coordinators believed that the syndicates' tilting support to teachers may not have taken place if teachers' coordination committees had not sustained the strike regardless of the ministry's adoption of salary deductions as an approach to end it.

About the involvement of entities other than the teaching community in the strike, the participants unanimously denied any external interference, being it from political parties or any other entities. To them, teachers went on strike because they felt marginalized and unfairly treated.

Another important question we asked the 7 coordinators was about whether the government resorted to any practices to obstruct coordination among teachers. The participants stated that some education directorates, for example, tried to end the strike by sending written warnings and reprimands to coordinators. There was even a feeling among the coordinators that agents working for the Ministry of the Interior infiltrated coordination committees to collect key information about their work, like the time and venue of their meetings as well as their views and decisions regarding issues related to the strike.

The obstruction of coordination among teachers was also done through fabricating statements issued by coordination committees, as happened in late December 2023 through early January 2024. According to the 7 coordinators, the fabricated statements created confusion within the teaching community and made a number of teachers consider ending the strike.

We closed our discussion by asking why teachers suspended the strike. The 7 coordinators agreed that one reason for that was the general feeling among the teaching community that certain objectives were achieved, especially repealing decree law No. 2.23.819 and raising teachers' salaries. However, taking disciplinary action by the Ministry of National Education against more than 500 teachers across the country was believed to be the major reason for the end of the strike. These teachers were temporarily suspended from work without pay, and they were required to appear before disciplinary committee panels for gross misconduct.

9. Findings:

Based on the responses contributed by the survey participants and those gleaned from the focus group discussion, it is clear that mis/disinformation around decree law No. 2.23.819 largely marked interaction between teachers, syndicates, and the government. One key finding from the study is that cognitive skills alone, no matter how developed they are, may not be enough to boost

people's immunity to mis/disinformation. At a deeper level, people's emotions (anxiety, distrust, etc.) and biases (confirmation bias, illusory truth effect, etc.) are very likely to disrupt the proper epistemological processes like logical reasoning and critical thinking. In other words, emotions and biases very often make information processing subjective.

Of equal importance to mention as well is the role of social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube in amplifying the various types of information disorder, whether that originated from teachers, syndicates, or influencers who were looking to generate traffic for their YouTube channels, in particular, or even content associated with the government. In this respect, the impact of recommendation algorithms cannot be understated.

A third key takeaway from this study is that the information landscape during teachers' strike was believed to have been subtly influenced by the government to peddle a misleading narrative about the motives and the legitimacy of teachers' strike. The government was believed to have used social as well as traditional media to shape a narrative other than the one that teachers were trying to advance. Information disorder was a mechanism employed by teachers and the government alike to serve their interests—teachers protesting assumed injustice and the government promoted a new law by emphasizing its benefits for teachers and the future of education in Morocco.

We believe that candid, transparent, and regular dialogues are vital to democratic processes and can boost trust between teachers, syndicates, and the government. The tug of war the three stakeholders were engaged in was a reminder that information disorder is a serious issue that needs to be tackled to create a healthier information ecosystem in Moroccan society at large.

10. Conclusion:

In this paper, our discussion has centred on the dissemination of problematic information (a term used by communication scholar Caroline Jack to refer to information disorder, https://datasociety.net/pubs/oh/DataAndSociety_LexiconofLies.pdf, accessed 14 March 2024) during teachers' strike in Morocco from October 2023 to January 2024. The main argument is that the strike was marked by a wider production, distribution, and consumption of different types of information disorder across different social media platforms where the government, syndicates, and teachers all contributed to a polluted information environment. We believe that such an environment poses the following questions:

1. What is the role of the government in sustaining trust in public institutions and building an informed society whose access to reliable information is guaranteed by law?
2. What is the mission of syndicates to honour their representation of teachers in the most transparent manner possible?, and
3. How engaged are the teachers in setting up a constructive dialogue with the government and syndicates on issues like teachers' legal statute and their working conditions?

Teachers' strike revealed disregard for truth in Moroccan society as a more serious problem. Even more troubling is the fact that there is no reliable inoculation program in place to boost people's immunity to mis/disinformation, nor is there any social media law that can help curb the nefarious effect of the phenomenon on society at large. A sector as sensitive and crucial as national education requires that the government shows enough courage and wisdom to nurture a culture of trust, notably through the institutions of education, media, and justice.

Notes:

ⁱ Article 89 of decree law No. 2.23.819 specifies the annual compensation package of teachers with the necessary qualifications to teach in preparatory class centers (known as B.T.S.), while articles 90 and 91 deal with the annual compensation package of pedagogical inspectors and administrators working in primary and secondary schools. More on the articles can be found at: <http://bdj.mmsp.gov.ma/Ar/Document/10592-D%C3%A9cret-n-2-23-819-du-20-rebia-l-1445-6-octobre-2.aspx?KeyPath=594/596/599/601/10592>

ⁱⁱ The can be found at: <https://www.tiktoak.com/@saiidsouidid2/photo/7289491551590583558>

ⁱⁱⁱ Aziz Akhannouch is a Moroccan politician, businessman, and billionaire who was nominated by His Majesty King Mohamed VI as the Prime Minister of Morocco as of October 2021 after his political party, the National Rally of Independents, won September 8, 2021 parliamentary elections.

^{iv} The post makes the claim that the Moroccan human rights lawyer Mohammed Ziane was weaponized by Algeria against the interests of Morocco.

^v Jamal Berraoui is a Moroccan journalist, editorialist, and communications consultant. He has served as editor-in-chief of such Moroccan magazines as *La vie économique*, *La gazette du Maroc*, and *Challenge*. After working as a political journalist on television, he is now a columnist for *Médias 24*. Politically, he is affiliated with the Socialist Union of Popular Forces. Jamal Berraoui is also the founding president of the Moroccan Organization against Hatred and Racism (Source: https://editions-balland.com/Jamal-Berraoui_auteur_6380.html).

^{vi} Rachid Niny is the General Director of *Al Akhbar* newspaper and co-founder of *Al-Massae* newspaper. In 2017, Niny launched TV channel Télé Maroc. He is well known for his controversial column "*Chouf Tchouf*".

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Appendix 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Have you read decree law No. 2.23.819 of 27 September 2023?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

2. What is your evaluation of teachers' understanding of decree law No. 2.23.819?
 - a. Good
 - b. Average
 - c. Poor

3. Do you think teachers spread inaccurate information about decree law No. 2.23.819?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I am not sure

4. Why do you think teachers went on strike? Choose all that apply.
 - a. The new statute for education is believed to be unjust
 - b. High cost of living
 - c. Pay injustice
 - d. Pending class-based issues

5. Do you think that education syndicates fully represent teachers' aspirations?
 - a. I agree
 - b. I disagree
 - c. I am not sure

6. Do you think the decision-making process of education syndicates reflects government influence?
 - a. I agree
 - b. I disagree
 - c. I am not sure

7. Do you think the Moroccan government provided accurate information about the crisis in the public education sector?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I am not sure

8. Do you think the government used various strategies, including misinformation, to manage teachers' strikes?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I am not sure

9. Do you think the government attempted to influence teachers through individual public figures and troll armies?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I am not sure

Appendix 2

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Why did teachers go on strike between October 2023 and January 2024?
2. Do you believe that teachers spread any mis/disinformation about decree law No. 2.23.819? If yes, why?
3. Do you believe that the government and the Ministry of National Education disseminated any false or misleading information about teachers' strike? If yes, why? What are some examples of that information?
4. To what extent would you agree with the Ministry of National Education in stating that decree law No. 2.23.819 was motivating to teachers?
5. How would you evaluate the kind of information shared by the major education syndicates?
6. Do you think that the statements, communications, or posts of the major education syndicates were false or misleading to the general public?
7. There were some accusations from teachers against education syndicates, alleging that they misrepresented teachers' interests by siding with the government in an attempt to sabotage the strike. To what extent were the accusations accurate?
8. Was the teachers' strike motivated by the interests of teachers themselves or was it influenced by some external entities, like political parties, for example?
9. Do you think that the government resorted to certain ways to obstruct or restrict the work of coordinators? If yes, what are some of the tactics used?
10. During December 2023 through January 2024, teachers widely spread in social media news and copies of fabricated statements issued by coordination committees. Did the fabrication of those statements happen for real? If yes, who did it?
11. Why was the strike suspended?
12. Did teachers accomplish the objectives of the strike?