

# JORDAN

	2011	2012
<b>INTERNET FREEDOM STATUS</b>	<b>Partly Free</b>	<b>Partly Free</b>
<b>Obstacles to Access (0-25)</b>	12	13
<b>Limits on Content (0-35)</b>	11	12
<b>Violations of User Rights (0-40)</b>	19	20
<b>Total (0-100)</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>45</b>

\* 0=most free, 100=least free

**POPULATION:** 6.3 million  
**INTERNET PENETRATION 2011:** 35 percent  
**WEB 2.0 APPLICATIONS BLOCKED:** No  
**NOTABLE POLITICAL CENSORSHIP:** No  
**BLOGGERS/ ICT USERS ARRESTED:** Yes  
**PRESS FREEDOM STATUS:** Not Free

## INTRODUCTION

Jordan, a small kingdom of about six million people, prides itself on offering relatively broad freedom to use the internet and officially blocks only one website. The Jordanian government's response to public protests in 2011 was relatively mild compared to neighboring countries. Moreover, the king and parliament passed a set of constitutional amendments that could improve human rights protections and free expression.

Nevertheless, restrictions on internet freedom exist and have increased since January 2011. News websites, which have become a vital source of information in a country where traditional media freedom is limited, often face pressure from state actors to delete articles deemed politically sensitive. In April 2012, a government council passed a resolution that could require online news websites to register with the government, a policy that if implemented risks curbing their independent reporting and analysis. Meanwhile, surveillance, physical attacks against bloggers and online journalists, and hacking attacks against prominent news websites also present a threat.

Internet access was first provided to Jordanians in 1995, and the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) was created that year to oversee the medium.<sup>1</sup> The authorities quickly recognized the economic potential of the internet and actively promoted

<sup>1</sup> The TRC was established as a financially and administratively independent jurisdictional body through the Telecommunications Law (No. 13 of 1995) and a subsequent amendment (Law No. 8 of 2002).

the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the kingdom.<sup>2</sup> As the number of internet users began to increase dramatically, the government stepped up both infrastructure expansion and monitoring. Although the authorities are aware of the need to develop the ICT sector for the country's economic survival and progress, they are nonetheless concerned about the internet's ability to empower citizens politically.

## OBSTACLES TO ACCESS

According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 35 percent of the Jordanian population accessed the internet in 2011, or about 2.1 million people.<sup>3</sup> The TRC estimated the number of users in early 2012 to be much higher, at 3.3 million people, or about 50 percent of the population.<sup>4</sup> Given the large number of people getting online at cybercafes and offices, most users have access to broadband rather than dial-up connections.<sup>5</sup> Most internet users are young people ranging in age from 15 to 24.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the medium, once seen as a tool for trivial entertainment and the exchange of scandalous or banned information, has grown into a vital instrument for business and an important forum for public discussion.

Mobile phone use has also expanded rapidly and by the end of 2011, the number of subscriptions was over 7.4 million, exceeding the total population.<sup>7</sup> Since 3G services were first launched in mid-2010, the number of subscribers has grown to over one million (about one-sixth of the population) between the two largest operators, Zain and Jordan Telecom.<sup>8</sup> Observers anticipate this number will further grow in 2012 upon implementation of a tax exemption for the purchase of smartphones and the launch of 3G services by another provider, Umniah.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Privacy International, "Jordan," *Silenced: An International Report on Censorship and Control of the Internet*, 2003, [http://www.privacyinternational.org/article.shtml?cmd\[347\]=x-347-103564](http://www.privacyinternational.org/article.shtml?cmd[347]=x-347-103564).

<sup>3</sup> International Telecommunication Union (ITU), "Percentage of individuals using the Internet, fixed (wired) Internet subscriptions, fixed (wired)-broadband subscriptions," 2011, accessed July 13, 2012, <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx#>.

<sup>4</sup> Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Jordan's official website [in Arabic], [http://www.trc.gov.jo/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1942&lang=arabic](http://www.trc.gov.jo/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1942&lang=arabic).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Mohammad Ghazal, "News websites most popular destination for Jordanian Internet users—study," *The Jordan Times*, March 22, 2012, <http://jordantimes.com/news-websites-most-popular-destination-for-jordanian-internet-users---study>.

<sup>7</sup> International Telecommunication Union (ITU), "Mobile-cellular telephone subscriptions," 2011, accessed July 13, 2012, <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx#>.

<sup>8</sup> ITU, "Jordan Telecom to invest JOD50 million in 3G," news release, June 29, 2011, <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/newslog/Jordan+Telecom+To+Invest+JOD50+Million+In+3G.aspx>; ITU, "Smartphone tax exemption drives 3G growth (Jordan)," news release, January 19, 2012, <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/newslog/Smartphone+Tax+Exemption+Drives+3G+Growth+Jordan.aspx>.

<sup>9</sup> ITU, "Smartphone tax exemption drives 3G growth (Jordan)," news release, January 19, 2012, <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/newslog/Smartphone+Tax+Exemption+Drives+3G+Growth+Jordan.aspx>.

Expansion of fixed-line internet access has been hampered by the cost of computers and connectivity. For several years, internet connection fees were considered high relative to neighboring countries and the cost of living. Prices have decreased, reportedly upon direct orders from the king, but complaints about the quality of service persist. Monthly internet subscription prices currently range from 10 Jordanian Dinars (JD) (US\$14) for the speed of 1 Mbps to about 25 JD (US\$35) for the speed of 2 Mbps for uploads and 10 Mbps for downloads. These charges are typically twice as much for subscriptions in an office setting. By comparison, the average monthly income in Jordan is about US\$500.<sup>10</sup> Customers often claim that connection speeds fluctuate and do not correspond to what they pay for. Meanwhile, internet access in remote areas remains poor, as almost all companies concentrate their operations and promotions in the capital, Amman.

The ICT sector is bound by Law No. 13 of 1995 and its amendment, Law No. 8 of 2002. The law endorses free-market policies and principles, and governs licensing and quality assurance.<sup>11</sup> Citizens and businesses can obtain internet access through privately owned service providers, and no special state approval or registration is required, but traffic must still flow through a government-controlled telecommunications hub. As of November 2011, there were 16 active internet service providers (ISPs) in Jordan, though licenses have been granted to over 20 companies.<sup>12</sup> The market is dominated by Umniah, Zain, and Jordan Telecom, the local affiliate of France Telecom's Orange brand. The formerly state-owned Jordan Telecom controls the fixed-line network and provides access to all other ISPs providing ADSL services, thereby centralizing most of the connection to the international internet.

The TRC is the main body overseeing the ICT sector. It is governed by the Telecommunications Law, which proscribes its financial and jurisdictional independence and the need to ensure no prior conflicts of interest among its five board members.<sup>13</sup> In May 2011, the Council of Ministers appointed Mohammad Taani to head the TRC.<sup>14</sup> The TRC is generally seen as independent and fair in its decision making, though it coordinates policy with the government.

---

<sup>10</sup> World Bank, "Gross national income per capita 2011, Atlas method and PPP," World Bank Databank, 2011, accessed July 18, 2012, <http://databank.worldbank.org/databank/download/GNIPC.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> "Jordan," *One Social Network With A Rebellious Message*, Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, 2009, <http://www.openarab.net/en/node/1618>.

<sup>12</sup> ITU, *ICT adoption and prospects in the Arab region*, Connect Arab Summit 2012, pg. 57, [http://www.itu.int/dms\\_pub/itu-d/opb/ind/D-IND-AR-2012-PDF-E.pdf](http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/ind/D-IND-AR-2012-PDF-E.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> The Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Jordan, *Chapter III*, [http://www.trc.gov.jo/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=20&lang=english](http://www.trc.gov.jo/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=20&lang=english).

<sup>14</sup> Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Jordan, *Mohammad Al Taani, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners/CEO*, [http://www.trc.gov.jo/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=126&Itemid=1079&lang=english](http://www.trc.gov.jo/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=126&Itemid=1079&lang=english).

## LIMITS ON CONTENT

Although the Jordanian government does not engage in extensive blocking of websites, other restrictions on online content exist. Behind-the-scenes pressure to delete content continues and in 2012 the parliament adopted amendments that require news websites to register with the government. Meanwhile, online tools—particularly news websites and the social-networking site Facebook—have played an important role in mobilizing public protests to oppose restrictions to free expression and call for broader political reforms.

In a 2009 meeting with journalists, government officials pledged to refrain from issuing legislation to censor online content. Indeed, outright blocking of websites by the authorities is rare. The only permanently blocked website is the U.S.-based *Arab Times* newspaper, which often takes a critical tone toward Arab regimes and their leaders.<sup>15</sup> In 2008, the authorities began blocking access to up to 600 websites on internal government networks, claiming such measures were necessary to prevent public service employees from wasting time online. The inclusion of key Jordanian news websites among those blocked raised concerns that the purpose was also to limit government employees' access to independent information.<sup>16</sup> In a positive development, the administration of Prime Minister Marouf al-Bakhit that came into office in February 2011 reversed this policy, enabling access for government employees to all websites.

More common in Jordan is for website owners to remove material after receiving informal complaints via telephone from government officials, members of the security services, party leaders, lawmakers, journalists, and ordinary users. In several cases over the past two years, websites that refused such requests faced reprisals. For example, in February 2011, one of the country's most popular news websites, *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 calling for democratic and economic reforms. Among other actions, the hackers deleted the joint statement, which represented a politically sensitive development given such groups' historic support for the monarchy.<sup>17</sup> In another incident in March 2012, the Jordanian Royal Court pressured the website of the *al-Arab al-Yawm* newspaper to delete an article titled, "We will not live in a stupid man's robe," which criticized the government's handling of corruption and protests in the city of al-

---

<sup>15</sup> A test by Freedom House in February 2012 confirmed that the website remains inaccessible. See also, "Jordan," OpenNet Initiative, August 6, 2009, <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/jordan>.

<sup>16</sup> Arab Archives Institute, "Fear of Freedoms: King Insists on Freedoms, Government Resists," news release, December 6, 2008, [http://www.ifex.org/jordan/2008/12/09/capsule\\_report\\_despite\\_advances/](http://www.ifex.org/jordan/2008/12/09/capsule_report_despite_advances/); "Public Employees Wasting Time on the Internet," *The Jordan Times*, August 5, 2010, <http://www.jordantimes.com/index.php?news=28938>.

<sup>17</sup> "In Jordan, website hacked after running sensitive statement," Committee to Protect Journalists, February 9, 2011, <http://cpj.org/2011/02/in-jordan-website-hacked-after-running-sensitive-s.php>.

Tafila.<sup>18</sup> In other cases, news websites have had to deal with waves of angry comments from the public after tackling sensitive issues, as readers pressure them to respect traditions.

Throughout 2011, debate continued over whether and how the government might extend the application of the Press and Publications Law (PPL), which governs and often restricts traditional media, to the online sphere. In January 2010, the Court of Cassation ruled that websites and electronic media must comply with the PPL.<sup>19</sup> However, implementing the decision was complicated by the fact that most Jordanian online news outlets are hosted on servers outside of the country due to cost, thereby placing them beyond the jurisdiction of domestic courts.<sup>20</sup> In August 2011, both houses of parliament passed amendments to the PPL to provide online news outlets with the choice to register with the government in exchange for certain benefits, or remain unregistered.<sup>21</sup> Among the benefits cited were guaranteed access to government officials, invitations to press conferences, and opportunities to receive public funding via advertisements. In addition, registered online news outlets and their staffs would only be subject to fines for content violations, whereas employees of unregistered websites risk imprisonment under the penal code, security legislation, and libel laws. Despite the government's efforts to lure independent websites into registering, as of March 2012, very few had done so. Thus, in April 2012, the Higher Judicial Council's Law Interpretation Bureau issued a decision classifying news websites as publications that should be subject to the same regulations as print media, including registering with the Press and Publications Department.<sup>22</sup> As of mid-2012, the government was considering legislation that would further formalize such an obligation.<sup>23</sup>

Among other implications, this regulatory change could affect the financial viability of online news websites as the PPL prohibits foreign investment in newspapers, a provision that could now apply to online news outlets as well. Meanwhile, unconfirmed reports emerged of government agencies in early 2012 pressuring advertisers to avoid certain news websites in an effort to limit the sites' income.<sup>24</sup> There have also been some initial reports of security or government officials offering encouragement—and possibly material support—to

---

<sup>18</sup> International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), "Royal Court orders newspaper to remove critical article from website," news release, March 26, 2012, [http://www.ifex.org/jordan/2012/03/26/article\\_censored/](http://www.ifex.org/jordan/2012/03/26/article_censored/).

<sup>19</sup> Hani Hazaimah, "Court Ruling Threatens Press Freedom—Activists," Jordan Times, January 15, 2010, <http://www.jordantimes.com/?news=23196>.

<sup>20</sup> Daoud Kuttab, "Jordan's News Sites' 'Voluntary' Registration Law Will Not Work," The Huffington Post, August 4, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/daoud-kuttab/jordans-newssites-volunta\\_b\\_917809.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/daoud-kuttab/jordans-newssites-volunta_b_917809.html).

<sup>21</sup> Law No. 17, Article 49, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Higher Judicial Council Bureau for Interpreting the Law, "Resolution No. 2 for the year 2012," [in Arabic], April 9, 2012, [www.jc.jo/القرارات-الصادرة-عن-الديوان-الخاص-السير-بتفسير-القانون-بتقسيم-2640](http://www.jc.jo/القرارات-الصادرة-عن-الديوان-الخاص-السير-بتفسير-القانون-بتقسيم-2640).

<sup>23</sup> Hani Hazalmeh, "Press law 'not sacred', open to change under Dome," The Jordan Times, August 2, 2012, <http://jordantimes.com/press-law-not-sacred-open-to-change-under-dome>.

<sup>24</sup> "Campaign on websites and the government refuses to license" [in Arabic], Allofjo, May 30, 2012, <http://www.allofjo.net/index.php?page=article&id=29643>.

journalists to establish news websites favorable to the government that would compete with the increasingly influential, and often critical, existing online outlets.<sup>25</sup>

The threat presented by restrictive laws and financial penalties in the PPL, combined with an awareness of extensive content monitoring, has a chilling effect on expression online. Bloggers and news website owners often complain directly or indirectly about their inability to post news freely due to monitoring. Many practice self-censorship and rarely cross the standard red lines, particularly concerning material that could be perceived as harmful to national security, national unity, the country's economy, or the royal family.

The country's approximately 200 news websites and their political analysis are an increasingly important source of information for many Jordanians, who feel they report information unavailable from print and broadcast media. A study released by the market research firm Ipsos in March 2012 found that around 70 percent of internet users accessed news websites, making it the most popular area of online interest, surpassing music and sports.<sup>26</sup> Three news websites—*Sarayanews*, *Khaberni*, and *Ammon News*—were among the top 20 most visited websites in the country in March 2012.<sup>27</sup>

Blogs in Jordan, which initially contributed to residents' discovery of the internet as a source of uncensored information, seemed to have lost some of their influence in relative terms in 2009 and 2010. Blogs regained their importance as an avenue for debate on political and social issues in 2011, as people used a wide range of new media tools to share information and organize protests. The most well-known blogs are produced by journalists seeking more freedom to post their views without their editors' censorship. A growing number of blogs are written in Arabic, a shift from several years ago, when most were bilingual or in English.

Web 2.0 applications and sites—including global platforms like Facebook, the microblogging service Twitter, and the video-sharing site YouTube—are freely available and very popular, particularly among younger Jordanians. The number of Facebook users in Jordan in March 2012 exceeded two million, representing over one-third of the country's population.<sup>28</sup> The microblogging website Twitter has garnered a smaller following. According to one social media analyst, by the end of May 2011, there were approximately 50,000 Twitter users in Jordan, of which only 15,000 were active, posting several times a

---

<sup>25</sup> "Liberal Press: government seeks to break the power forward positions" [in Arabic], JO24, May 29, 2012, <http://www.jo24.net/index.php?page=article&id=5179>.

<sup>26</sup> "News websites most popular destination for Jordanian Internet Users," Zawya.com, accessed September 18, 2012, [http://www.zawya.com/story.cfm/sidZAWYA20120323115500/News\\_websites\\_most\\_popular\\_destination\\_for\\_Jordanian\\_Internet\\_users](http://www.zawya.com/story.cfm/sidZAWYA20120323115500/News_websites_most_popular_destination_for_Jordanian_Internet_users) (subscription required).

<sup>27</sup> "Top Sites in Jordan," Alexa Web Information Company, accessed March 27, 2012, <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/JO>.

<sup>28</sup> "Jordan Facebook Statistics," Social Bakers, accessed March 28, 2012, <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/jordan>.

week.<sup>29</sup> Several local social media tools had previously gained popularity, but in June 2011, the Jordanian microblogging site WatWet shut down, unable to compete with Twitter.<sup>30</sup> Besides average citizens using these tools to communicate, several ministers and government officials, including the Minister of Information, have established Facebook and Twitter accounts to communicate with the public. Queen Rania Al Abdullah has also been known to use Facebook and Twitter from time to time.

Facebook played a particularly important role in 2011 mobilizing youth to participate in protests calling for political reform. Throughout the year, numerous demonstrations took place, gathering thousands of people. In March 2011, a group calling itself Youth of March 24 organized a protest camp in a central square in Amman via Facebook. They demanded the prime minister's resignation, parliamentary reforms, and the prosecution of corrupt officials. That night, police attempted to disperse the youth, cutting off electricity at the location. Meanwhile, a group of people believed to be government loyalists began throwing rocks at the protesters as police reportedly stood by, resulting in over 30 people being injured.<sup>31</sup> The organizers had prepared for potential clashes, however, designating people in advance to document any violent incidents. As a result, images and video clips of the attack were taken, uploaded, and quickly circulated online.<sup>32</sup>

## VIOLATIONS OF USER RIGHTS

In October 2011, responding to public pressure and street protests that began in January, King Abdullah II approved over 40 constitutional amendments that had been passed by both houses of parliament. The amendments include creation of a constitutional court (Article 58-61), an explicit prohibition on torture (Article 8), and the restriction of the State Security Court's jurisdiction only to crimes of treason, espionage, and terrorism (Article 110).<sup>33</sup> Several amendments touched directly or indirectly on internet freedom. Specifically, terms such as "mass media" and "other means of communication," which likely encompass online media, were added to provisions that both protect freedom of expression and allow

<sup>29</sup> Mohammad Ghazal, "Twitter study points to declining happiness, but users don't plan to stop," The Jordan Times, December 29, 2011, <http://jordantimes.com/twitter-study-points-to-declining-happiness-but-users-dont-plan-to-stop>.

<sup>30</sup> "On Shutting Down WatWet," Tootcorp.com, July 2011, <http://tootcorp.com/2011/07/on-shutting-down-watwet/> (site discontinued).

<sup>31</sup> "Clashes break out at Jordan anti-government protest," BBC News, March 25, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12857360>.

<sup>32</sup> Yahia Shukkeir, *Jordan: 2011 Internet rights and democratization*, Global Information Society Watch, 2011, <http://www.giswatch.org/en/country-report/social-mobilisation/jordan>; Hadeel Gbon and Abdullah Dividend, "Dozens injured in a sit-in after a new attack of 'thugs'" [in Arabic], Alghad, March 25, 2011, <http://alghad.com/index.php/article/422946.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Ali al-Rawashdah, "Jordan approves constitutional amendments," Al-Shorfa, October 5, 2011, [http://al-shorfa.com/cocoon/meii/xhtml/en\\_GB/features/meii/features/main/2011/10/05/feature-01](http://al-shorfa.com/cocoon/meii/xhtml/en_GB/features/meii/features/main/2011/10/05/feature-01).

for its limitation during periods of emergency (Article 15). With regards to the right to privacy, the requirement of a judicial order was added as a precondition for censorship or confiscation of telephonic and other means of private communication (Article 18).<sup>34</sup> For the Constitutional Court to come into effect, additional legislation is required, which had not been completed as of May 1, 2012.

Despite constitutional protections, there remain several laws that hinder free expression and access to information. These include the Jordan Press Association Law (1998), the penal code (1960), the Defense Law (1992), the Contempt of Court Law (1959), the Protection of State Secrets and Classified Documents Law (1971), and the Press and Publications Law (1999). An Access to Information Law was enacted in 2007, but it contains a number of restrictions.<sup>35</sup> In September 2011, the elected lower house of parliament passed an amendment to the country's Anti-Corruption Law, which would penalize the publication or dissemination of allegations of corruption without proof with fines ranging from 30,000 to 60,000 dinar (US\$4,000-US\$84,000).<sup>36</sup> However, in January 2012, the upper house of parliament rejected the controversial article when passing the law, following analysis by a new committee chosen after the change in government, advocacy efforts by civil society groups, and resignation threats by the board of the Jordan Press Association.<sup>37</sup>

Defamation remains a criminal offense under the penal code. A series of amendments to the law enacted in 2010 abolished imprisonment as a punishment for libeling ordinary citizens, but increased the fine (up to 10,000 dinars or US\$14,000) and jail sentences (from three months to two years) for libel committed against public servants and government officials, contrary to international practice of greater lenience for criticism of elected or appointed officials.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Constitution of Jordan, 1952, [http://www.mpil.de/shared/data/pdf/overview\\_amendments.pdf](http://www.mpil.de/shared/data/pdf/overview_amendments.pdf); "Jordan," Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law, last updated May 4, 2012,

[http://www.mpil.de/ww/en/pub/research/details/know\\_transfer/constitutional\\_reform\\_in\\_arab\\_jordanien.cfm](http://www.mpil.de/ww/en/pub/research/details/know_transfer/constitutional_reform_in_arab_jordanien.cfm).

<sup>35</sup> For example, the law bars public requests for information involving religious, racial, ethnic, or gender discrimination (Article 10), and allows officials to withhold all types of classified information, a very broad category (Article 13) Arab Archives Institute, "Summary of the Study on Access to Information Law in Jordan," June 2005,

<http://www.alarcheef.com/reports/englishFiles/accessToInformation.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Yahya Shakir, "Article 23 of the Anti-Corruption Law aimed at burying the opposing views in the bud" [in Arabic], Alarabalyawm, [http://alarabalyawm.batelco.jo/pages.php?articles\\_id=17077](http://alarabalyawm.batelco.jo/pages.php?articles_id=17077);

<sup>37</sup> "Jordan journalists protest anti-corruption bill," Khaleej Times, September 28, 2011,

[http://www.khaleejtimes.com/darticle.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2011/September/middleeast\\_September568.xml&section=middleeast](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/darticle.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2011/September/middleeast_September568.xml&section=middleeast); Wael Jaraysheh, "Senate Returns Controversial Anti-Corruption Law, Dodging Deliberations Again," Ammon News, December 8, 2011, <http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articleNO=14876>; "Jordanian Senate Rejects Article 23 of the Anti-Corruption Law," SKeyes News, January 16, 2012, <http://www.skeyesmedia.org/en/News/Jordan/Jordanian-Senate-Rejects-Article-23-of-the-Anti-Corruption-Law>.

<sup>38</sup> IREX, "Introduction to News Media Law and Policy in Jordan," May 2011, pg 38,

[http://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/Media%20Law%20and%20Policy%20Primer%20\(English\).pdf](http://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/Media%20Law%20and%20Policy%20Primer%20(English).pdf).

The parliament passed a new cybercrime law in August 2010. The law, which proscribes penalties for cybercrimes such as hacking and online identity theft, also contains several provisions that could be easily used to suppress free online expression. For example, the new law prohibits posting any information on the web already not available to the public concerning national security, foreign affairs, the national economy, and public safety. Nevertheless, following protests by civil society, several more egregious provisions related to defamation and police searches without a warrant were removed by royal decree in September.<sup>39</sup>

For the most part, Jordan's leadership has not made use of these laws to severely punish domestic political opponents, though some online commentators have faced legal harassment.<sup>40</sup> In a troubling development, since early 2011, several online journalists have been brought before the military-dominated State Security Court (SSC) on charges related to their writings. In July 2011, Jordanian journalist Alaa' Fazzaa' was arrested for "working to change the constitution by unlawful means" after he reported about a Facebook group supporting reinstatement of Prince Hamza, King Abdullah's half-brother, as crown prince.<sup>41</sup> He was released several days later. During the year, Fazzaa' also faced prosecution for an article he authored on the news website *Khabarjo* in which he accused senior officials of inappropriately allowing convicted business tycoon Khalid Shahin to leave the country.<sup>42</sup> The charges against Fazzaa' were later dropped as part of a general amnesty.<sup>43</sup>

In April 2012, Jamal al-Muhtaseb, the publisher and owner of the *Gerasa News* website, was charged by the SSC with "opposing the ruling system," after the site published an article alleging that the Royal Court had directed a parliamentary committee not to refer a former minister's corruption case to trial.<sup>44</sup> The SSC ordered that Muhtaseb be held in pre-trial detention for 14 days.<sup>45</sup> The article's author, Sahar al-Muhtaseb, was also arrested but was

---

<sup>39</sup> International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), "Government yields to protests, modifies cyber crimes law," news release, September 3, 2010, [http://ifex.org/jordan/2010/09/03/cyber\\_crimes\\_law/](http://ifex.org/jordan/2010/09/03/cyber_crimes_law/); Official Website of the Prime Ministry of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan [in Arabic],

[http://www.pm.gov.jo/arabic/index.php?page\\_type=gov\\_paper&part=3&id=5056](http://www.pm.gov.jo/arabic/index.php?page_type=gov_paper&part=3&id=5056).

<sup>40</sup> Oula Farawati, "Jordan's News Websites Running for Legal Cover," *Menassat*, March 11, 2009, <http://www.menassat.com/?q=ar/comment/reply/6143>.

<sup>41</sup> James M. Dorsey, "Assad Criticism Isolates Iran, Fails to Tackle Key Issues," *MidEast Posts*, September 8, 2011, <http://mideastposts.com/2011/08/09/assad-criticism-isolates-iran-fails-to-address-key-issues/>.

<sup>42</sup> AFP, "Jordan frees journalist held for 'undermining throne,'" *Google News*, <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gqpn0B98i6cWhwxx2TJvrRGILmFg?docId=CNG.7e8c9b730d578a188e3f19c677e0e598.131>.

<sup>43</sup> James M. Dorsey, "Assad Criticism Isolates Iran, Fails to Tackle Key Issues," *MidEast Posts*, September 8, 2011, <http://mideastposts.com/2011/08/09/assad-criticism-isolates-iran-fails-to-address-key-issues/>.

<sup>44</sup> "Jordanian journalist arrested over critical article," *Committee to Protect Journalists*, April 25, 2012, <http://cpj.org/2012/04/jordanian-journalist-arrested-over-critical-articl.php>.

<sup>45</sup> Muhtaseb was released on bail in mid-May after 21 days in detention, but the charges against him were still pending. See, "Journalist Freed on Bail After 21 Days in Custody, Still Faces Prosecution," *Reporters Without Borders*, May 14, 2012, [http://en.rsf.org/jordan-journalist-to-be-tried-before-25-04-2012\\_42354.html](http://en.rsf.org/jordan-journalist-to-be-tried-before-25-04-2012_42354.html).

released on bail the same day. No bloggers or online journalists were serving prison terms as of May 2012, as several previously detained writers were released following royal pardons.

Jordanians are careful when they talk on mobile phones and extra prudent about what they say at public meetings. This attitude has passed naturally to the internet, because it is believed that security services closely monitor online comments, documenting them by date, internet-protocol (IP) address, and location. In a 2010 case that strengthened these suspicions, a Jordanian college student Imad al-Ash was sentenced to two years in prison after security forces accused him of insulting the king in an instant message to a friend and of posting “controversial religious opinions” in public online forums;<sup>46</sup> he was subsequently released after a royal pardon.

Cybercafes, where users might otherwise write with relative anonymity, have been subjected to a growing set of restrictive regulations in recent years. Since mid-2010, operators have been obliged to install security cameras to monitor customers, who in turn 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.<sup>47</sup> Authorities claim these restrictions are needed for security reasons. Although enforcement is somewhat lax, the once thriving cybercafe business is now in decline due to the restrictions as well as the decrease in the cost of home connections. Despite these restrictions, some data protection provisions are in place. For example, the legislation that regulates the telecommunications sector prescribes fines and one month to one year in prison for the distribution of improperly obtained content from any internet or telephone communication.<sup>48</sup>

Since January 2011, incidents of intimidation and physical attacks against bloggers and staff of online news websites have notably increased. According to Human Rights Watch, in February 2011, unknown assailants attacked Basil al-Ukur, and threatened Samir al-Hiyari, executives at the popular news website *Ammon News*.<sup>49</sup> Although the reason for the attack is unclear, the timing suggested it may have been related to the website’s coverage of protests in Amman calling for major economic and political reforms. The following month, Sami Zubaidi, a prominent columnist and editor at another news website *Amman Post* reported

---

<sup>46</sup>Ahmad Al-Shagra, “Jordanian Student Sentenced to 2 Years Over IM,” *The Next Web*, July 19, 2010, <http://thenextweb.com/me/2010/07/19/royal-ash-jordanian-student-sentenced-to-jail-for-2-years-over-im/>.

<sup>47</sup>International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), “Cyber crime law attacks free expression; Internet cafés monitored,” News Release, August 18, 2010, [http://www.ifex.org/jordan/2010/08/18/cyber\\_cafe/](http://www.ifex.org/jordan/2010/08/18/cyber_cafe/); “Interior requires internet cafes to install surveillance cameras and keep internet visits for months” [in Arabic], *Saraya News*, June 3, 2010, <http://www.sarayanews.com/object-article/view/id/23211>.

<sup>48</sup>Law No. 13 of 1995 and its amendment, Law No. 8 of 2002. “Jordan,” *One Social Network With A Rebellious Message*, Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, 2009, <http://www.openarab.net/en/node/1618>.

<sup>49</sup>Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2012: Jordan*, 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2012/world-report-2012-jordan>.

that a member of parliament threatened him with physical harm.<sup>50</sup> In a more serious incident in February 2012, female blogger Enass Musallam was stabbed and her attacker indirectly referenced her political writings. The assault occurred shortly after she published a blog post criticizing Jordan's Prince Hassan for derisive comments he made about pro-reform protesters.<sup>51</sup> Jordanian authorities denied the attack was related to her blog post or activism, but Musallam reported being harassed by police and called a liar after filing a complaint.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to attacks on particular individuals, the offices of at least one news website were also targeted. In April 2011, six men raided the office of *Al-Muharrir* in Amman, beating one employee and destroying a computer. The men stormed the office of editor-in-chief Jihad Abu Baidar, threatening to kill him and burn down the workplace if he did not withdraw an article on an anti-corruption commission investigation of former chief of staff, General Khaled Jamil al-Saraira.<sup>53</sup> News websites and online writers also face intimidation by conservative readers, who have been known flood their comments sections with threatening messages in a bid to muzzle independent thought and free expression.

Popular news websites have also been subjected to hacking attacks after posting sensitive material or during times of social tension. As noted above, in February 2011, *Ammon News* had its website hacked after publishing a call for reform by tribal leaders. At first, content was deleted or manipulated, then users began being redirected to a page saying, "This site was hacked because you work against the security of Jordan." For several days, both the work and personal email accounts of editors were inaccessible.<sup>54</sup> The following month, the opposition Islamic Action Front reported that its site had also been hacked a day after the group called for the prime minister's ouster.<sup>55</sup> The staff of these websites accused Jordan's intelligence agencies of carrying out the attacks, but the government denied the allegations.

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), "Blogger stabbed after criticizing royal family member," news release, February 27, 2012, [http://www.ifex.org/jordan/2012/02/27/musallam\\_stabbed/](http://www.ifex.org/jordan/2012/02/27/musallam_stabbed/).

<sup>52</sup> "In Jordan, blogger stabbed after criticizing the royal family," Committee to Protect Journalists, February 29, 2012, <http://cpj.org/2012/02/in-jordan-blogger-stabbed-after-criticizing-the-ro.php>.

<sup>53</sup> "CPJ condemns attack on office of news website," Committee to Protect Journalists, April 19, 2011, <http://cpj.org/2011/04/cpj-condemns-attack-on-office-of-website.php>.

<sup>54</sup> International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), "News website hacked after publishing sensitive statement," news release, February 9, 2011, [http://www.ifex.org/jordan/2011/02/11/ammon\\_news\\_hacked/](http://www.ifex.org/jordan/2011/02/11/ammon_news_hacked/).

<sup>55</sup> "Jordan Islamist Opposition Says Website Hacked," France24, March 27, 2011, <http://www.france24.com/en/20110327-jordan-islamist-opposition-says-website-hacked> (link discontinued).