

# Jordan

	2013	2014		
<b>Internet Freedom Status</b>	<b>Partly Free</b>	<b>Partly Free</b>	Population:	7.3 million
Obstacles to Access (0-25)	13	12	Internet Penetration 2013:	44 percent
Limits on Content (0-35)	13	15	Social Media/ICT Apps Blocked:	No
Violations of User Rights (0-40)	20	21	Political/Social Content Blocked:	Yes
<b>TOTAL* (0-100)</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>48</b>	Bloggers/ICT Users Arrested:	Yes
			Press Freedom 2014 Status:	Not Free

\* 0=most free, 100=least free

## Key Developments: May 2013 – May 2014

- On June 2, 2013 the Department of Press & Publications requested that the TRC order ISPs to block more than 200 websites for failing to comply with registration and licensing requirements set forth in the amended Press and Publications Law (see **Limits on Content**).
- A new anti-terrorism law was passed in April 2014. The law broadens the definition of terrorism in a way that threatens free speech and may be used to prosecute users and online journalists for anything broadly interpreted as damaging to Jordan's relations with foreign governments (see **Violations of User Rights**).
- On September 17, 2013, the publisher of a Jordanian news outlet, Jafra, and its editor-in-chief were arrested under the penal code for publishing a third-party YouTube video which was deemed offensive to the Crown Prince of Qatar, Jassim Bin Hamad al-Thani. In the video the prince appears sitting, dancing and bathing with a group of women (see **Violations of User Rights**).
- Ayman al-Bahrawi was charged with "lengthening the tongue" and "insulting" foreign heads of state in private Whatsapp messages found on his mobile phone (see **Violations of User Rights**).

## Introduction

Internet freedom conditions in Jordan have declined over the past year. Over 200 websites were blocked in June 2013 for failing to obtain a license from the Department of Press and Publications after the expiration of a nine-month grace period granted by authorities. In the ensuing months, many websites were unblocked after successfully obtaining a license.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, new anti-terror measures passed in April of this year have worried opposition voices that authorities will use the legislation to silence dissent and further intimidate activists.<sup>2</sup> Two journalists were brought before a state security court after posting a YouTube video of a Qatari prince, while an ordinary user was also arrested for private Whatsapp messages in which he criticized the Egyptian military's takeover of power in that country.<sup>3</sup> The increased restrictions came as Jordan continues to host at least 600,000 Syrian refugees amid prolonged insecurity over the threat of armed extremists in neighboring Syria and Iraq.<sup>4</sup>

Low-level public protests have ensued since 2011 over both political reform and socio-economic conditions.<sup>5</sup> Constitutional amendments were passed to calm public discontent, improving protections on freedom of expression and strengthening the independence of the judiciary, while parliamentary elections took place under an improved electoral framework in January 2013. That June, King Abdullah II released a "discussion paper" on liberalization and political reform in Jordan while also calling for "greater activism and citizen empowerment".<sup>6</sup> However, these developments have not significantly altered the status quo in the country.<sup>7</sup> The Islamic Action Front, Jordan's branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, once again boycotted the elections over political grievances and concerns over the elections law.<sup>8</sup> The Universal Periodical Review of Jordan, which took place in October 2013 under the United Nations Human Rights Council, criticized the increased censorship in the country, along with the continued trials of civilians before military courts for offenses related to free speech.<sup>9</sup>

Internet access was first provided to Jordanians in 1995, the same year the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) was established to regulate the country's information and

1 Rimaz Mousa and Neemat Smadi, "Fayez Shawabkeh: Jordanian Intelligence Department Didn't Interfere in the Websites Blocking Decision," July 22, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1vbRKfr>.

2 Areej Abuqudairi, "Jordan Anti-Terrorism Law Sparks Concern," AlJazeera, April 25, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/04/jordan-anti-terrorism-law-sparks-concern-201442510452221775.html>.

3 Doa Ali and Hussam Daana, "Military, Secret, and Below Standards for Justice: Trials of Activists before "State Security" Courts," November 3, 2013, <http://www.7iber.com/2013/11/state-security-court-2/>.

4 See, Areej AbuQudairi, "Syrian Refugees Struggle in Urban Jordan," AlJazeera.com, April 17, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/04/syrian-refugees-urban-jordan-201441712570581988.html>, and Curtis R. Ryan, "Jordan's Security Dilemmas," Foreign Policy, May 1, 2012, [http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/05/01/jordans\\_security\\_dilemmas](http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/05/01/jordans_security_dilemmas).

5 Aalektisadia, "Demonstrations, roads blocking and confrontations in Jordan after rise in Fuel prices," November 13, 2012, Accessed June 26, 2013, [http://www.aleqt.com/2012/11/13/article\\_709448.html](http://www.aleqt.com/2012/11/13/article_709448.html)

6 Curtis R. Ryan, "Jordan's Websites Blocking Controversy," Foreign Policy, June 26, 2013, [http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/06/20/jordans\\_website\\_blocking\\_controversy](http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/06/20/jordans_website_blocking_controversy).

7 Joshua Tucker, "2013 Jordan Post-Elections Report: And the winner is ...the King," January 25, 2013, Accessed June 27, 2013, <http://themonkeycage.org/2013/01/25/2013-jordan-post-election-report-and-the-winner-isthe-king/>

8 "Jordan election: Voting ends as Islamists allege fraud," BBC News, January 23, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-21158713>.

9 United Nations Human Rights: Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, Universal Periodic Review: Media Brief, October 24, 2013, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/Highlights24October2013am.aspx> and UN Human Rights Council (2013, January 6) Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Jordan, p. 19, [www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Documents/A-HRC-25-9\\_en.doc](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Documents/A-HRC-25-9_en.doc).

communication technology (ICT) sector.<sup>10</sup> Recognizing the economic potential of the internet, authorities actively promoted ICT development in the small kingdom.<sup>11</sup> Once seen as a means of trivial entertainment and the exchange of scandalous or banned information, the internet has grown into a vital instrument for business and an important forum for public discussion. Likewise, as the number of users began to increase dramatically, the government drew up legal methods for maintaining control over online content and monitoring users, particularly after the regional uprisings of 2011.

## Obstacles to Access

According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a total of 44 percent of the Jordanian population accessed the internet by the end of 2013, up from 23 percent five years earlier.<sup>12</sup> National figures from the Telecommunications Regulation Commission (TRC) estimated the number of users to have increased in the second quarter of 2014 to 73 percent, or 5.4 million users.<sup>13</sup> Given the large number of people accessing the internet at cybercafes and offices, most users have access to broadband rather than dial-up connections.<sup>14</sup> According to TRC statistics, the number of mobile broadband subscriptions reached over 1.2 million in the second quarter of 2014, with ADSL next at around 208,000.<sup>15</sup> Most internet users are young people from ages 15 to 24.<sup>16</sup>

Mobile phone use has also expanded rapidly and by the end of 2013, the number of subscriptions was over 10.3 million, representing a penetration rate of 141.80 percent.<sup>17</sup> 3G services were first launched by Zain and Jordan Telecom (Orange) in mid-2010 and increased upon implementation of a tax exemption for the purchase of smartphones and the launch of mobile broadband by another provider, Umniah.<sup>18</sup> A call from the TRC to introduce a fourth mobile operator in December 2012, however, was rejected by Zain and Jordan Telecom.<sup>19</sup> No new providers have been introduced since then and the three companies have a similar share of the market.<sup>20</sup>

10 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).

11 Privacy International, "Jordan," *Silenced: An International Report on Censorship and Control of the Internet*, 2003, .

12 International Telecommunication Union (ITU), "Percentage of individuals using the Internet, fixed (wired) Internet subscriptions, fixed (wired)-broadband subscriptions," 2013, accessed July 5, 2014, <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>.

13 Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Jordan's official website [in English], accessed May 10, 2014. [http://www.trc.gov.jo/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2597&Itemid=978&lang=arabic&lang=arabic](http://www.trc.gov.jo/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2597&Itemid=978&lang=arabic&lang=arabic)

14 Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Jordan's official website.

15 Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Jordan's official website [in English], accessed September, 26, 2014. [http://www.trc.gov.jo/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2599&lang=english&Itemid=1231](http://www.trc.gov.jo/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2599&lang=english&Itemid=1231).

16 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>.

17 International Telecommunication Union (ITU), "Fixed (wired)-broadband subscriptions," 2000-2013, accessed July 5, 2014, <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>.

18 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>.

19 Ghazzal, Mohammad "Orange Jordan Opposes TRC Plan," Jordan Times, December 15, 2012. <http://jordantimes.com/orange-jordan-opposes-trc-plan>, accessed April 30, 2013.

20 Mai Barakat, "Jordan will be challenging, but a fourth operator might find elbow room as a mobile broadband provider," Informa, February 21, 2013, <http://blogs.informatandm.com/9181/jordan-will-be-challenging-but-a-fourth-operator-might-find-elbow-room-as-a-mobile-broadband-provider/>.

After rejecting two international operators, the Jordanian government awarded Zain Jordan with the rights to introduce 4G services to the market. Zain has since announced that 4G service will be available by the end of 2014.<sup>21</sup> A few weeks later, Mohamad Taani, TRC chief commissioner, was reported to have invited the other two major operators in Jordan, Orange Jordan and Umniah, to bid for 4G service frequencies.<sup>22</sup>

The expansion of fixed-line internet access has been hampered by the relatively high costs of computers and connectivity. Indeed, fixed broadband subscriptions have decreased since 2009, with only 2.83 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, mobile broadband use has soared to over 1.2 million subscribers.<sup>24</sup>

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 fixed-line subscription prices currently range from JOD 13 (US\$18) for speeds of 128 Kbps and an allowance of 10 Gigabytes (GB), to JOD 65 (US\$92) for speeds of up to 24 Mbps and a 65 GB allowance. Postpaid monthly plans for Evolved High-Speed Packet Access (HSPA+) range from JOD 5 (US\$7) to JOD 49 (US\$69) per month, depending on speeds and data allowances.<sup>25</sup> By comparison, gross national income per capita is US\$4,950, or US\$413 per month.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, internet access in many governorates and remote areas remains poor, as almost all companies concentrate their operations and promotions in major cities, particularly the capital Amman.

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.<sup>27</sup> Citizens and businesses can obtain internet access through privately owned service providers without state approval or registration. A November 2011 reports listed 16 active internet service providers (ISPs) in Jordan, though licenses have been granted to over 20 companies.<sup>28</sup> The market is dominated by Umniah (a subsidiary of Batelco Bahrain), 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, thereby centralizing most of the connection to the international internet. The government retains a degree of control over the country's internet backbone and all traffic within the country must flow through a government-controlled telecommunications hub.

The TRC is the independent agency responsible for regulating the ICT sector. It is governed by the

21 Ghazzal, Mohammad "Zain Jordan to Introduce 4G Services by Year End," Jordan Times, April, 15, 2014, <http://jordantimes.com/zain-jordan--to-introduce-4g-services-by-year-end>.

22 McBride, Stephen "Zain Jordan Snaps up 4G Frequencies: Kingdom's Number-One Mobile Operator Plans LTE Service Launch by End of Year," ITP.NET, April, 17, 2014. <http://www.itp.net/597702-zain-jordan-snaps-up-4g-frequencies>.

23 International Telecommunication Union (ITU), "Fixed (Wired) Broadband Subscriptions," 2000-2013, accessed July 5, 2014, <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>.

24 "Telecommunications Indicators (Q2-2014)," Telecommunications Regulatory Commission – Jordan, 2014, accessed September 26, 2014, [http://www.trc.gov.jo/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2599&lang=english&Itemid=1231](http://www.trc.gov.jo/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2599&lang=english&Itemid=1231).

25 "Broadband," Zain, accessed July 5, 2013, <http://www.jo.zain.com/english/consumer/broadband/Pages/default.aspx>.

26 "GNI per capita, Atlas method (current US\$)" World Bank Databank, 2009-2013, accessed September 15, 2014, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNPCCAPCD>.

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

28 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).

Telecommunications Law and defined as a “financially and administratively independent juridical personality.”<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> The TRC’s Board of Commissioners and its chairman, currently Mohammad al-Taani,<sup>31</sup> are appointed by a resolution from the Council of Ministers based on a nomination from the prime minister.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, the TRC is generally seen as independent and fair in its decision making, though it does coordinate policy with the government.

## Limits on Content

This year marked an important shift in how Jordanian authorities limit online content. In June 2013, 291 news websites were blocked in the country for failing to comply with the recently amended Press and Publication Law (PPL).<sup>33</sup> The law establishes limits on what websites can provide news content and reinforces economic obstacles to freedom of the press. The Jordanian government claimed that the amendments were introduced “to regulate the work of news websites and in order to increase transparency and accountability.” Officials have stated that the law was called for by professionals within the industry, in order to preserve professionalism and protect the media from those “who have practiced embezzlement, defamation and blackmailing to a degree that threatened social peace.”<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, local journalists, international human rights groups,<sup>35</sup> and a former Jordanian minister of media affairs and communication criticized the decision as a serious affront to freedom of the press,<sup>36</sup> and a decisive move to censor the internet in Jordan.<sup>37</sup>

The move to block almost 300 news sites came after the expiration of a nine-month grace period for news sites to comply with the amended PPL, passed in September 2012. The PPL places restrictions on online news editors and requires news websites to register with the government or face blocking. According to Article 49(A), any electronic publication which publishes domestic or international news, press releases, or comments is required to register with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and acquire a license from the Ministry of Culture’s Department of Press and Publications (DPP).<sup>38</sup> In

29 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).

30 “Jordan ICT Sector Profile,” Information & Communications Technology Association – Jordan, Slide 10, accessed July 5, 2013, [http://intaj.net/sites/default/files/jordan\\_ict\\_sector\\_profile.pdf](http://intaj.net/sites/default/files/jordan_ict_sector_profile.pdf).

31 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).

32 Telecommunication Regulatory Commission Jordan. Telecommunication Law No. (13) of 1995, p. 18, accessed June 26, 2013. <http://www.trc.gov.jo/images/stories/pdf/telecommunication%20law.pdf?lang=english>.

33 Human Rights Watch, “Jordan: Rescind order to block Websites, Regulation of Online Expression Undermines Reform Pledges”. Accessed January 6, 2014. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/04/jordan-rescind-order-block-websites>.

34 UN Human Rights Council, “Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Jordan.” January 6, 2013, [www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Documents/A-HRC-25-9\\_en.doc](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Documents/A-HRC-25-9_en.doc).

35 Article 19, “Jordan: Websites Blocking Order Must be Revoked Immediately,” June 6, 2013, accessed February 3, 2014. <http://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/3791/en/jordan:-website-blocking-order-must-be-revoked-immediately#sthash.t6aCWaaM.dpuf>.

36 Amman Net “Udwan: Blocking the Websites is against the Democratic Empowerment,” Jordan News Agency, June 3, 2013, accessed February, 3 2014. <http://bit.ly/1xXFNhe>.

37 Reporters Without Borders, “International free expression groups call for an end to Internet censorship in Jordan.” October 8, 2013, Accessed February 3, 2014. [http://en.rsf.org/jordan-international-free-expression-08-10-2013\\_45296.html](http://en.rsf.org/jordan-international-free-expression-08-10-2013_45296.html).

38 Law number (32) 2012. Amendments to The Press and Publications law for the Year 1998 (8).

April 2014, the Director of the DPP, Fayez Shawabkeh, stated that a total of 156 websites have since become unblocked after obtaining a license.<sup>39</sup>

For many observers, the law's broad definition of a news website includes almost all Jordanian and international websites, blogs, portals, and social networks. According 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, 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."<sup>40</sup> Articles 48 and 49 enable the Director of the DPP to block any website for failing to obtain a license or, more broadly, for violating Jordanian law. In addition to facing blocking, unlicensed websites also face a potential fine of JOD 1,000–5,000 (\$1,500–7,500) according to Article 48(B). The blocking occurs through a direct request from the director of the DPP to the TRC, with the TRC chairman then sending a decree to ISPs to implement the blocking. The law also requires that editors-in-chief of online outlets must have been prior members of the Jordan Press Association for a period of at least four years. The Director of the DPP estimated that Jordan contains some 400 news websites.<sup>41</sup>

The move was met with consternation, particularly as Jordan does not have a history of extensive web filtering. For a number of years, the only blocked website was the U.S.-based Arab Times, which often takes a critical tone toward Arab regimes.<sup>42</sup> In the past, however, authorities had failed in their attempts to impose greater restrictions on content. In 2008, authorities blocked access to about 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>43</sup> Marouf al-Bakhit, the prime minister at the time, reversed this policy in 2011.

As recent as July 2012, some groups have staged small protests and even launched a Facebook campaign to push the MoICT to block pornography sites.<sup>44</sup> Internet freedom activists have been highly critical of any potential move, citing the potential for widespread censorship due to overblocking.<sup>45</sup> According to one official, authorities may instead insist that ISPs offer a voluntary service to block these sites for subscribers.<sup>46</sup> So far, there is no evidence that the ISPs are voluntarily

39 Skeyes, "Shawabkeh to Skeyes: DPP Continues to receive Licensing Requests for Online News Websites," April 11, 2014, <http://www.skeyesmedia.org/ar/News/Jordan/4359>.

40 Jordanian Media Monitor, "Amended Press & Publications Law No. 32 in 2012," August 2013, <http://bit.ly/1zqh8ig>.

41 BBC Arabic, "The Blocking of 290 websites in Jordan," June 2013, Accessed June 26, 2013. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2013/06/130603\\_jordan\\_electronic\\_sites\\_closed.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2013/06/130603_jordan_electronic_sites_closed.shtml). AlBawaba, "Jordan: Lifting up the Block only on a few websites," June 5, 2013, accessed June 26, 2013.

42 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>.

43 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>.

44 "Protest calls on Gov't to block Porno sites," Ammon News, July 16, 2012, [http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articulo=17418#\\_UdsThPm1EwA](http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articulo=17418#_UdsThPm1EwA).

45 "Internet freedom activists slam ministry's call to block porn sites," Ammon News, August 1, 2012, [http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articulo=17418#\\_UdsThPm1EwA](http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articulo=17418#_UdsThPm1EwA).

46 Majed Al Dabbas, "Govt will not block porn sites," Ammon News, April 27, 2013, [http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articulo=20775#\\_UdsS7Pm1EwA](http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articulo=20775#_UdsS7Pm1EwA).

blocking websites. However, the Jordanian government proposed a new Communication Law this year that would require the TRC to issue a set of instructions that force the companies licensing and operating public information to prevent access to pornographic websites and content.<sup>47</sup> The ICT minister, Dr. Azzam Slait, reportedly withdrew the proposed law, sending it back for further consideration and possible amendments in mid-2014.<sup>48</sup> The law was published on the Legislation and Opinion Bureau's website to solicit feedback from the public.<sup>49</sup>

In a more subtle censorship dynamic, website owners have occasionally acted to remove, or refrain from publishing, online content after receiving informal complaints from government officials, members of the security services, party leaders, lawmakers, journalists, and even ordinary users. Websites that refuse such requests have faced reprisals. The military court reportedly asked owners and editors-in-chief of all Jordanian news websites to refrain from publishing any news or information on issues related to the Jordanian military and its personnel, except after a "direct and clear request to the authorized military sources."<sup>50</sup> The request was delivered through a letter sent to the DPP. In contrast, there were no reports that print and audiovisual media received any requests, most likely since they are known to be monitored by the authorities and their employees do not dare to publish any unauthorized news about the military.

The director of the DPP issued another brief to online media outlets, telling them to refrain from publishing further news regarding a doctor who was reportedly infected with malaria while in one of Jordan's Dead Sea resorts, and died. The order came in response to a request by businesses in the resort area.<sup>51</sup>

In another incident from 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-Tafila.<sup>52</sup> In other cases, news websites that tackle sensitive issues must deal with waves of angry comments from conservative readers.

Intermediaries face increasing liability for content posted to their sites. The 2012 amendments of the PPL place 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.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, websites must keep a record of all comments for six months after initial publication and refrain from publishing any "untruthful" or

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47 Middle East & North Africa Financial Network (April, 7, 2014) Jordan: The new Amendment for the Communication Law Bans Access to Pornographic content, <http://bit.ly/1xSjJDn>.

48 Mbaideen, Ibrahim "Slait: The Government is Reconsidering the New Communication Law," (June 24, 2014) <http://bit.ly/11SyOiy>.

49 Mbaideen, Ibrahim "The Proposed Telecommunication Law Prohibits Access to Pornographic Websites," April, 7, 2014, <http://bit.ly/1vjlp6E>.

50 Arabi 21, "Jordan Bans Electronic media from Publishing Military News," April 1, 2014, <http://arabi21.com/Story/738851>.

51 Jarasa News (2014, April 10) The Shawabkeh Brief. <http://www.gerasanews.com/index.php?page=article&id=142982>

52 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/).

53 Law number (32) 2012. Amendments to The Press and Publications law for the Year 1998 (8).

“irrelevant” comments.<sup>54</sup> Journalists in Jordan stated that the new changes in the law are intended to increase self-censorship and instigate fear among journalists.<sup>55</sup>

Article 38 of the PPL prohibits specified material from being published, including any “contempt, slander, or defamation of or abuse of” a religions or prophets. The same article prohibits publishing any material defamatory or slanderous of individuals who are also protected by the same law against “rumors” and “anything that hinders their personal freedom”.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the amended PPL has forced many news sites to register with Chamber of Commerce and obtain a license from the Department of Press and Publications, thus opening themselves up to direct legal action by the government. Overall, 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 online speech. (See “Violations of User Rights” for a discussion on punitive laws and surveillance.)

Many bloggers and website owners 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. In a recent survey of journalists conducted by Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists in Jordan, 91 percent of Jordanian journalists admitted to practicing some form of self-censorship, with more than three-quarters indicating they avoid publishing any material critical of the military, the judicial system, tribal leaders, and religion.<sup>57</sup> Traditional journalists often start their own blogs in order to be free from editorial censorship. Since 2011, blogs have regained their importance as an avenue for debate on political and social issues. A growing number of blogs are also written in Arabic, a shift from several years ago when most were in English or bilingual.

The amended law also affects the financial viability of online news websites by prohibiting foreign investment in newspapers, a provision that could now apply to online news outlets as well. All licensed websites must pay to acquire a license to “legally” operate within the country and avoid being blocked. The Council of Ministers was assigned the task of regulating licensing and registration fees, but little information about the process has been made public.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, there are reports that the DPP Director, Fayez Shawabkeh, announced that the government will not require any licensing fee.<sup>59</sup> Observers believe this decision to be a tactic by the Jordanian government to release tension after the local and international outcry over the blocking in June 2013.

Meanwhile, in mid-2012, unconfirmed reports emerged of government agencies pressuring advertisers to avoid certain news websites in an effort to limit the sites’ income.<sup>60</sup> There have also been some initial reports of security or government officials offering encouragement—and possibly

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54 Law number (32) 2012. Amendments to The Press and Publications law for the Year 1998 (8).

55 Tarawnah, Naseem “Jordan Internet Goes Dark” Foreign Policy. August 31, 2012. [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/08/31/jordans\\_internet\\_goes\\_dark](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/08/31/jordans_internet_goes_dark). Accessed April 30, 2013. And Sweis, Rana “Jordan Limits Protests, and Internet as Tensions Simmer” New York Times. September 19, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/20/world/middleeast/jordan-limits-protests-and-internet-as-tensions-simmer.html?pagewanted=all&r=1&>. Accessed April 30, 2013.

56 Law number (32) 2012. Amendments to The Press and Publications law for the Year 1998 (8), Article 38, clauses A, B, C & D.

57 AlAraby AlJadeed, “DPP Brings Down Media Freedom in Jordan,” May 3, 2014, <http://www.alaraby.co.uk/miscellaneous/3bc2e102-3d53-47b9-8757-9e9ff61a791d>.

58 Law number (32) 2012. Amendments to The Press and Publications law for the Year 1998 (8), Article 50.

59 Interview with anonymous journalist, May, 2014.

60 “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>.

material support—to journalists to establish news websites favorable to the government that would compete with the increasingly influential, and often critical, existing online outlets.<sup>61</sup> Media analysts and online news editors have indicated that political candidates, for example, purchase advertising on news websites in a bid to avoid negative coverage. At the same time, the more popular news sites have benefitted from the high number of daily hits, presenting a strong alternative to advertising in traditional media.<sup>62</sup> A survey by the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists revealed that 76 percent of all journalists believe that online news websites are more prone to accepting gifts and even cash in return for favorable news reports.<sup>63</sup>

Overall, the country's hundreds of news websites are an increasingly important source of information and analysis for many Jordanians. Many feel that online sources discuss a wide range of topics typically avoided by traditional media outlets. 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>64</sup> Nine news websites—*Sarayanews*, *Alwakeelnews*, *Ammonnews*, *Gerasanews*, *Garaanews*, *Panet*, *Tasweernews*, *Royanews*, and *Jfranews*—were among the top 25 most visited websites in the country in mid-2014.<sup>65</sup> The general perception is that online journalists tend to focus more on opinion pieces and pushing social or cultural boundaries than their counterparts in traditional media.

There is no evidence that English language websites, like the *Jordan Times*, are subject to similar pressure from the government or other state departments. While the *Jordan Times* is owned by the Jordan Press Foundation, a public company listed on the Amman Stock Exchange, the Jordanian government is one of its main shareholders.

Social media applications such as Facebook, the micro-blogging service Twitter, and the video-sharing site YouTube are very popular, particularly among younger Jordanians. There are over two million Facebook users in Jordan, representing over one-third of the country's population,<sup>66</sup> with a penetration rate of 47.9 percent of the population as of May 2014, of whom 59 percent are male.<sup>67</sup> Twitter has garnered a much smaller following of around 161,000 users, or around 2.4 percent of the population.<sup>68</sup> Several local social media tools, such as the Jordanian microblogging site WatWet, have shut down because they failed to compete.<sup>69</sup> State officials, including the Royal Hashemite

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61 "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>.

62 "Mapping Digital Media: Jordan," p. 48.

63 Haremna, "2013 is the Worst Year in the History of the Jordnain Press," Haremna.net, May 3, 2014, <http://bit.ly/1xXGy9U>.

64 "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).

65 "Top Sites in Jordan," Alexa, accessed September 16, 2014, <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/JO>.

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

67 Dubai School of Government (2013) Arab Social Media report 6<sup>th</sup> Edition ( June 2014) , <http://www.mbrsg.ae/getattachment/e9ea2ac8-13dd-4cd7-9104-b8f1f405cab3/Citizen-Engagement-and-Public-Services-in-the-Arab.aspx>.

68 Dubai School of Government (2013) Arab Social Media report 6<sup>th</sup> Edition ( June 2014) , <http://www.mbrsg.ae/getattachment/e9ea2ac8-13dd-4cd7-9104-b8f1f405cab3/Citizen-Engagement-and-Public-Services-in-the-Arab.aspx>.

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

Court,<sup>70</sup> the Queen, the Crown Prince,<sup>71</sup> and Prince Hassan,<sup>72</sup> have established social media accounts to communicate with the public. Queen Rania is by far the most popular of these accounts, with over 3 million followers on Twitter and over 200,000 on Instagram.<sup>73</sup> She was, in fact, referred to by Forbes Middle East magazine as “The Queen of Social Media”.<sup>74</sup> Among government officials, Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh has around 50,000 Twitter followers, while an unverified account related to Prime Minister Abdulla Ensour has 5,000 followers.<sup>75</sup>

These online tools, in addition to news websites, have played an important role in mobilizing public protests to oppose restrictions on free expression, to call for broader political reforms, and to protest government policies. Over 500 websites went offline on August 29, 2012 in a coordinated protest against the changes in the PPL.<sup>76</sup> The home pages of these sites displayed a black screen with text reading, “You may be deprived of the content of this site under the amendments of the Jordanian Press and Publications Law and the governmental internet censorship.” However, social media activity and numerous protests failed to halt the bill from being passed in September 2012.

On the other hand, social media platforms were also utilized to mobilize for further restrictions on access to internet content by users. For instance, a Facebook campaign to press the government to block pornographic websites in the country garnered more than 37,800 likes as of May 2014.<sup>77</sup> The government responded in 2013 by introducing a new telecommunications law that, if passed, would prohibit ISPs from allowing users to access pornographic websites under article 61.<sup>78</sup>

While public demonstrations were less visible this year, in March 2014 social media helped organize demonstrations to protest the killing of the Jordanian judge Raed Zwitter by the Israeli military on the border between Jordan and the West Bank.<sup>79</sup> A Facebook page was created in his memory with more than 10,000 likes.<sup>80</sup>

## Violations of User Rights

A host of repressive laws and severe punishments create an environment of fear in Jordan, where

70 <http://instagram.com/rhcjo>

71 <http://instagram.com/alhusseinbinabdullahii>

72 <https://twitter.com/majliselhassan>

73 Twitter: <https://twitter.com/QueenRania>, Instagram: <http://instagram.com/queerania>.

74 Abderrahim Etouil, “Queen of Social Media,” Forbes Middle East, July 1, 2011, <http://www.forbesmiddleeast.com/read.php?story=280>.

75 See <https://twitter.com/DrEnsour>.

76 Ruth Michaelson, “Jordan blocks over 200 ‘unlicensed’ websites,” Index on Censorship, June 3, 2013, <http://www.indexoncensorship.org/2013/06/jordan-blocks-over-200-unlicensed-websites/>.

77 See Facebook.com. May 12, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AF-%D8%B2%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%B1/293893970763114?id=293893970763114&sk=info>.

78 “Government will block pornographic content from the internet in early 2014,” [Arabic] February 23, 2013, Al Arab Al Yawm, [http://alarabalyawm.net/?post\\_type=post&p=44546](http://alarabalyawm.net/?post_type=post&p=44546).

79 Sas Post, “Fifty Passengers and a few Cameras Refute Israel’s Lie about the Martyrdom of Judge Zwitter,” <http://www.sasapost.com/killing-zwitter/>.

80 See Facebook.com. May 12, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AF-%D8%B2%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%B1/293893970763114?id=293893970763114&sk=info>.

journalists, political activists, and ordinary users face arrest and possible prosecution if they overstep the boundaries of acceptable speech. While extralegal attacks and physical harassment of users has decreased over the past year, three citizens faced charges before the military-dominated State Security Court for their online activities over the coverage period. Strict penalties for criminal defamation against public authorities, both foreign and domestic, remain a prominent concern. At the same time, the passing of a new anti-terrorism law, as well as proposals for a new communications law, present another grave threat to internet freedom.

In October 2011, responding to public discontent, constitutional amendments were introduced to strengthen checks and balances and ensure greater protections for human rights.<sup>81</sup> The measures resulted in the 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 to crimes of treason, espionage, and terrorism (Article 110).<sup>82</sup> The Constitutional Court's nine members were named by King Abdullah II in October 2012.<sup>83</sup> Several constitutional 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 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).<sup>84</sup>

Despite constitutional protections, several laws that hinder freedom of expression and access to information remain on the books. 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. Despite the passage of an Access to Information Law in 2007, a number of restrictions remain on requesting sensitive social and religious content.<sup>85</sup> In September 2011, the lower house of parliament passed an amendment to the Anti-Corruption Law which would have penalized the publication or dissemination of allegations of corruption without proof with fines ranging from JOD 30,000 to JOD 60,000 (US\$42,000 to US\$84,000).<sup>86</sup> However, in January 2012, the upper house of parliament rejected the controversial

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81 Law Library of Congress (2012, December 3) Jordan: Constitutional Law Court Newly Established in Jordan. Accessed June 26, 2013. [http://www.loc.gov/lawweb/servlet/lloc\\_news?disp3\\_l205403416\\_text](http://www.loc.gov/lawweb/servlet/lloc_news?disp3_l205403416_text)

82 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).

83 Daily Star, "Jordan's King Abdulla Sets up a Constitutional Court," October 7, 2012, Accessed June 26, 2013. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Oct-07/190450-jordans-king-abdullah-sets-up-constitutional-court.ashx#axzz2XGFGzWz>

84 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).

85 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.alarchief.com/reports/englishFiles/accessToInformation.pdf>.

86 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);

article following advocacy efforts by civil society groups and threats by the board of the Jordan Press Association to resign.<sup>87</sup>

Most recently, the amended Press and Publication Law bans the publishing of “material that is inconsistent with the principles of freedom, national obligation, human rights, and Arab-Islamic values.”<sup>88</sup> Journalists, website owners, and editors-in-chief face a fine of JOD 5,000 (US\$ 7,500) if found to violate Article 5 of the law. In addition, civil defamation suits against private individuals can result in fines of between JOD 500 to 1,000 (US\$ 700 to 1,400).<sup>89</sup>

In early 2014, a law was passed to limit the powers of the quasi-military State Security Court, before which citizens and journalists could be tried for crimes related to freedom of expression. The law, proposed in September 2013 in response to international criticism, limited the court’s jurisdiction to only five areas: terrorism, espionage, drug felonies, treason, and currency counterfeiting.<sup>90</sup> At the time, the changes were seen cosmetic at best, with Human Rights Watch stating that Jordan needs to “overhaul its outdated penal code and stop dragging civilians in front of the State Security Court just for demonstrating for reform.”<sup>91</sup> Most worryingly, amendments to the anti-terrorism law passed in mid-2014 essentially reverse many of the advances made in the law by expanding the definition of “terrorism” to include offenses that do not directly relate to the causing of physical damage or violent attacks.<sup>92</sup>

The amendments to the 2006 anti-terrorism law were sanctioned by the Senate on May 1,<sup>93</sup> and endorsed by King Abdullah II on June 1, 2014.<sup>94</sup> The amendments have been criticized for “broaden[ing] the definition of terrorism and threaten[ing] freedom of expression”<sup>95</sup> while increasing the scale of punishments. In addition to more legitimate offenses 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,”<sup>96</sup> an offense that had already been listed in the penal code. The new law also covers any “use of an information system or information network or any other publication or media outlet or website to facilitate terrorist acts, to support a group, organization, or

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87 “Jordan journalists protest anti-corruption bill,” Khaleej Times, September 28, 2011, [http://www.khaleejtimes.com/darticlen.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2011/September/middleeast\\_September568.xml&section=middleeast](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/darticlen.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>.

88 Law number (32) 2012. Amendments to The Press and Publications law for the Year 1998 (8).

89 Law number (32) 2012. Amendments to The Press and Publications law for the Year 1998 (8), Article 46 (E)

90 Human Rights Watch, “Jordan: End Trials of Persecutors Undermining Regime, proposed security court law would preserve the status quo,” October 29, 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/10/29/jordan-end-trials-protesters-undermining-regime>.

91 Human Rights Watch, “Jordan: End Trials of Persecutors Undermining Regime, proposed security court law would preserve the status quo,” October 29, 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/10/29/jordan-end-trials-protesters-undermining-regime>.

92 Human Rights Watch “Jordan: Terrorism Amendments Threaten Rights: Greatly Expanded Categories of Terrorism Acts,” May, 18, 2014. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/05/17/jordan-terrorism-amendments-threaten-rights>.

93 All Of Jo. “The Senate Approves of “Journalists”, “Water”, “Anti-Terrorism” and “Military Court” Laws,” May 1, 2014. <http://www.allofjo.net/index.php?page=article&id=68585>.

94 GerasaNews “Royal Endorsement of Anti-Terrorism Law,” June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014. <http://www.gerasanews.com/index.php?page=article&id=146993>.

95 Human Rights Watch “Jordan: Terrorism Amendments Threaten Rights: Greatly Expanded Categories of Terrorism Acts,” May, 18, 2014. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/05/17/jordan-terrorism-amendments-threaten-rights>.

96 Article 3, (B) Anti-Terrorism law –No 18 2014. <http://bit.ly/1trDOKp>.

society” which commits, promotes, or funds terrorist acts, or to subject “Jordanians or their property to danger of hostile acts or acts of revenge”.<sup>97</sup>

Political analysts understood the new amendments in the context of the security threats posed by the proximity with Syria and the tensions growing in the region.<sup>98</sup> However, many critics view the bill as a tool for the government to crackdown on the opposition and impose further restrictions on media freedom.<sup>99</sup> Online media outlets will be even more hesitant to publish any news or opinions that could be construed as overly-critical of foreign leaders or diplomats, particularly of foreign countries. The Islamic Action Front, the political arm of Jordan’s Muslim Brotherhood and a prominent opposition group, asked for changes to the law to be made in early 2014.<sup>100</sup> The law comes at a time when neighboring countries, such as Egypt,<sup>101</sup> Saudi Arabia,<sup>102</sup> and the United Arab Emirates,<sup>103</sup> have outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization.

The 2010 cybercrime law proscribes penalties for hacking and online identity theft, though it also contains several provisions that could be easily used to suppress online expression. For example, the law prohibits posting any information concerning national security, foreign affairs, the national economy, and public safety that is not already available to the general public. Nevertheless, following protests by civil society, several more egregious provisions related to defamation and warrantless police searches were removed by royal decree in September 2010, one month after the law was passed.<sup>104</sup>

Defamation remains a criminal offense under the penal code. Amendments to the press law enacted in 2010 abolished prison sentences for libeling private citizens. However, the same bill increased fines and jail sentences for defaming government officials to up to JOD 10,000 (US\$14,000) and three to twelve months imprisonment.<sup>105</sup> On April 25, 2013, Mohammad Asha al-Dawaymeh, a parliamentarian from the Islamist Centrist Party, filed a suit against the website Ammon News for publishing news about a visit to Israel he made earlier this year.<sup>106</sup> He was later expelled from his political party over the visit, during which he reportedly attended a reception with Israeli President

97 “King urged to repeal draconian changes to anti-terrorism law,” Reporters Without Borders, June 16, 2014, <http://en.rsf.org/jordan-king-urged-to-repeal-draconian-16-06-2014.46423.html>.

98 Nahar Net, “Jordan Amends Anti-Terror Law to Face Syria Fallout.” April 25, 2014, <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/127845>.

99 Areej Abuqudairi, “Jordan Anti-Terrorism Law Sparks Concern,” AlJazeera. April 25, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/04/jordan-anti-terrorism-law-sparks-concern-201442510452221775.html>.

100 Mousa Kraeen, “The Legal committee in in the Islamic Action Front Requests Certain Amendments to the proposed Anti-Terrorism Law,” AsSabeel. March 23, 2014, <http://bit.ly/1y91uIG>.

101 Shadia Nasralla, “Egypt designates Muslim Brotherhood as terrorist group,” Reuters, December 25, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/25/us-egypt-explosion-brotherhood-idUSBRE9BO08H20131225>.

102 Alaa Shahine and Glen Carey, “UAE Supports Saudi Arabia Against Qatar-Backed Brotherhood,” Bloomberg, March 9, 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-03-09/u-a-e-supports-saudi-arabia-against-qatar-backed-brotherhood.html?cmpid=yhoo>.

103 “UAE jails 30 over ‘Muslim Brotherhood ties;’” BBC News, January 21, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25824395>.

104 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).

105 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).

106 Sarah News, “After his secret was revealed by Ammon News AlAsha goes to defame the website,” April 26, 2013, accessed June 26, 2013 <http://www.sarahanews.com/?p=33472>

Shimon Peres to celebrate Israel's Independence Day.<sup>107</sup> While a hearing was held in January 2014, there have not yet been any reports of a verdict in the defamation case.<sup>108</sup>

For the most part, Jordanian authorities have not made use of these laws to sentence domestic political opponents to lengthy prison terms, though some online commentators have faced legal harassment.<sup>109</sup> In September 17, 2013, the publisher of a Jordanian news outlet, *Jafra*, and its editor-in-chief were arrested under the penal code for publishing a third-party YouTube video that was thought to be offensive to Crown Prince Jassim Bin Hamad AlThani of Qatar. Amjad Mu'ala and Nidhal Fara'neh were investigated and detained.<sup>110</sup> The journalists were "charged with carrying out acts that the government does not approve and that would expose Jordan and its citizens to the risk of acts of aggression," a court official reportedly said. The two were to be tried in front of a military court and faced two- to five-year prison terms.<sup>111</sup> The military court repeatedly rejected requests to free the two journalists on bail,<sup>112</sup> despite numerous calls from human rights organizations.<sup>113</sup> Two sit-ins were organized by the Jordanian Press Association (JPA) in solidarity with the journalists and requesting their release on December 24-25, 2013, with the JPA Council threatening to resign two days later.<sup>114</sup> On December 31, an appeals court ruled to release the two individuals on bail for JOD 3,000 (US\$ 4,000) and the case was transferred to the Amman Court of First Instance, a civilian court.<sup>115</sup>

This was not the only case of online journalism professionals being charged over the coverage period. Hashem Khalidi, publisher of the *Saraya News* website, was accused of lacking attention to accuracy, publishing false news, and publishing materials offensive to individuals.<sup>116</sup> Two lawsuits were filed against the publisher on November 4, 2013, by a former minister of education and a former member of parliament.

In October 2013, Ayman al-Bahrawi was accused of "lengthening the tongue" and "insulting" foreign heads of state in private messages found on the Whatsapp messaging application on his mobile phone.<sup>117</sup> His lawyer reported in *AsSabeel*, a Jordanian daily newspaper, that al-Bahrawi faced these charges before the State Security Court. According to his lawyer, al-Bahrawi's was also accused of a

107 "Jordanian MP expelled for Israel visit," UPI, April 22, 2013, [http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/World-News/2013/04/22/Jordanian-MP-expelled-for-Israel-visit/UPI-45941366623316/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2013/04/22/Jordanian-MP-expelled-for-Israel-visit/UPI-45941366623316/).

108 Kermalkom. "MP Mohammad Dayamah Testifies in the "Israel's Visit" Court Case," January 21, 2014. <http://bit.ly/1zV2u3v>.

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

110 France 24 "Jordanian authorities arrest two journalists after publishing a Youtube Video that was seen as a sexual scandal for a Qatari Emir," September 18, 2013, <http://f24.my/1ycbfqA>.

111 Al-Akhbar "Jordan jails journalists for posting video that offends Qatari royal," September 18, 2013, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/17057>.

112 AlDabbas, Majed, "Military Court Rejects 4 bail requests to release two journalists, Ammon News. October 20, 2013, [http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articleno=23331#.UvXN\\_CKks\\_8](http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articleno=23331#.UvXN_CKks_8).

113 The Daily Star, "HRW Urges Jordan to Free Journalists held over Qatar Video," September 22, 2013, <http://www.4.hathalyoum.net/showsit.php?action=sit&cd=6&sid=308529>.

114 Rai AlYoum, "JPA Council Threatens to Resign in a Protest to the Arrest of Two Colleagues," December 27, 2013, <http://www.raialyoum.com/?p=35636>.

115 Human Rights Watch, "Jordan: Deliver on Promises to Respect Freedom of Expression. Arrests, Security Trials for Peaceful Criticism." January 28, 2014 <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/28/jordan-deliver-promises-respect-free-expression>.

116 Skeyes, "Amman's Attorney General Directs Three Accusations to Saraya News Published Hashem Khalidi." November 8, 2013, <http://www.skeyesmedia.org/ar/News/Jordan/3894>.

117 AlBawabah, "Jordan: the Trial of four activists for using the Rabiya logo and messages on WhatsApp," October 1, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1xSjXug>. Jarasa News, March 18, 2014, <http://www.gerasanews.com/index.php?page=article&id=140315>.

second charge of committing actions that can disturb relations with Arab countries.<sup>118</sup> News reports also mentioned a separate charge of “lengthening the tongue” for messages that criticized the king.<sup>119</sup> One of the news sources stated the message to be “It turned out that El-Sisi is worst than Bashar [reference to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad]. Damn them both”.<sup>120</sup> Al-Bahrawi’s lawyer had asked for Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh and the Egyptian Ambassador to Jordan to testify whether the relation between the two countries (Egypt and Jordan) was negatively affected by the messages.<sup>121</sup> The request was rejected by the military court in March. Al-Bahrawi and his associates were finally released on bail on December 25, 2013, one day after they announced their intentions to commence a hunger strike. They were released for US\$ 1,500 each and a hearing was scheduled for later in 2014.<sup>122</sup> Importantly, the accusations faced by al-Bahrawi, Mu’ala and Fara’neh have now been incorporated into the new anti-terrorism law, passed in April 2014.

The al-Bahrawi trial is indicative of state surveillance of private communications, since the content for which he was tried was communicated to a group from his mobile phone. In general, Jordanians are careful when talking on mobile phones or at public meetings. This attitude has passed naturally to the internet, where it is believed that security services closely monitor online comments, cataloging them by date, internet-protocol (IP) address, and location. 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.”<sup>123</sup>

Cybercafes, where users might otherwise write with relative anonymity, have been subjected to a growing set of regulations in recent years. Since mid-2010, operators 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.<sup>124</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 in part to the restrictions, as well as increased access to personal internet connections.

Over the past year, incidents of physical harassment and cyberattacks against bloggers and staff of online news websites have decreased in severity. Jordanian policemen targeted journalists with teargas during protests in Amman in November 2012.<sup>125</sup> Unknown perpetrators raided the offices of

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118 Human Rights Watch, “Jordan: End Trials of Protestors for “Undermining Regime”, Proposed Security Court Reform would Preserve Status Quo,” October 29, 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/10/29/jordan-end-trials-protesters-undermining-regime>.

119 Rumman, Raed, “State Security Court” Attends to Witnesses’ Testimonies on “Rabea”, “ALHeasah” and “AlBalawi” April 2, 2014, <http://bit.ly/1ySsDPA>.

120 Amman, “Jordan: Cynical Remarks after the trial of an activist for Lengthening the Tongue,” October 1, 2013, <http://amman1.net/jonews/herak-heart/50048.html>.

121 Jarasa News, March 18, 2014, <http://www.gerasanews.com/index.php?page=article&id=140315>.

122 AlWakeel AlEkhabari, “State Security Decides to Release Rabea’s Detainees,” December 25, 2013, <http://www.alwakeelnews.com/print.php?id=81050>.

123 Eye on Media, “Declining Freedom, Restrictions on the Internet and a Financial Crisis,” December 25, 2013, <http://www.eyeonmediajo.net/?p=7676>.

124 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>.

125 Talhouk (2012).

the online news site *Watan* on July 17, 2012, stealing documents and damaging equipment.<sup>126</sup> The webpage of the news sites *Khaberni* and *Al Ain* were hacked in March and October 2012 respectively, while the site of the Jordanian rap group Ahat was also hacked on September 15, 2012.<sup>127</sup> 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, 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.<sup>128</sup>

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126 "Report: increasing attacks on journalists in Jordan, mostly from the security," [translated] Satel News, July 8, 2012, see <http://bit.ly/15WAUGB>.

127 "Press and Cultural Freedom in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine – Annual Report 2012," SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, 2013, <http://foundationforfuture.org/en/Portals/0/Grantees%20Publications/SKeyes%202012%20Annual%20Report%20EN.pdf>.

128 "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>.