Sudan

	2015	2016
Internet Freedom Status	Not Free	Not Free
Obstacles to Access (0-25)	18	16
Limits on Content (0-35)	19	18
Violations of User Rights (0-40)	28	30
TOTAL* (0-100)	65	64

* 0=most free, 100=least free

Population:	40.2 million
Internet Penetration 2015 (ITU):	27 percent
Social Media/ICT Apps Blocked:	No
Political/Social Content Blocked:	No
Bloggers/ICT Users Arrested:	Yes
Press Freedom 2016 Status:	Not Free

Key Developments: June 2015 – May 2016

- There were no reports of deliberate internet shutdowns in Sudan during the coverage period, marking an improvement from the previous period when a five-day internet blackout was reported in the West Darfur region of Sudan (see **Availability and Ease of Access**).

- In February 2016, the authorities raided 130 internet cafes in Khartoum in search of content threatening "public morals" (see **Surveillance, Privacy, and Anonymity**).

- Revisions to the 2004 Press and Printed Press Materials Law were introduced in 2015 with the aim of regulating online media and providing a legal framework to prosecute online journalists (see **Legal Environment**).

- Arrests and prosecutions under the IT Crime Act grew in the past year, reflecting a tactical shift in the government's strategy to limit internet freedom (see **Prosecutions and Detentions for Online Activities**).

Introduction

Internet freedom in Sudan improved marginally in 2015-16 due to the lack of internet shutdowns and content restrictions experienced in previous years, despite a rise in arrests and prosecutions.

The Sudanese government has shifted tactics over the past year, as users increasingly turned to digital platforms to exchange news and opinions in the face of a repressive media environment. There were no blocks on political or social websites reported during the coverage period—in contrast to "immoral" content, which remained systematically blocked—while social media and communications platforms were freely available. WhatsApp has become particularly popular among Sudanese, who have turned to the platform's relative privacy and anonymity to share critical news via the app's group chat function.

Nonetheless, independent online news outlets were subject to frequent technical attacks, which many believe were perpetrated by the Cyber Jihadist Unit, the government's army of trolls. Several users were arrested with the intent of creating a chilling effect online, although no individuals faced trial on legal charges. While several restrictive laws can be applied to penalize online activities, including the 2007 IT Crimes Act, the Sudanese government introduced revisions to the 2004 Press and Printed Press Materials Law in 2015 with the aim of regulating online media and providing a legal framework to prosecute online journalists.

Obstacles to Access

Access to the internet continued to be a challenge for Sudanese citizens in 2015-2016 as a result of economic challenges, increasing costs, and declining quality of services. Mobile phone penetration declined slightly from the previous year, while technical issues with submarine cables disrupted internet access for a number of subscribers.

Availability and Ease of Access

Access to the internet became more challenging for Sudanese citizens during the coverage period amid declining quality and speeds, and increasing costs. Internet penetration stood at 27 percent in 2015, growing incrementally from 25 percent in 2014, while mobile phone penetration declined slightly from 72 percent to 71 percent, according to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU).[1]

The country's staggering economy has created an expensive operating environment for the ICT sector, impacting both telecom companies and their subscribers. In early 2016, Zain, the telecom operator with the largest market share, canceled its daily unlimited internet bundle services and instead increased prices on select data bundles by up to 300 percent.[o] Making matters worse, its newly introduced bundles did not deliver on advertised speeds, forcing subscribers to purchase additional

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1   International Telecommunication Union, "Percentage of Individuals Using the Internet, 2000-2015," and "Mobile-Cellular Telephone Subscriptions, 2000-2015," http://bit.ly/1cblxxY.

2   "A storm of discontent in Sudan following Zain's increase of Internet service prices," [in Arabic] Al-hayat, February 3, 2016, http://bit.ly/1Y30qST; "Sudanese boycott a telecommunications company for increasing Internet tariff by 300%," Alquds, February 3, 2016, bit.ly/21XNVua. Coverage of Zain's CEO press conference, Alyoum Altali, February 21, 2016, bit.ly/1WgoMra.

data more frequently than anticipatedK [P] Mobile providers pointed to high licensing and registration fees and the proliferation of internet-enabled voice and messaging services that have disrupted their traditional revenue flows as justification for price increases.

Users organized boycott campaigns against the price increases and contested fair usage policies as well as declines in speed quality.[Q] Average connection speeds were registered as 2.1 Mbps by Akamai's 2016 "State of the Internet" first quarter report, significantly lower than the global average of 6.3 Mbps.[R] Internet speeds outside Khartoum are remarkably lower than the country's average, especially during peak hours.[S]

In contrast to rising mobile data rates, the cost of internet access at cybercafés dropped slightly during the coverage period to SDG 2-3 (around USD 0.40) per hour, perhaps due to decreasing visitors. Cybercafés have become less popular in recent years due to increasing access via mobile devices, as well as pervasive surveillance and policing of immoral activities at cybercafés (see Intimidation and Violence). In 2016, many cybercafés were used mainly for printing or during emergencies.

Electricity shortages also limit internet services in Sudan, compounded by recent oil price hikes that have led to outages across the country.[7] Only 35 percent of the population has access to electricity,[8] and the current crisis has reduced the electricity supply by 40 percent.[9]

Furthermore, approximately 1.4 million citizens living in rebel-controlled areas in South Kordofan have extremely limited access to basic services and the internet.[10] Nearly 3.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in camps as of December 2015 have no access whatsoever.[11] In the rebel-controlled Nuba Mountains region of the country, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) rebel government issued a directive in August 2015 banning citizens from accessing the internet to prevent information from leaking to the central government, allowing access to only government officials and NGO affiliates.[12]

Restrictions on Connectivity

Sudan connects to the global internet through three international gateways controlled by the partly state-owned Sudan Telecom Company (Sudatel), Zain, and Canar TelecomI [N] [P] which are in turn connected to four submarine cables: Saudi Arabia-Sudan-1 (SAS-1), Saudi Arabia-Sudan-2 (SAS-2), Eastern Africa Submarine System (EASSy), and FALCON.[N] [Q] Partial control over the international

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3   Author's interview, May 2016.

4   "Boycott campaign in Sudan targets telecom companies to compel better service," *Sudan Tribune,* July 3, 2015, http://bit.ly/1p7OJ1L

5   Akamai, "Average Connection Speed," map visualization, *State of the Internet, Q1 2016,* accessed March 4, 2016, http://akamai.me/1LiS6KD.

6   " NTC inquires Zain to explain the deterioration of Internet service," *Sudan Tribune*, July 4, 2015, http://bit.ly/1Sr1P5q

7   "Fuel shortage blamed for recent power outages in Sudan," *Sudan Tribune*, March 10, 2015, http://bit.ly/1YgFjN7

8   "Seeking Alterative Energy in Sudan: UNDP and the Ministry Of Water Resources Initiate the Use of Wind Power in Sudan –A 200 Million Dollar Project," UNDP Sudan, Dec 4, 2014**,** http://bit.ly/1UIVmUb

9   "Sudan aspires to increase electricity production by 2020," *Sudan Tribune*, August 2, 2015, http://bit.ly/1UIXBqi

10   See "Mayors in Sudan's South Kordofan demand no-fly zone," Radio Dabanga, February 24, 2014, http://bit.ly/1RkJ8gf, and UNHCR, "Sudan," 2015, http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e483b76.html

11   OCHA: Sudan: Humanitarian Bulletin | Issue 08 | 15 – 21 February 2016 [EN/AR], http://bit.ly/1EaK287

12   "SPLM-N limits Internet access in Nuba Mountains," *Radio Tamazuj*, August 19, 2015, https://radiotamazuj.org/en/article/splm-n-limits-internet-access-nuba-mountains

13   Doug Madory, "Internet Blackout in Sudan," Dyn Research, September 25, 2013, http://bit.ly/1QN46V3

14   Check interactive, Huawei Marine Networks, "Submarine Cable Map for Sudan," http://bit.ly/1ZRMhKz

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gateway has enabled the government to restrict internet connectivity during particular events in the past. For example, internet access was shut down for five days in the West Darfur region in August 2014, and nationwide for nearly 24 hours in September 2013 during massive protests across the country.[15]

While the government did not impose largescale restrictions over the past year, Zain's broadband network was intermittently disrupted during a period of 12 hours in January 2016.[16] Zain attributed the disruption to technical glitches. In separate incidences that month, the SEACOM broadband submarine cable near Egypt was temporarily cut, affecting 65 percent of Canar's broadband users, while access for Sudani subscribers was reportedly disrupted for five days.[17]

ICT Market

There are four licensed telecommunications operators in Sudan: Zain, MTN, Sudatel, and Canar. All are fully owned by foreign companies with the exception of Sudatel, in which the government owns a 22 percent share.[18] However, the Sudanese government holds significant sway over Sudatel's board of directors, which includes high-ranking government officials.[19]

Two providers, MTN and Sudatel, offer broadband internet, while Canar offers fixed phone lines and home internet. Emirati-owned Canar was denied a license to provide mobile services in February 2016, demonstrating the lack of competition in the sector.[20] The Bank of Khartoum subsequently purchased Canar from UAE's Etisalat in June 2016, after the bank used its 3.7 percent share in Canar to block Zain's efforts to purchase it. Observers believe the government's move to increase its market share of the telecom industry will have a negative impact on internet freedom for Sudanese users.

Regulatory Bodies

Sudan's telecoms sector is regulated by the National Telecommunications Corporation (NTC), which is housed under the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology. The NTC is tasked with producing telecommunications statistics, monitoring the use of the internet, introducing new technology into the country, and developing the country's telecommunications and IT industry. It is also responsible for deciding what content should be accessible on the internet. Although it is a state body, the NTC receives grants from international organizations such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the World Bank, and its website describes the body as "self-financing."

15   See Freedom House, "Sudan," *Freedom on the Net 201*, http://bit.ly/1M2wVig

16   "Zain Sudan Internet cut," *Alwatan*, January 14, 2016

17   "Submarine cable cut causes weakens Internet in Sudan," *Sudan Tribune*, January 27, 2016, http://bit.ly/29MPETk; "SEACOM IS EXPERIENCING A CRITICAL OUTAGE – 16:30 GMT," *SEACOM*, January 21, 2016, http://bit.ly/1nbKeld; "NOT ONE, BUT TWO SA INTERNET CABLES WENT DOWN LAST NIGHT," htxt.Africa, January 22, 2016 http://bit.ly/2a8izQP

18   Rupa Ranganathan and Cecilia Briceno-Garmendia, *Sudan's Infrastructure: A Continental Perspective*, Africa Infrastructure Country Diagnostic, (Washington, D.C.): World Bank, June 2011), http://bit.ly/1OOZoXz

19   Sudan Central Bank, "The Present Board of Directors," http://bit.ly/1jxA7pG

20   "Emeriti owned Canar considering to exit Sudan's market for not denial of mobile phone license," *Sudan Tribune*, February 1, 2016, http://bit.ly/1PPqLlG

Limits on Content

Online news outlets, social media, and communications platforms did not face restrictions during this year. Self-censorship among online journalists and ordinary users was more palpable due to fears of government surveillance and arbitrary legal consequences. Nonetheless, social media users were active in organizing campaigns about important political, social, and economic issues.

Blocking and Filtering

News websites and social media platforms were not blocked in Sudan during the coverage period, though the relatively free environment in which online news outlets operate has faced growing threats in recent years. According to local sources, the Sudanese government is in the process of establishing a new unit devoted to monitoring online outlets that may impose a similar regime of systematic censorship faced by Sudan's print and broadcast media (see Media, Diversity, and Content Manipulation).[21]

The Sudanese government openly acknowledges blocking and filtering websites that it considers "immoral" and "blasphemous." The NTC manages online filtering in the country through its Internet Service Control Unit and is somewhat transparent about the content it blocks, reporting that 95 percent of blocked material is related to pornography,[22] though the regulator recently acknowledged that it had not be successful in blocking all pornographic sites in Sudan.[23] The NTC also obligates cybercafé owners to download blocking and filtering software as a requirement to sustain their licenses.[24]

The NTC's website gives users the opportunity to submit requests to unblock websites "that are deemed to not contain pornography,"[25] but it does not specify whether the appeals extend to political websites. Users attempting to access a blocked site are met with a black page that explicitly states, "This site has been blocked by the National Telecommunications Corporation," and includes links to further information and a contact email address.[26]

In addition to the NTC, National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) agents reportedly have the technical capability to block websites deemed harmful and threatening to Sudan's national security,[27] while the General Prosecutor also has the right to block any site that threatens national security or violates social mores.[28] The NTC also requires internet café owners to download a blocking and filtering software to target "immoral" content as a requirement to sustain their licenses.

21   Author's interview, May 2016. See also, "Sudan to set up special body for electronic media monitoring," Sudan Tribune, January12, 2016, http://bit.ly/1pcaxJF

22   National Telecommunications Corporation, "Blocking Or Unblock Websites," last modified September 21, 2016, http://www.ntc.gov.sd/index.php/en/blocking-websites

23   NTC: pornographic sites are increasing on the Internet and other online platform," *Almeghar*, August 9, 2015, bit.ly/1X8CQDm.

24   "Sudanese intelligence prosecutes Internet content that 'threatens the morals of the nation'," *Alhayat*, February 29, 2016, http://bit.ly/21iftrT

25   NTC, "Blocking Or Unblock Websites."

26   Image of a blocked site: https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B6mgwvplJ6IadERXT3RTZW1jSkk/edit?pli=1

27   "Expert: NISS is capable of blocking websites that are posing a threat to Sudan's national security," *Aljareeda*, November 7, 2014.

28   "Cybercrime is an act of terrorism that threatens the sovereignty of the state," [in Arabic] *Alintibaha*, August 13, 2014, http://bit.ly/1NRfFg5.

Content Removal

The extent to which the government forces websites to delete certain content is unknown, though anecdotal incidents in the past few years suggests that some degree of forced content removal by the state exists, and that such ad hoc requirements lack transparency. No specific incidents were reported during this report's coverage period.

Media, Diversity, and Content Manipulation

Compared to the highly restrictive space in the traditional media sphere—which is characterized by pre-publication censorship, confiscations of entire press runs of newspapers, and warnings from NISS agents against reporting on certain taboo topics—the internet remains a relatively open space for freedom of expression, with bold voices expressing discontent with the government on various online platforms. Online news outlets such as *Altareeg*,[29] *Altaghyeer*,[30] *Radio Dabnga*,[31] *Hurriyat*, and *Alrakoba* cover controversial topics such as corruption and human rights violations. Facing heavy censorship, many print newspapers have shifted to digital formats, circulating censored or banned material on their websites and social media pages; as a result, Sudanese citizens increasingly rely on online outlets and social media for uncensored information.

WhatsApp has become particularly popular among Sudanese, who have turned to the platform's relative privacy and anonymity to share critical news via the app's group chat function.[32] Blogging is also popular, allowing journalists and writers to publish commentary free from the restrictions leveled on print newspapers and provides ethnic, gender, and religious minorities a platform to express themselves. The more active Sudanese bloggers write in the English language. However, self-censorship has risen in recent years. Many journalists writing for online platforms publish anonymously to avoid prosecution, while ordinary internet users in Sudan have become more inclined to self-censor to avoid government surveillance and arbitrary legal consequences.

In response to Sudan's more vibrant online information landscape, the government employs a concerted and systematic strategy to manipulate online conversations through its so-called Cyber Jihadist Unit. Established in 2011 in the wake of the Arab Spring, the unit falls under the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) and works to proactively monitor content posted on blogs, social media websites, and online news forums.[33] The unit also infiltrates online discussions in an effort to ascertain information about cyber-dissidents and is believed to orchestrate technical attacks against independent websites, especially during political events (See Technical Attacks).[34]

In January 2016, the government issued a directive to the Journalists' Association, requiring editors-in-chief of the association to sign a voluntary Charter that obliges editors to match their outlets'

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29   *Altareeg* was established in January 2014.

30   *Altaghyeer* [Arabic for change with political connotation] was established in 2013 following the government's crackdown on independent journalists, who were eventually banned from practicing traditional journalism in Sudan.

31   Launched from the Netherlands in November 2008, Radio Dabanga focuses on reporting on Darfur and has a strong online presence and wide audience in conflicts areas. It website is bilingual and runs in depth reports and features. It is a project of the Radio Darfur Network. Dabnga, "About Us," http://bit.ly/1LkMr5H.

32   Khalid Albaih, "How WhatsApp is fueling a 'sharing revolution' in Sudan," The Guardian, October 15, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/15/sudan-whatsapp-sharing-revolution

33   "Sudan to unleash cyber jihadists," *BBC*, March 23, 2011, bbc.in/1V3FWdi.

34   See Freedom on the Net, Sudan 2015, bit.ly/1QQpZp5.

online articles with printed versions.[35] Considering the government's pre-publication censorship of the print media, observers believe the move is an effort to impose the same restrictions on online outlets.[36]

Digital Activism

Sudanese social media users have become more willing to organize themselves online for common goals, launching several online campaigns to address social, political, and economic concerns in the past year.

In November 2015, users started a campaign in reaction to photos circulated on social media indicating mistreatment of Sudanese citizens in Egypt.[37] Several hashtags called on Sudanese to refrain from traveling to Egypt and boycott EgyptAir and other Egyptian products.[38] While there was no official response from the Egyptian government, Egyptian media covered the campaign and Egyptian social media users launched a hashtag to apologize for the mistreatment.[39]

In March 2016, Sudanese social media users called on Khalid al-Wazir, a Blue Nile TV talk show host, to apologize for racially insensitive comments about Ethiopian domestic workers in Sudan.[40] Building on the #اعتذر_اي_خالد_الوزير hashtag [Arabic for #Say_Sorry Khalid_AlWazie], a Facebook page was created with the same name calling on al-Wazir to apologize. Page administrators also reached out to sponsors of the show, asking them to take a stand against the racist content of the show. The campaign attracted local and regional coverage.[41] Other commentators used the opportunity to address racism, as well as the role of social media and the elite in influencing positive social change.[42] Within a few days, al-Wazir apologized on his Facebook page, and Blue Nile TV issued a statement promising to conduct an investigation about the allegations of racist comments.[43]

In April 2016, large demonstrations broke out at the University of Khartoum for three days following news circulated on social media about government plans to sell a historical building of the university.[44] Several online campaigns emerged calling for the halt of the sale and for student protests

35   "Signing journalism charter in Sudan," *Ashorooq*, January 26, 2016, bit.ly/1pFgJtI.

36   "Sudanese Journalism charter," *Sada Alahdas*, January 28, 2016, bit.ly/1QPpURh.

37   "Egypt and Sudan: the 'torture incident' beats the drums of war between the Nile Valley Partners," *Sasa Post*, November 23, 2016 http://bit.ly/2aieTZK

38   "Egypt is not my country's sister" Facebook page: http://bit.ly/2aid2Eq
There is a famous Sudanese song that celebrates the historical relations between Sudan and Egypt that is titled Egypt is my country's sister and the hashtag is generated to reject this affinity.

39   "A campaign to contain the anger of our brothers: we are sorry Oh Sudanese," *Elwatan News*, November 22, 2015 http://bit.ly/2aFg4Gs; "Crisis in cyberspace between Egypt and Sudan: the authorities are silent and the citizens are responding," *Dot Msr*, November 21, 2016 http://bit.ly/2aqglIo

40   Khalid Al-Wazir, say sorry Facebook page: http://bit.ly/2az2dyo

41   "Say sorry, Khalid Al-Wazir!," *Alrakoba*, March 26, 2016 http://bit.ly/2aGOkOq; Clip from Al-Arabiya TV uploaded to YouTube http://bit.ly/2apQIaB

42   "Amidst the anger against Alwazir show: an opportunity to call for the better," *Alrakoba,* March 27, 2016, http://bit.ly/2a7QUzl

43   "Blue Nile: administrative action to be taken against a program that offended Ethiopian domestic workers," *Altageer*, March 27, 2016

44   "Demonstrations at the University of Khartoum following reports of the Sudanese government's intention selling its buildings, *Alquds*, April 14, 2016 http://bit.ly/2aFy2YY

against the plan.[45] Dozens of students were briefly arrested,[46] two students were killed,[47] and at least six students were held for 45 days without charge. Their families protested the police's use of excessive force and arbitrary detention[48] and campaigned online for the release of those held by posting photos and calling for sit-ins.[49] Public pressure fueled by the online activism helped lead to their eventual release.[50]

Violations of User Rights

Revisions to the 2004 Press and Printed Press Materials Law were introduced in 2015 with the aim of regulating online media and providing a legal framework to prosecute online journalists. Arrests and prosecutions under the IT Crime Act grew markedly in the past year, reflecting a tactical shift in the government's strategy to limit internet freedom and creating a chilling effect on freedom of expression online.

Legal Environment

Sudan has restrictive laws that limit press and internet freedom. Most notably, the Informatic Offences (Combating) Act 2007 (known as the IT Crime Act, or electronic crimes law)[51] criminalizes the establishment of websites that criticize the government or publish defamatory material and content that disturbs public morality or public order.[52] Violations involve fines and prison sentences between two to five years.

Broad wording in other laws pertaining to traditional media may be applied to online content, including revisions to the highly restrictive 2004 Press and Printed Press Materials Law in 2009, which extended restrictions on the press in the interests of national security and public order and holds editors-in-chief liable for all content published by their press outlets.[53] The 2010 National Security Act gives the NISS immunity from prosecution and the permission to arrest, detain, and censor journalists under the pretext of national security.[54]

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45   "Graduates of the University of Khartoum hold The silent vigils in number of capitals around the world," *Sudan Tribune*, April 22, 2016 http://bit.ly/2aSQudb

46   "Sudanese security arrested dozens of graduates of the University of Khartoum after protests," *Youm7*, April 23, 2016 http://bit.ly/2alAI8A

47   "Sudan student killing sparks wave of protests," *The Guardian*, April 22, 2016 http://bit.ly/2aqk1tu

48   "Killing of Ahlia University's student escalates demonstrations," 3ayin, April 29, 2016 http://bit.ly/2aoWUA8

49   Press Release: The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI): Sudan: protests of families of the University of Khartoum students detainees and civil society. May 26, 2016 http://bit.ly/2aDxDVM "Families of the University of Khartoum students detainees have their Iftar in front of the headquarters of the Sudanese security [National Intelligence and Security Service] since the beginning of Ramadan," *Alquds,* June 11, 2016 http://bit.ly/2acF7v4

50   "Sudanese security released two students and 4 students," *Sky News Arabia*, June 19, 2016 http://bit.ly/2a8iRqz

51   The Informatic Offences (Combating) Act, 2007, http://bit.ly/1NkNx1R.

52   Abdelgadir Mohammed Abdelgadir, *Fences of Silence: Systematic Repression of Freedom of the Press, Opinion and Expression in Sudan*, (International Press Institute, 2012) http://bit.ly/1Pv7nee. According to Section 4, crimes against public order and morality Sudan cyber law, of Sudan's Cybercrime Law (2007), intentional or unintentional producing, preparing, sending, storing, or promoting any content that violates public order or morality, makes the offender liable to imprisonment of 4 to 5 years or a fine or both. The maximum penalty for committing both crimes is 7 years or fine or both. Also, under the same section, creating, promoting, using, website that calls for, or promote, ideas against public law or morality is punished by 3 years in prison or fine or both. Cyber defamation crimes necessitate 2 years in prison or fine or both. Public order is not defined clearly in the law. Subsequently, most of the opposition content online falls under this section making online activists liable under this law.

53   Committee to Protect Journalists, "Repressive press law passed in Sudan," June 11, 2009, https://cpj.org/x/2c67.

54   Amnesty International, "Sudanese security service carries out brutal campaign against opponents," July 19, 2010, http://bit.ly/1OP3OOi.

In August 2015, the Minister of Information announced plans to further extend the highly restrictive 2004 Press and Printed Press Materials Law to control online content.[55] Reiterating the new law's intentions in January 2016, the minister warned social media users and online journalists that the law would address the spread of false news that "distorts Sudan's image."[56] While the text of the law remains unpublished, the new law will reportedly establish a specialized council to monitor online media and social media platforms as well as a Summary Press Court to try media and freedom of expression cases.[57] A committee formed by the Ministry of Justice—comprised of representatives from the NISS, Ministry of Interior, Bar Association, and Sudanese Journalist Union—met in May 2016 to finalize the new law,[58] which is expected to come into effect in 2017.[59]

Prosecutions and Detentions for Online Activities

Arrests for online activities grew markedly in the past year, reflecting a tactical shift in the government's strategy to limit internet freedom. In an alarming change from previous years, the government kept several individuals in arbitrary detention for lengthy periods of time due to their online activities, denying them the right to a fair trial.

In a growing trend, critical WhatsApp messages frequently implicated users in alleged cybercrimes, which were often leaked to the authorities by the members of group chats. In November 2016, for example, Seraj al-Naeem, the founder of the online news outlet *Awtar al-Aseel*, was arrested and charged with libel under the IT Crime Act for sending a WhatsApp message that accused a doctor of medical malpractice. Al-Naeem was detained for hours and released on bail, but not before he was asked to surrender his smartphone to the police as evidence.[60] Al-Naeem was subsequently charged for inquiring about the legality of surrendering his phone.[61] He was acquitted of all charges in May 2016.[62]

In January 2016, the administrator of a WhatsApp group for journalists was charged with libel under the IT Crime Act for a message that criticized the Minister of Health. He was detained and questioned for several hours along with the individual who sent the original message; both were subsequently released on bail, and as of October 2016, still awaiting trial.[63]

Facebook posts also led to several arrests. In January 2016, a humanitarian activist in the town of

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55   "Sudanese Minister of Information: New press law will include strict sanctions to control violations in online media," *Alwafd,* August 18, 2015, bit.ly/1U7NDzm.

56   "The Sudanese government vows to deprive journalists of their last self-expression venue," *Alarab*, January 14, 2016, bit.ly/1RNliMv.

57   "Sudanese government: Summary press courts to reduce the 'exceptional measures'," *Global Media Service (Sudan)*, November 2, 2015, bit.ly/1P73KW5. "'A new press court to suppress freedom of expression," *Alarab*, August 20, 2016, bit.ly/1QR080a.

58   "A committee that includes NISS considers modifying the press and publications law in Sudan," *Altareeq*, May 15, 2016 http://bit.ly/29N1dK1

59   "[The government to take measurements against what it perceives as lack of discipline on the part of the media], *AlSaiha*, June 17, 2016 http://bit.ly/29SZbpg

60   "A case against Seraj Alnaeem is before court for writing about the death of Dr. Ghada," *Awtar Alaseel,* February 29, 2016, bit.ly/1g3AhR6.

61   "Investigation Office brings Seraj Alnaeem before Criminal Court for sending a text message to the Director General of Police," *Alnilin*, November 30, 2015, bit.ly/24ZUz5z.

62   "Acquittal of Seraj Alnaeem of the charge of publishing an article about the death of the (Ghada Ahmad Badawi) as a result of medical error," *Alnilin*, May 29, 2016, http://bit.ly/29ZNWfq

63   "In an unprecedented incident, Cybercrime Prosecutor interrogates a WhatsApp manager," *Almshaheer*, January 4, 2016, bit.ly/1nHUAcA. "Two Sudanese journalists face defamation accounts for messages exchanged on 'WhatsApp'," *Sudan Tribune*, January 3, 2016, bit.ly/1RJhsAA. "Only happening in Sudan: a comment «WhatsApp» leads a person to court," Al-quds Al-Arabi, January 9, 2016 http://bit.ly/29HI7zb; https://twitter.com/iyad_elbaghdadi/status/684033732559241216

Tandali, located in South Kordofan State, was arrested for a Facebook post criticizing the town's mayor.[64] No further information was available about this case as of October 2016. In February 2016, Ibrahim Baggal, a digital journalist and online activist, was arrested for criticizing the governor of North Darfur in a Facebook post and charged under the IT Crime Act.[65] Baggal spent 55 days in detention before his release on bail,[66] but was detained again days later and held for another week, for seemingly arbitrary reasons.[67] The public prosecutor later dropped some of the charges leveled against Baggal, namely undermining the constitutional order, waging war against the state, and contempt for authority; however, Baggal still faces charges of spreading false information, disclosing military information, and breaching public safety.[68]

The authorities increasingly went after bloggers and journalists who have turned to online outlets to avoid heavy-handed censorship in the print and broadcast sectors. At least one online journalist was arrested. In July 2015, Waleed al-Hussein, the creator of the critical online news outlet *al-Rakoba*, was arrested by the authorities in Saudi Arabia, where al-Hussein was residing. He was arrested without charges and eventually released in February 2016; three months of his detention were spent in solidarity confinement.[69] Family members believe he was arrested at the request of the Sudanese government, which had targeted al-Hussein for his work in the past and was seeking to have him extradited back to Sudan,[70] though the government denied the accusations.[71]

In May 2016, the Cyber Crime Investigations Unit interrogated journalist Sarah Taj Elsir for an article she wrote for *al-Jarida* newspaper that was republished by the online outlet *al-Rakoba*.[72] She was charged under article 17 of the IT Crime Act for allegedly spreading false news, though she was not responsible for the online distribution of her article.[73] Elsir was also questioned about her relation to an individual who had commented on the online version of her article. She later filed a Case Removal Request to have the charges dropped.[74]

Users who violated "public morals" also faced arrests. In 2015, an individual was arrested at a cybercafe for viewing a secular website in Khartoum; he was held for two days and beaten before being released without charges.[75]

Surveillance, Privacy, and Anonymity

Unchecked surveillance of ICTs is a grave concern among citizens in Sudan, where the government is

64   "Security Apparatus of Al- Bashir regime arrests activist Mohammed Jaili in Tandali," Sudan Voices, January 25, 2016, http://bit.ly/1UCFJhc

65   "Health of a journalist arrested by authorities in Khartoum transferred to Elfashir deteriorates," *Sudan Tribune*, February 2016, bit.ly/1M1hQ0M.

66   "El Fasher: Baggal released after 55 days of detention," *Radio Dabang*, April 8, 2016 http://bit.ly/2a8FcVh

67   "Baggal re-arrested and transferred to Shalla under the guidance of the governor," *Radio Dabang*, April 12, 2016, http://bit.ly/29MKXCJ

68   "Release of Baggal" *Radio Dabanga*, April 15, 2016, http://bit.ly/29N9626

69   Author interview, May 2016.

70   Amnesty International, "Sudanese Activist Arrested, Risks Deportation," urgent action, September 9, 2015, http://bit.ly/1LH10lk

71   "Khartoum denies involvement in Sudanese blogger arrest by Saudi police," *Sudan Tribune*, September 7, 2015, http://bit.ly/1LV7nju

72   Link to the article on Alrakoba: http://bit.ly/1UfI0LJ

73   "Sudan | Cyber Crime Investigations Unit Interrogates a Female Journalist of Al-Jaridah," Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, May 4, 2016, http://bit.ly/1YyJqWt

74   "For the second time, Cyber Crime Investigations Unit Interrogates Sarah Taj Elsir, journalist with Al-Jarida newspaper because of the material published by Alrakoba," *Alrakoba*, May 10, 2016, http://bit.ly/1Xwf87E

75   Author's interview.

known to actively monitor internet communications on social media platforms and target online activists and journalists during politically sensitive periods. The NISS regularly intercepts private email messages, enabled by sophisticated surveillance technologies.[76]

Internal emails leaked by hackers in July 2015 confirmed that the NISS had purchased Hacking Team's Remote Control System (RCS) spyware in 2012,[77] which has the ability to steal files and passwords, and to intercept Skype calls and chats.[78] While other leaked emails revealed that the company had discontinued business with Sudan in November 2014,[79] Citizen Lab research found that Sudan also possesses high-tech surveillance equipment from the U.S.-based Blue Coat Systems, a technology company that manufactures monitoring and filtering devices. The surveillance system was initially traced to three networks inside Sudan, including on the networks of the private telecom provider Canar.[80]

Article 9 of the NTC's General Regulations 2012, based on the 2001 Communications Act, obligates mobile companies to keep a complete record of their customers' data, thus requiring SIM card registration, which was enacted in 2008.[81] The government reportedly plans to link SIM cards to users' national identification numbers in the future,[82] while the Ministry of Information stated in March 2016 that it is considering new requirements to register all mobile devices with real names.[83]

Cybercafés lack privacy and are also subject to intrusive government surveillance. In February 2016, the NISS and Ministry of Interior special cybercrime units raided 130 internet cafes in Khartoum in search of content threatening "public morals."[84]

Intimidation and Violence

Online journalists and activists often face extralegal intimidation, harassment, and violence for their online activities. Female activists in particular were subject to multilayered attacks on social media. In 2015, an anonymously run Facebook page titled "Sudanese Women against Hijab"[85] trolled female activists by attributing fabricated statements against religion and the Hijab (headscarf) to several women known for their activism and posting their photos alongside the statements. The page elicited heresy accusations and death threats against the female activists, who sought to have the Facebook page removed.[86]

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76   See, "Sudan," Freedom on the Net 2015, Freedom House.
77   PDF of a receipt that shows the National Intelligence and Security Services of Sudan purchased Hacking Team's services: http://bit.ly/1Pv9A9p.
78   Hacking Team, "Customer Policy," accessed February 13, 2014, http://bit.ly/1GnkbjG.
79   Cora Currier and Morgan Maqruis-Boire, "A Detailed look At Hacking Team's Emails About Its Repressive Clients," *The Intercept*, July 7, 2015, http://bit.ly/1jxGv0h.
80   Ellen Nakashima, "Report*:* Web monitoring devices made by US firm Blue Coat detected in Iran, Sudan," *Washington Post*, July 8, 2013, http://wapo.st/1Pv95fA.
81   SIM card registration compromises mobile phone users' privacy and anonymity, as it requires an official identification card and home address information. "NTC announces the end of grace period to register sim cards," [in Arabic] *Sudani Net*, June 1, 2014, http://bit.ly/1W2A0n3.
82   "Sudan: Telecoms companies block non-registered SIM cards," *African Manager,* June 1, 2014, http://bit.ly/1NRlJ8x.
83   "A proposal for a new cybercrime law that stipulates prison sentences unto to 3 years," *AUaridah*, March 20, 2016
84   "Sudanese intelligence prosecutes Internet content that 'threatens the morals of the nation'," *Alhayat*, February 29, 2016, http://bit.ly/21iftrT
85   See Link to the page: http://bit.ly/1W7r1jm
86   Petition: Save the lives of Sudanese women and men, take down "Sudanese Women Against Hijab" Page! http://chn.ge/1omvbp9

Technical Attacks

Independent news sites are frequently subject to technical attacks, which many believe are perpetrated by the government's Cyber Jihadist Unit. Attacks usually intensify during political events and unrest, while some prominent news sites ward off daily DDoS attempts.[87]

The online outlet *al-Rakoba*, whose Sudanese founder was arrested in Saudi Arabia in July 2015 (see Prosecutions and Detentions for Online Activities), suffered regular DDoS attacks that intensified during the national dialogue events in early 2016, which sought solutions for lasting peace amid the country's various conflicts.[88] Publicized attacks during the coverage period include a DDoS attack on the online newspaper *al-Tareeq*, which took the site offline for half a day on August 12, 2015.[89]

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87   Author's interview with internal sources who requested to stay anonymous with this info to avoid making their vulnerabilities known.

88   Author's interview, May 2016. http://www.usip.org/olivebranch/2016/02/11/sudan-s-national-dialogue-poses-test-government-s-commitment

89   "From Altareeg to its supporters against the recent hacking attack," *Altareeg*, August 16, 2015, bit.ly/1M6BEdE. Journalists for Human Rights (JHR). (2015). Altareeq online newspaper hacked. [Press release].