JORDAN

	2012	2013
INTERNET FREEDOM STATUS	PARTLY FREE	PARTLY FREE
Obstacles to Access (0-25)	13	13
Limits on Content (0-35)	12	13
Violations of User Rights (0-40)	20	20
Total (0-100)	**45**	**46**

* 0=most free, 100=least free

POPULATION: 6.3 million
INTERNET PENETRATION 2012: 41 percent
SOCIAL MEDIA/ICT APPS BLOCKED: No
POLITICAL/SOCIAL CONTENT BLOCKED: No
BLOGGERS/ICT USERS ARRESTED: No
PRESS FREEDOM 2013 STATUS: Not Free

KEY DEVELOPMENTS: MAY 2012 – APRIL 2013

- Amendments to the Press and Publications Law were passed in September 2012, requiring news websites to obtain licenses in order to continue to operate in the country (see **LIMITS ON CONTENT**).

- Online editors and site owners are now officially liable for comments posted by other users on their platforms, increasing the need for pre-censorship (see **LIMITS ON CONTENT**).

- The offices of the online media company Watan were ransacked in July 2012 and several news websites were the victims of cyberattacks over the past year (see **VIOLATIONS OF USER RIGHTS**).

EDITOR'S NOTE ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

This report covers events between May 1, 2012 and April 30, 2013. On June 2, 2013, the Telecommunication Regulatory Commission instructed internet service providers to block over 200 websites. The sites had failed to obtain a license from the Department of Press and Publications after the expiration of a nine-month grace period granted by authorities. These actions have their foundations in amendments to the Press and Publications Law passed in September 2012. The law imposes disproportionately-heavy burdens on intermediaries and unnecessary obstacles to registration. The editors-in-chief of all news websites must be members of the Jordan Press Association for a prior period of at least four years. On July 2, authorities revealed that 254 news sites had been blocked, while 111 have been licensed. Previously, only one news website was known to be blocked in Jordan. The recent moves signal a drastic shift in the country's attitude towards online censorship and mounting fears over the power of the internet in the face of increasing discontent in the traditionally stable kingdom.

INTRODUCTION

Jordan, a small kingdom of about six million people, has prided itself as being an example of stability and incremental political reform. The Jordanian government's response to relatively low-level public protests in 2011 was mild compared to neighboring countries and other monarchies in the Gulf. Working with parliament, the king passed a set of constitutional amendments to improve protections on freedom of expression and strengthen the independence of the judiciary. Protests returned, however, in November 2012, when thousands of protestors took to the streets of Amman and other major cities to protest a rise in fuel prices.[1] Hundreds of protesters were arrested by security forces in the ensuing chaos. Parliamentary elections in January 2013 resulted in limited political developments, with supporters of the king maintaining a strong majority in the lower house of parliament (members of the upper house are appointed by the king himself).[2] The elections do not seem to have quelled repeated calls for greater political reform and were boycotted by opposition parties including the Islamic Action Front, the political arm of Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood.[3]

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 communication technology (ICT) sector.[4] Recognizing the economic potential of the internet,

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

[2] Tucker, Joshua(2013, January 25) 2013 Jordan Post-Elections Report: And the winner is …the King. Accessed June 27,2013. http://themonkeycage.org/2013/01/25/2013-jordan-post-election-report-and-the-winner-isthe-king/

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

[4] 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).

authorities actively promoted ICT development in the kingdom.[5] 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.

In this regard, restrictions on internet freedom have increased since the regional uprisings of 2011. News websites, a vital source of information in a country where traditional media freedom is limited, often face pressure from state actors to delete politically-sensitive articles. In August 2012, around 1,000 websites temporarily went offline to protest proposed amendments to the 1998 Press & Publications Law.[6] The amendments impose a variety of burdensome requirements to operate online news portals, limiting freedom of expression and placing heavy liabilities on intermediaries. Despite the opposition campaign, the new amendments were passed on September 19, 2012.[7] While censorship is due to increase, prosecutions and extralegal attacks on users appears to have declined in severity over the past year. Nonetheless, during the coverage period, the offices of an online media company were raided and several news sites suffered cyberattacks by unidentified perpetrators.

OBSTACLES TO ACCESS

According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a total of 41 percent of the Jordanian population accessed the internet in 2012.[8] National figures from the TRC estimated the number of users to be much higher in the first quarter of 2013, at 69 percent, or 4.45 million users.[9] Given the large number of people accessing the internet at cybercafes and offices, most users have access to broadband rather than dial-up connections.[10] Furthermore, most internet users are young people ranging from ages 15 to 24.[11]

Mobile phone use has also expanded rapidly and by the end of 2012, the number of subscriptions was over 9 million, representing a penetration rate of 139.1 percent.[12] 3G services were first launched by Zain and Jordan Telecom (Orange) in mid-2010 and increased in 2012 upon implementation of a tax exemption for the purchase of smartphones and the launch of mobile

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[5] 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.
[6] The blackout was called by a group of internet users called 7uryanet (freedom for the internet)
[7] http://www.lob.gov.jo/ui/laws/all_modified_law.jsp?no=32&year=2012&law_no=8&law_year=1998. Accessed April, 30, 2013.
[8] International Telecommunication Union (ITU), "Percentage of individuals using the Internet, fixed (wired) Internet subscriptions, fixed (wired)-broadband subscriptions," 2012, accessed July 5, 2013, http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx.
[9] Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Jordan's official website [in English], accessed June 26, 2013. http://www.trc.gov.jo/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2603&Itemid=1&lang=english.
[10] Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Jordan's official website.
[11] 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.
[12] International Telecommunication Union (ITU), "Fixed (wired)-broadband subscriptions," 2000-2012, accessed July 5, 2013, http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx.

broadband by another provider, Umniah.[13] A call from the TRC to introduce a fourth mobile operator in December 2012, however, was rejected by Zain and Jordan Telecom.[14] No new providers have been introduced since then and the three companies have a similar share of the market.[15]

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 3 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants.[16] On the other hand, mobile broadband use has soared to over 812,000 subscribers, or 73 percent of all internet subscriptions.[17]

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 ($18) for speeds of 128 Kbps and an allowance of 10 Gigabytes (GB), to JOD 65 ($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 ($7) to JOD 49 ($69) per month, depending on speeds and data allowances.[18] By comparison, gross national income per capita is $6,130, or only $511 per month.[19] Meanwhile, internet access in 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.[20] Citizens and businesses can obtain internet access through privately owned service providers without state approval or registration. As of November 2011, there were 16 active internet service providers (ISPs) in Jordan, though licenses have been granted to over 20 companies.[21] 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

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[13] 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.

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

[15] 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/.

[16] International Telecommunication Union (ITU), "Mobile-cellular telephone subscriptions," 2000-2012, accessed July 5, 2013, http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx.

[17] "Telecommunications Indicators (Q1-2013)," Telecommunications Regulatory Commission – Jordan, 2013, accessed July 5, 2013, http://www.trc.gov.jo/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2603&Itemid=1&lang=english.

[18] "Broadband," Zain, accessed July 5, 2013, http://www.jo.zain.com/english/consumer/broadband/Pages/default.aspx.

[19] "GNI per capita, PPP" World Bank Databank, 2008-2012, accessed July 5, 2013, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.PP.CD.

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

[21] 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.

connection to the international internet. All traffic 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 Telecommunications Law and defined as a "financially and administratively independent juridical personality."[22] Nonetheless, it is accountable to the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MoICT), which in turn was created in April 2002 to drive the country's ICT development.[23] The TRC's Board of Commissioners and its chairman, currently Mohammad al-Taani,[24] are appointed by a resolution from the Council of Ministers based on a nomination from the prime minister.[25] The government retains a degree of control over the country's internet backbone and traffic must flow through a government-controlled telecommunications hub. 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

Although the Jordanian government did not engage in extensive blocking of websites from May 2012 to April 2013, changes to the PPL have drastically altered the country's legal framework, opening the door to censorship of any website not in compliance with the law. Intermediaries face increasing liability for content posted to their sites and new restrictions laid the groundwork for the widespread blocking of internet news sites. On a positive note, Jordan witnessed several notable online campaigns over the past year, indicating users' growing interest in utilizing online tools for activism. YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and international blog-hosting services are freely available and very popular in the country. Crucially, however, social media activity and numerous protests over amendments to the press law failed to halt the bill from being passed in September 2012. Furthermore, a nine-month grace period in which websites must register with authorities was set to expire in June 2013.

The amended PPL places restrictions on online news editors and requires news websites to register with the government. 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 Department of Press and Publications (DPP).[26] For many observers, the law's broad definition of a news website could have included almost all Jordanian and international websites, blogs, portals, and social networks. Articles 48 and 49 enable the Director of the DPP to block any website for failing to obtain a

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[22] The Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Jordan, *Chapter III*, http://www.trc.gov.jo/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=20&lang=english.
[23] "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.
[24] 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.
[25] Telecommunication Regulatory Commission Jordan. Telecommunication Law No. (13) of 1995, p. 18, accessed June 26,2013. http://www.trc.gov.jo/images/stories/pdf/telecomunication%20law.pdf?lang=english.
[26] Law number (32) 2012. Amendments to The Press and Publications law for the Year 1998 (8).

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 law also requires that editors-in-chief of online outlets must have been prior members of the Jordan Press Association (JPA) for a period of at least four years. The Director of the DPP estimated that Jordan contains some 400 news websites.[27]

Jordan does not have a history of extensive web filtering and, 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.[28] In the past, however, authorities have attempted to introduce greater restrictions. 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.[29] Marouf al-Bakhit, the prime minister at the time, reversed this policy in 2011. More recently, rumors resurfaced that the MoICT was seeking to block access to pornographic sites. On numerous occasions, internet freedom activists have criticized reports that the ministry has instructed ISPs to block explicit content.[30] On the other hand, some groups have staged small protests and even launched a Facebook campaign to push the MoICT to block pornography sites, most recently in July 2012.[31] According to one official, authorities may instead insist that ISPs offer a voluntary service to block these sites for subscribers.[32]

In a more subtle censorship dynamic, website owners have occasionally acted to remove online content after receiving informal complaints from government officials, members of the security services, party leaders, lawmakers, journalists, and even ordinary users. Websites that have refused such requests have 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, in which they called 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.[33] In another incident from March 2012, the Jordanian Royal Court pressured the website of the *al-Arab al-Yawm* newspaper to delete an article

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[27] BBC Arabic (2013, June) The Blocking of 290 websites in Jordan. Accessed June 26, 2013.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2013/06/130603_jordan_electronic_sites_closed.shtml. AlBawaba.Com (2013, June 5) Jordan: Lifting up the Block only on a few websites. accessed June 26, 2013.
[28] 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.
[29] 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/; "Public Employees Wasting Time on the Internet," The Jordan Times, August 5, 2010, http://www.jordantimes.com/index.php?news=28938.
[30] "Internet freedom activists slam ministry's call to block porn sites," Ammon News, August 1, 2012, http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articleno=17418#.UdsThPm1EwA.
[31] "Protest calls on Gov't to block Porno sites," Ammon News, July 16, 2012, http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articleno=17418#.UdsThPm1EwA.
[32] Majed Al Dabbas, "Govt will not block porn sites," Ammon News, April 27, 2013, http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articleno=20775#.UdsS7Pm1EwA.
[33] "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.

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.[34] In other cases, news websites that tackle sensitive issues must deal with waves of angry comments from conservative readers.

The 2012 amendments of the PPL treat 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.[35] Moreover, websites must keep a record of all comments for six months after initial publication and refrain from publishing any "untruthful" or "irrelevant" comments.[36] Journalists in Jordan stated that the new changes in the law aim at increasing self-censorship and instigating fear among journalists.[37]

The amended law also affects the financial viability of online news websites. The amended PPL prohibits foreign investment in newspapers, a provision that could now apply to online news outlets as well. 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.[38] There have also been some initial reports of security or government officials offering encouragement—and possibly 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.[39]

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. Bloggers and news website owners often complain 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. 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.

Nonetheless, 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

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[34] 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/.
[35] Law number (32) 2012. Amendments to The Press and Publications law for the Year 1998 (8).
[36] Law number (32) 2012. Amendments to The Press and Publications law for the Year 1998 (8).
[37] Tarawnah, Naseem "Jordan Internet Goes Dark" Foreign Policy. August 31, 2012.
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.
[38] "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.
[39] "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.

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.[40] Seven news websites—*Jfranews, Garaanews, Sarayanews*, *Tasweernews, Alwakeelnews Sameerbook*, and *Khaberni*—were among the top 20 most visited websites in the country in mid-2013, up from only three news sites in March 2012.[41]

Web 2.0 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.[42] Twitter has garnered a much smaller following of around 60,000 users.[43] Several local social media tools, such as the Jordanian microblogging site WatWet, have shutdown in recent years over an inability to compete.[44] Several state officials, including Queen Rania and the Minister of Information, have established Facebook and Twitter accounts to communicate with the public.

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 to the changes in the PPL.[45] The home pages to 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."[46] Facebook played a particularly important role in 2012, when activists used it to mobilize against a rise in fuel prices in November of that year. The *Habbet Teshreen* ("November Demonstration") hashtag was trending for almost a week on Twitter. Demonstrations have continued throughout the year, with online media playing a central role in keeping the public informed of recent events. Social media has also been critical in documenting attacks against demonstrators by police, *darak* (special riot police known as "riders"), government loyalists, and other actors.

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[40] "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 (subscription required).
[41] "Top Sites in Jordan," Alexa Web Information Company, accessed July 8, 2013 and March 27, 2012, http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/JO.
[42] "Jordan Facebook Statistics," Social Bakers, accessed March 28, 2012, http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/jordan.
[43] Salem, Fadi., & Murtada, Racha (2012, July) Arab Social Media Report. Vol.2, No.1. Dubai School of Government. Dubai, UAE. Pp.10,12,15, Accessed June 26, 2013. http://www.dsg.ae/en/Publication/Pdf_En/826201211212209347849.pdf.
[44] "On Shutting Down WatWet," Tootcorp.com, July 2011, http://tootcorp.com/2011/07/on-shutting-down-watwet/ (site discontinued).
[45] 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/.
[46] 7oryanet.com "Ammendemnts to the Press and Publications Law," September 20, 2012. http://7oryanet.com/, accessed April 30, 2013.

VIOLATIONS OF USER RIGHTS

While the country appears on a trend toward greater restrictions of online content, prosecutions and extralegal attacks on web users have decreased in severity over the past year. Nonetheless, strict penalties for criminal defamation against public authorities remain a concern. Amendments to the press law, discussed in detail above, also restrict internet freedom through the mandatory registration of news websites and their staff.

In October 2011, responding to public discontent, constitutional amendments were introduced to strengthen checks and balances and ensure greater protections for human rights.[47] 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).[48] The Constitutional Court's nine members were named by King Abdullah II in October 2012.[49] Earlier that year, the king issued two royal decrees completing the necessary processes for the Constitutional Court and the Political Parties Laws to be enacted. [50] 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 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).[51]

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 socially- and religiously-sensitive content.[52] In September 2011, the lower house of parliament passed an amendment to the country's Anti-Corruption Law, which would have penalized the publication or dissemination of allegations of corruption without proof with fines ranging from

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[47]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

[48] 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.

[49] Daily Star (2012, October 7) Jordan's King Abdulla Sets up a Constitutional Court. Accessed June 26, 2013. http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Oct-07/190450-jordans-king-abdullah-sets-up-constitutional-court.ashx#axzz2XGFGrzWz

[50] King Abdulla II website (2013, June 6) Jordan Enacts New Political Parties, Constitutional Court Laws. accessed June 26, 2013. http://www.kingabdullah.jo/index.php/en_US/news/view/id/10139/videoDisplay/1.html.

[51] Constitution of Jordan, 1952, 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.

[52] 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.

JOD 30,000 to JOD 60,000 ($42,000 to $84,000).[53] However, in January 2012, the upper house of parliament rejected the controversial article following advocacy efforts by civil society groups and threats by the board of the Jordan Press Association to resign.[54]

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 new 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.[55]

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 ($14,000) and three to twelve months imprisonment.[56] 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.[57] He was later expelled from his political party over the visit, during which he reportedly attended a reception with Israeli President Shimon Peres to celebrate Israel's Independence Day.[58]

For the most part, Jordanian authorities have not made use of these laws to severely punish domestic political opponents, though some online commentators have faced legal harassment.[59] In the past, several online journalists were 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

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[53] 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;

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[57] Saraha News (2013, April 26) After heis secret was revealed by Ammon News AlAsha goes to defame the website. accessed June 26, 2013 http://www.sarahanews.com/?p=33472

[58] "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/.

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

prince.[60] He was released several days later. That same 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.[61] The charges against Fazzaa' were later dropped as part of a general amnesty.[62]

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. In a 2010 case that strengthened these suspicions, 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 posting "controversial religious opinions" in public online forums.[63] 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 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.[64] 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 continued, though they have decreased in severity since last year. Jordanian policemen targeted journalists with teargas during protests in Amman in November 2012.[65] Unknown perpetrators raided the offices of the online news site *Watan* on July 17, 2012, stealing documents and damaging equipment.[66] 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.[67]

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[60] 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/.

[61] AFP, "Jordan frees journalist held for 'undermining throne," Google News, http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gqpn0B98i6cWhwxx2TJvrRGILmFg?docId=CNG.7e8c9b730d578a188e3f19c677e0e598.131.

[62] 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/.

[63] 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/.

[64] 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/; "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.

[65] Talhouk (2012).

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

[67] "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.