Jordan

Key Developments: June 2016 – May 2017

- Telecom operators continue to block VoIP calling features on several communication apps, but an online campaign successfully pressured the government to roll back a proposal for operators to unblock them for a monthly fee (see Restrictions on Connectivity and Digital Activism).

- Prodemocracy activists were detained and prosecuted for their online activities, including eight retired officers who called for reform and one leader of a Facebook campaign (see Prosecutions and Detentions for Online Activities).

- In a first several licensed news websites were blocked. Jordan’s Media Commission, the sole agency with authority to order blocks, denied responsibility in some cases (see Blocking and Filtering).

- Writer Nahed Hattar, who was on trial for republishing a cartoon on Facebook seen as offensive to Islam, was assassinated by a religious extremist (see Prosecutions and Detentions for Online Activities and Intimidation and Violence).

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* 0=most free, 100=least free

Population: 9.5 million

Internet Penetration 2016 (ITU): 62.3 percent

Social Media/ICT Apps Blocked: Yes

Political/Social Content Blocked: Yes

Bloggers/ICT Users Arrested: Yes

Press Freedom 2017 Status: Not Free
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Introduction

Internet freedom declined in Jordan due to the murder of Nahed Hattar by a religious extremist for sharing a satirical cartoon on Facebook, as well as the blocking of several licensed news sites.

Authorities arrested several activists for calling for criticizing public officials or calling for reform. Communication apps continue to be restricted during school examinations, an alarming sign that the government will restrict information at the slightest excuse. Internet service providers (ISPs) continue to block internet calling services (VoIP) on popular apps such as Viber, WhatsApp, and Skype, in defiance of Jordan’s telecommunications regulator. Millions of Jordanians who rely on the services to do business and communicate have been unable to access them since 2015.

Legal restrictions on internet and digital media freedom are principally based on a cybercrime law and the Press and Publication Law (PPL). Article 11 of the cybercrime law penalizes online defamation with a fine and prison sentence of at least three months. The Law Interpretation Bureau ruled that the law could also be applied to journalists for articles that appeared on their outlets’ websites, thereby contravening protections in the PPL. After the assassination of the Nahed Hattar, a Christian writer who had mocked extremists’ concept of heaven, a new climate of fear emerged on social media. The government has also sought to pass tougher legislation on hate speech and incitement online.

After the regional uprisings of 2011, constitutional amendments were passed to calm public discontent, improving protections for freedom of expression and strengthening the independence of the judiciary. However, when amendments to the PPL came into force in June 2013, nearly 300 websites were blocked for failing to obtain a license from the Media Commission. During the coverage period, unlicensed websites remained blocked by the commission, but at least two licensed websites were temporarily blocked without a clear legal basis, in addition to the entirety of the Internet Archive.

Obstacles to Access

Mobile broadband has soared, boosted by the introduction of 4G LTE and new packages with more affordable pricing. However, the ICT market continues to be largely controlled by Jordan’s existing providers.

Availability and Ease of Access

According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 62.3 percent of the Jordanian population had access to the internet by the end of 2017, up from 34.9 percent five years earlier. National figure from the Telecommunications Regulation Commission (TRC) estimated 8.7 million Jordanians had access to the internet, resulting in a penetration rate of 87 percent as of the third quarter of 2016. For the same period, the TRC estimated the number of mobile phone subscriptions to be slightly over 16.7 million, or a penetration rate of 168 percent. Ninety percent of all internet


subscriptions are mobile broadband subscriptions, with the number of fixed-line ADSL subscriptions steadily decreasing.³

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<th>Key Access Indicators</th>
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<td>Internet penetration (ITU)⁴</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
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<td>Mobile penetration (ITU)⁵</td>
<td>196%</td>
<td>179%</td>
<td>111%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average connection speeds (Akamai)⁶</td>
<td>5.8 Mbps</td>
<td>4.6 Mbps</td>
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A survey conducted by the Department of Statistics demonstrated that females made up 43.5 percent of Jordanian internet users in 2015.⁴ Thirteen percent of respondents cited the high cost of internet service as a reason for not using the internet, while only one percent saw the lack of localized or Arabic online content as a reason for not connecting.⁵ Prices have dropped in recent years, but in February 2017, a sales tax on internet services was increased from 8 to 16 percent, resulting in a price increase.⁶

Monthly home broadband subscriptions range from JOD 21 (US$30) for a data allowance of 82 GB, to JOD 50 (US$71) for allowance of up to 300 GB.⁷ Monthly mobile internet prices range from JOD 2 (US$3) for a 400 MB plan to JOD 20 (US$28) for 10 GB.⁸

According to Pew Research Center, there is a “real and pervasive” demographic digital divide among internet users in Jordan. While 75 percent of individuals from the ages of 18-34 use the internet, the percentage dropped to 57 percent among those aged 35 years and above. The contrast was even starker when looking at education levels. Ninety-six percent of people with “more education” used the internet, compared to only 41 percent of Jordanians with “less education.” The report also shed light on economic differences with 80 percent of high-income individuals using the internet compared to 50 percent of low-income individuals.⁹ Meanwhile, access in many of the country’s rural governorates remains poor in comparison to urban areas. For instance, fiber-optic connections (FTTx) offered by the main providers are limited to the wealthy areas of western Amman, the capital city.

Restrictions on Connectivity

Starting June 2015, the Jordanian government ordered internet service providers to block access to WhatsApp, Instagram, and Viber on days that secondary school students sat for their national exam (Tawjiih). Multiple users reported the block continued to be effective during exams in both 2016 and 2017, even though the restrictions were delimited to locations nearby examination halls and limited to a couple of hours.

In March 2016, the TRC stopped Jordanian mobile operators’ attempt to impose fees on the use of VoIP services in order to increase profits. However, the providers then blocked users from making free or cheap phone calls over services like WhatsApp and Viber. In January 2017, the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (MoICT) proposed a new monthly fee of JOD 2 (US$2.8) for users in order to unblock VoIP, with revenues shared between operators and the government. However, the proposed fee was rejected by the Council of Ministers following online protests (see “Digital Activism”).

While no other restrictions on connectivity were seen in Jordan over the past year, the centralization of the internet backbone infrastructure remains a concern. The incumbent operator, Orange Jordan, has a de facto monopoly on the international gateway and local backbone, as other providers utilize Orange’s copper network for last mile connectivity. Nonetheless, over the past few years, most ISPs have initiated work on their own fiber-optic backbone. Additionally, Orange remains the landing party for the FLAG FEA submarine cable, the only East-West cable to land in Jordan. A number of providers, like Damamax and LinkDotNet, have independent international connectivity while non-incumbent provider VTel signed an agreement to be the landing party for a possible connection of the FLAG FALCON submarine cable to Aqaba.

International connectivity is also provided via terrestrial connections from neighbouring countries as an alternative to submarine cables. In 2015, the RCN (Regional Cable Network) was launched to provide a high-capacity terrestrial fibre network from Fujairah to Amman, an addition to the established JADI (Jeddah-Amman-Damascus-Istanbul) link, in operation since 2010.

ICT Market

Three providers have a similar share of the information and communications technology (ICT) market: Umniah (a subsidiary of Batelco Bahrain), Zain, and Jordan Telecom.21 Jordan Telecom is 51 percent owned by France Telecom, with the remaining shares divided between Jordan’s Social Security Corporation, the armed forces, and others. An attempt to add a fourth provider was blocked by ISPs in December 2012.22

After rejecting two international operators, the Jordanian government awarded Zain Jordan the rights to introduce 4G/Long Term Evolution (LTE) services to the market, which it launched in February 2014. In January 2015, Orange Jordan (owned by the Jordan Telecom Group) was awarded the second 4G license for US$100 million,23 and later that June, the third 4G license was granted to Umniah for an equivalent price.24 In February 2017, FRiENDi, Jordan’s only mobile virtual network operator and part of Virgin Mobile Middle East and Africa, suspended its operations due to losses.25

Regulatory Bodies

The Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) is responsible for regulating the ICT sector. It is governed by the Telecommunications Law and defines its financial and administratively independent juridical personality.”26 Nonetheless, it is accountable to the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MoICT), which was created in April 2002 to drive the country’s ICT development.27 The TRC’s Board of Commissioners and its chairman are appointed by a resolution from the Council of Ministers based on a nomination from the prime minister.28 The ICT sector is regulated under Law No. 13 of 1995 and its amendment, Law No. 8 of 2002. The law endorses free-market policies and governs licensing and quality assurance.29

In January 2017, TRC chairman Ghazi Salem Al-Jobor30 blamed telecom operators for obstructing amendments to the Telecommunications Law that would have allowed the TRC to obtain greater independence and authority.31 One month earlier, members of a parliamentary financial committee cast doubt on the power of the TRC due to its inability to require that ISPs unblock VoIP services on popular communication apps (see Restrictions on Connectivity).32

32 Moutaz Abu Rumman, “MP Abu Rumman called on telecom companies to reverse the decision to block digital communication service via Viber and Whatsapp,” [Facebook post, In Arabic], http://bit.ly/2aERnHz.
Limits on Content

Authorities are increasingly using extralegal means to censor critical coverage. Several licensed news sites were blocked in murky circumstances and without transparent legal authorization. Self-censorship remains pervasive, particularly around the royal family and Islam, although digital activism made concrete gains over the past year.

Blocking and Filtering

The past year witnessed an alarming uptick in the number of licensed news websites being blocked, seemingly for failing to adhere to strict editorial guidelines. On August 8, 2016, the Media Commission blocked news site AmmanNet for nine days. Ostensibly, the blocking occurred after lawyers with the commission reinterpreted licensing regulations to ban outlets that are not fully owned by Jordanian individuals or entities. However, the owners of the website pointed to recent publication of articles that criticized the Grand Mufti as the main reason for the blocking order.33

In another case, a licensed news site was blocked without any apparent order. The site, Kull al Urdun, was blocked for a month starting January 13, 2017 after publishing an article on the detention of the Mohammed Otoom, a former general with the General Intelligence Directorate and current pro-reform activist in Jordan’s Military Veterans’ Association (Tayyar).34 According to the website owner, Khaled Majali, the Media Commission denied issuing any order to block the website.35

Internet users separately reported that the Internet Archive, a digital library, was inaccessible from early 2016 to early 2017. In an email received by the Internet Archive, the Media Commission confirmed that no blocking order had been issued by them or any other official entity.36 These instances evidence an alarming rise in the extralegality and nontransparency of Jordanian censorship orders. Having little sense of why their website is blocked and who ordered it, there is effectively no recourse for website owners who have found their websites blocked.

Officially the blocking of news websites is carried out according to the Press and Publications Law (PPL), amended in 2012, which stipulated that news websites need to obtain a license from the Media Commission or face blocking. The law also requires any electronic publication that publishes domestic or international news, press releases, or comments to register with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. One of the requirements for a general news website to obtain a license is to have an editor-in-chief who has been a member of the Jordan Press Association (JPA) for at least four years. In July 2014, the JPA law was amended to enable journalists in online media to become members. Prior to that, journalists could only become members if they underwent a period of “training” in an “official media organization.

According to the amended PPL, an electronic publication is defined as any website “with a specific web address on the Internet which provides publishing services, including news, reports,

34 Al-Quds Al-Arabi, “Jordan blocks a website because of a news article about the arrest of a retired military,” [In Arabic], January 21, 2017, http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=663076.
investigations, articles, and comments, and chooses to be listed in a special register maintained at the Department, pursuant to instructions issued by the Minister for this purpose.\textsuperscript{37} Articles 48 and 49 enable the head of the Media Commission to block any website for failing to obtain a license or, more broadly, for violating Jordanian law. For many observers, the law’s broad definition of a news website includes almost all Jordanian and international websites, blogs, portals, and social networks.

Consequently, 291 news websites were blocked in June 2013 on instructions from the head of the Media Commission (then named the Press and Publications Department) after a nine-month grace period. Most have since applied for a license to get unblocked. By June 2014, there were 160 licensed general news sites and 100 specialized websites. To obtain licenses, most general news websites hired new chief editors who were already JPA members, a concerning development for independent media given that 64 percent of JPA members work in government or government-related media outlets.\textsuperscript{38}

**Content Removal**

The 2012 amendments of the PPL increased the liability of intermediaries for content posted on news websites, placing readers’ comments under the same restrictions as normal news content. Clause 3 of Article 49 states that both the editors-in-chief and owners of online publications are legally responsible for all content posted to the site, including user comments.\textsuperscript{39} Moreover, websites must keep a record of all comments for six months after initial publication and refrain from publishing any “untruthful” or “irrelevant” comments.\textsuperscript{40} As a result, some news websites, such as JO24, stopped allowing comments for a limited period of time as an expression of protest.\textsuperscript{41}

**Media, Diversity, and Content Manipulation**

The overwhelming majority of journalists continue to practice self-censorship, as the annual survey on media freedoms conducted by the Amman-based Center for Defending the Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ) showed. According to the center’s 2016 survey, a staggering 94 percent of journalists said they practiced self-censorship in 2016.\textsuperscript{42} When asked about taboo topics, 95 percent said they avoided criticizing the armed forces, an increase over past years, and 91 percent stated they feared criticizing the king, the royal court and members of the royal family. The judicial system, tribal leaders, and religion are also sensitive topics.\textsuperscript{43}

According to the CDFJ survey, the percentage of respondents who believed media professionals avoided discussing sex-related topics in 2016 increased drastically, reaching 84.2 percent, the highest level in seven years. Additionally, avoidance of religious issues in the last year increased by

\textsuperscript{41} In a discussion about the impact of website licensing and the PPL, publisher of news website JO24 Basel Okour said that they stopped allowing comments on their website in protest of the law and to protect the privacy of their readers. See “An Open Meeting at 7iber to Discuss the State of Online Journalism After the Website Registration Requirement,” [in Arabic], YouTube video, 1:43:44, posted by Jordan Days, December 8, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJlvkviRk8I.
\textsuperscript{42} Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists, “Prohibition on Publication: Media Freedom Status in Jordan 2016”, May 2, 2017
10 percentage points to 83.1 percent. The survey pointed to growing threats from violent religious extremists against journalists as the main cause, in addition to the assassination of writer Nahed Hattar by an extremist in 2016.

The online information landscape continues to be limited by direct bans on reporting on certain topics, especially at critical moments. For instance, after the shooting of Hattar, the State Security Court banned all forms of publication regarding the case, to “preserve the secrecy of the investigation in the public’s interest,” according to a circular from the Media Commission.44

In the second half of 2016, two gag orders limiting independent coverage about the armed forces and the king were issued. On September 1, all media outlets were banned from reporting news about the king and the royal family, unless obtained from official bulletins released by the Royal Hashemite Court.45 On November 30, the Media Commission banned publication of any reports about the Jordan Armed Forces, except for statements made by its media spokesperson. The order covered social media networks and other websites, supposedly in the “public interest.”46

Facebook and YouTube are among the top ten visited websites in Jordan.47 As of April 2016, 89 percent of all social media users in Jordan used Facebook, while 71 percent used WhatsApp.48 In March 2017, King Abdullah launched a personal Twitter account.49 Other state leaders and institutions have established social media channels to communicate with the public, like the Royal Hashemite Court,50 the Crown Prince,51 and Queen Rania, who has millions of followers on Twitter and Instagram.52 Forbes Middle East has described her as “The Queen of Social Media.”53

Digital Activism

Several online campaigns called for boycotting different goods in protest against recent economic policies in 2017. In February, the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology suggested imposing a monthly fee on the use of several messaging apps, including Viber and WhatsApp, spurring an online campaign named “Sakker Khattak” (Shut off your phone line). Campaigners called citizens to boycott telecommunication companies for half a day,54 the National Society for Consumer Protection (NSCP) asked the government to look for alternatives,55 and the

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Jordan Open Source Association (JOSA) called on the government to respect net neutrality and user rights.\textsuperscript{56}

Also in February, the Facebook group "Jordanian Boycott Campaign," which called for a boycott of eggs and potatoes due to price increases, gathered more than 1.3 million followers.\textsuperscript{57} Consumption of eggs dropped by 15 percent and prices were subsequently lowered to pre-boycott levels, while a price ceiling was imposed by the government.\textsuperscript{58} Another boycott campaign was started by social media activists who urged motorists not to refuel their cars to protest against gas price hikes.\textsuperscript{59}

In October 2016, a coalition of activists and civil society organized a protest considered to be the largest since 2012. Demonstrators demanded the cancellation of a gas deal between the state-owned National Electric Power Company (NEPCO) and suppliers of Israeli gas.\textsuperscript{60} For several weeks, campaign organizers called for participants to shut off power in periodic hour-long blackouts. Pictures of darkened or candle-light towns flooded social media, while the Arabic hashtags used by the campaign, which translate as “the enemy’s gas is occupation,” and “switch off the lights,” were trending in the Jordanian Twittersphere.\textsuperscript{61}

Violations of User Rights

Several journalists were arrested for their online activities under a problematic cybersecurity law. The intelligence bureau detained a group of teachers, former security officials, and activists for almost one month due to social media posts that were critical of the bureau’s handling of a terrorist attack. A religious extremist assassinated Jordanian writer Nahed Hattar as he was due to face trial for inciting sectarianism over a cartoon mocking the so-called Islamic State. In the aftermath, several users were arrested for hate speech and extremism. Also, the state-owned news agency was hacked in order to post false news regarding Saudi’s deputy crown prince.

Legal Environment

Although Jordan’s constitution contains some theoretical protections for free speech online, in practice, several laws contain disproportionate or unnecessary restrictions. Jordan’s penal code forbids any insult of the royal family, state institutions, national symbols, foreign states, and “any writing or speech that aims at or results in causing sectarian or racial strife.” Defamation is also a criminal offense\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{58} Zaid Ad-Dabisiyah, “The Potato Revolution motivates Jordanians to expand the boycott of high-priced goods,” al-Araby al-Jadeed [in Arabic], February 1, 2017.
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Several constitutional amendments introduced in September 2011 directly or indirectly touched on internet freedom. Specifically, terms such as “mass media” and “other means of communication,” which likely encompass online media, were added to provisions that protect freedom of expression and concomitantly allow for its limitation during states of emergency (Article 15). With regard to the right to privacy, judicial approval was added as a precondition for censorship or confiscation of private communications (Article 18). Despite the passage of the Access to Information Law in 2007, a number of restrictions remain on requesting sensitive social and religious content.

In January 2017, the government called for the adoption of a “social media law” to limit hate speech and incitement online, and in September 2017 suggested a series of amendments to the cybercrime law to explicitly cover hate speech, define as “any statement or act that would incite discord, religious, sectarian, ethnic or regional strife or discrimination between individuals or groups.” An “internet police” unit was launched to fight cybercrime, including online activities that could foment sectarian or religious strife, a criminal offense in Jordan.

In June 2015, the amended Cybercrime Law No 27 came into effect with at least one provision that poses a serious threat to online freedom. According to Article 11, internet users can face a jail term of no less than three months and a maximum fine of JOD 2,000 (US$ 2,800), if they are found guilty of defamation on social media or online media outlets. In practical terms, this means journalists face harsher penalties online than in print media, since the Press and Publications Law prohibits the jailing of journalists. In 2015, the Law Interpretation Bureau issued a ruling that Article 11 supersedes other legislation, rendering journalists’ immunity that is safeguarded by the Press and Publications Law irrelevant. Thus, journalists may now be tried for print articles if those articles appear online. In March 2016, a group of journalists and activists launched a campaign, titled “Talking Is Not a Crime,” calling Article 11 “unconstitutional” as it undermines freedom of expression as safeguarded by the Jordanian constitution. According to the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists, at least seven journalists and activists were detained in the first year after the passage of the amendment.

Many older laws continue to pose a threat to access to information and free expression online. These include the 1959 Contempt of Court Law, the 1960 penal code, the 1971 Protection of State Secrets and Classified Documents Law, the 1992 Defense Law, the 1998 Jordan Press Association Law, and the 1999 Press and Publications Law.

Amendments to the Press and Publication Law enacted in 2010 abolished prison sentences for libel against private citizens (as opposed to public officials). However, fine and jail sentences remain for

64 For example, the law bars public requests for information involving religious, racial, ethnic, or gender discrimination (Article 10), and allows official to withhold all types of classified information, a very broad category (Article 13). See Arab Archives Institute, “Summary of the Study on Access to Information Law in Jordan,” June 2005, http://www.alarcheef.com/reports/englishFiles/accessToInformation.pdf.
defaming government official with penalties to up to JOD 10,000 (US$14,000) and 3 to 12 months’ imprisonment. Further amendments passed in 2012 banned the publication of “material that is inconsistent with the principles of freedom, national obligation, human rights, and Arab-Islamic values.” Article 38 of the PPL also prohibits any “contempt, slander, or defamation of or abuse of” religions or prophets. The same article prohibits the publication of any material that is defamatory or slanderous of public official who are also protected by the same law against “rumors” and “anything that hinders their personal freedom.” Journalists, website owners, and editors-in-chief face a fine of JOD 5,000 (US$7,500) if found to violate the law. In addition, civil defamation suits against private individuals can result in fine of between JOD 500 to 1,000 (US$700 to 1,400).

In early 2014, a law was passed to limit the powers of the quasi-military State Security Court, to terrorism, espionage, drug felonies, treason, and currency counterfeiting. The court had previously tried citizens and journalists for crimes related to freedom of expression. Worryingly, amendments to an antiterrorism law passed in mid-2014 essentially reversed that move by expanding the definition of “terrorism” to include broader offenses In addition to more legitimate offense such as attacking members of the royal court or provoking an “armed rebellion,” the definition of terrorist activities now includes any acts that “threaten the country’s relations to foreign states or expose the country or its citizens to retaliatory acts on them or their money,” an offense that had already been listed in the penal code. The law also explicitly penalizes the use of ICTs to promote, support, or fund terrorist acts, or to subject “Jordanians or their property to danger of hostile acts or acts of revenge.”

**Prosecutions and Detentions for Online Activities**

Arrests and prosecutions for online activities increased during the coverage period. Ziad Neserat, Muhammad Qaddah, and several other journalists were arrested on defamation charges related to Facebook posts under the cybercrime law, while a group of individuals were detained for criticizing the intelligence services.

In August 2016, prominent leftist writer Nahed Hattar was arrested after sharing a cartoon of unknown authorship on Facebook that was deemed offensive to Islam. The cartoon features a “bearded man in heaven, smoking and in bed with women, asking God to bring him wine and cashews.” Prime Minister Hani Mulki ordered the Interior Minister to investigate complaints about

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73 The Press and Publications Law 1998 amended by Law No. 32.
74 Law number (32) 2012. Amendments to The Press and Publications law for the Year 1998 (8), Article 38, clauses A, B, C & D.
75 The Press and Publications Law 1998 amended by Law No. 32.
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the image. The government-run Ifta Department, which is responsible for issuing religious edicts, also published a statement condemning any group that insults Islam, religious symbols, and divinity. Hattar, a Christian, later apologized on Facebook and clarified that the cartoon was meant to mock the so-called Islamic State (IS or Daesh) and their vision of God, rather than Islam. Article 150 of the penal code bans contempt for religion.

One month later, Hattar was shot dead by an extremist outside the court where he was due to appear (see Intimidation and Violence). His family blamed the government for failing to prosecute extremists who had called for his killing on social media under laws that ban inciting violence.83

Several arrests for online hate speech followed; many appeared to involve violent threats.84 Sixteen people were arrested after the assassination, including individuals who used social media to spread sectarianism and hate speech, according to a police statement. But online abuse regarding the case continued. A social media page was started calling for the release of the murderer,85 and extremists continued to send messages encouraging violence on WhatsApp, a violation of Article 20(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Jordan is a signatory.86 At least three more were arrested in October.87

Other detentions for online speech were reported during the coverage period, including some involving criticism of the government. The General Intelligence Directorate (GID or mukhabarat) arrested between 18 and 20 individuals in January 2017 on charges of lèse majesté and “incitement to undermine the political regime of Jordan using social media” for posting antigovernment statements online, according to their lawyers. The group included retired army and intelligence generals, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood opposition group, and 10 members of a teachers’ syndicate. According to their lawyers, the accused criticized the government response to a terrorist attack in the town of Karak and some called for the firing of the head of the GID.88 The individuals were detained for nearly one month and were set to be tried by the State Security Court (SSC). After pressure from family members and supporters of the accused, they were released without charge in February.89

At least one journalist was detained in relation to an allegedly defamatory post on social media. After a complaint by Zaki Bani Irsheid, a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, journalist Amjad Mualla was detained on January 30, 2017; he was released on bail in mid-February.90 According to reports, he published a Facebook post accusing Bani Irsheid of promoting IS’ policies and representing

86 Article 20(2) states: “Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.” See International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, United Nations Offi
the wali (deputy) of the IS leader in Jordan. Mualla stated the move was part of the Muslim Brotherhood’s policy of silencing journalists who oppose their views.91

On January 31, 2017, Essam Zabin, a retired lieutenant-colonel in the air force and one of the administrators of a Facebook group that called for boycotting goods to protest price hikes, was also detained by the GID.92 He was held in prison for one week before being released without charge.93

In January 2017, 12 individuals were prosecuted and four others investigated for online hate speech after a terrorist attack on an Istanbul nightclub on New Year’s Eve, during which two Jordanians were killed.94 Finding that the case related to libel of private persons and not terrorism, the SSC referred the case to a civil prosecutor as a violation of Article 11 of the cybercrime law.95

In October 2016, one member of the Jordanian Teachers’ Syndicate in Jerash was detained for publishing a post on Facebook in which he expressed his refusal to implement changes to the school curriculum despite a complaint file by the Minister of Education.96 He was released on bail on the same day.

Zain Karazon, a popular singer and social media figure was arrested in September 2016 at the Amman airport as she returned from overseas. She was accused of slander for a Snapchat video in which she responded to her critics “in an inappropriate manner,” according to reports.97 Karazon’s sister said the singer was harassed online after exposing malpractice at a local hospital. She was released one week later.

Similar to monitoring hate speech, Jordanian authorities continue to monitor the online activities of IS supporters. Several individuals, including98 women,99 have been arrested100 and in some cases sentenced to prison for promoting or supporting the terrorist organization through social media posts or in private electronic messages.101 There were no indications any of these individuals had been targeted for speech normally protected under international norms.

Surveillance, Privacy, and Anonymity

Article 18 of the constitution protects the right to privacy, but allows for surveillance “by a judicial
order in accordance with the provisions of the law." The telecommunication law requires that operators take appropriate measures to allow for the tracking of communication upon a judicial or administrative order, while an antiterrorism law allows for the prosecutor general to order surveillance upon receiving "reliable information... a person or group of persons is connected to any terrorist activity."  

Jordan currently lacks a privacy law. The Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MoICT) is currently drafting a Data Protection Law that aims to regulate how personal data are collected, used and published. The last draft of the law, however, does not ensure the independence of the proposed Data Protection Authority (DPA) and does not always follow best international standards for protection of personal data.

There have been no reports about restrictions on VPNs and other circumvention tools, nor any limits on encryption. However, many Jordanians reportedly have a long-standing belief that "someone is listening in" to their phone calls. This attitude has carried over to the internet, where it is believed that security services closely monitor online comments, cataloging them by date, internet protocol (IP) address, and location.

Since mid-2010, cybercafes have been obliged to install security cameras to monitor customers, who must supply personal identification information before they use the internet. Cafe owners are required to retain the browsing history of users for at least six months. Authorities claim these restrictions are necessary for security reasons. Although enforcement is somewhat lax, the once-thriving cybercafe business is now in decline due in part to the restrictions, as well as increased access to personal internet connections. According to a report by Privacy International, representatives from various intelligence and government ministries regularly inspect internet cafes for compliance. Internet cafes are by law required “to take all procedures and arrangements” to ensure customers are not accessing terrorist-related material, without specifying what types of actions would be legally permissible. Furthermore, clauses within mobile phone contracts give Jordanian companies the right to terminate services should customers use it in any way “threatening to public moral or national security.”

Intimidation and Violence

On September 25, 2016, Jordanian writer Nahed Hattar was shot dead outside of a courthouse in Amman, where he was due to face trial for posting a satirical cartoon deemed “offensive to Islam” on his Facebook page (See “Prosecutions and Detentions for Online Activities”). Hattar, a Christian who had expressed his support for Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, explained the cartoon

“mocks terrorists and their concept of God and heaven.”

Thousands of Jordanians expressed their solidarity with Hattar’s family, demanding an end to hate speech and incitement to violence online.

Journalists are regularly subject to harassment from state and nonstate actors, particularly when investigating corruption. For example, after journalist Amal Ghabayen published an article on one of the country’s most popular news websites, Ammon News, regarding the alleged appropriation of a state-owned piece of land in West Amman by a high-ranking official in the army, she was threatened by phone and told “she will pay” for the article. She fled Jordan and was granted political asylum in Turkey. Online journalists reporting on protests are also intimidated by security forces. A police officer threatened to break the cell phone of Dana Gibreel, a journalist from 7iber, in November 2016 during a sit-in against a gas agreement with Israel.

**Technical Attacks**

Incidents of cyberattacks against bloggers and staff of online news websites have decreased in severity compared to previous years. However, geopolitical tensions have resulted in the hacking of state news sites. In June 2016, the state-owned news agency, Petra, confirmed their website was affected by a cyberattack. Hackers posted a fabricated news story regarding the deputy crown prince of Saudi Arabia. Officials claimed Iranian hackers were behind the attack.

In February 2011 Ammon News, was hacked and temporarily disabled after its editors refused to comply with security agents’ demands to remove a statement by 36 prominent Jordanian tribesmen, in which they called for democratic and economic reforms. Among other actions, the hackers deleted the joint statement, which were politically sensitive given the groups’ historic support for the monarchy. In 2012, the webpages of the news sites Khaberni and Al Ain were hacked; the site of the Jordanian rap group Ahat was also hacked on September 15, 2012.


109 “Condemnation related to arrests of participants in a sit-in against the gas agreement,” [in Arabic], AmmanNet, November 12, 2016, [http://ar.ammannet.net/news/276607](http://ar.ammannet.net/news/276607)


