



FREEDOM ON THE NET 2024

Jordan

PARTLY FREE

47
/100

A. <u>Obstacles to Access</u>	14 / ₂₅
B. <u>Limits on Content</u>	16 / ₃₅
C. <u>Violations of User Rights</u>	17 / ₄₀

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

47 /100 **Partly Free**

Scores are based on a scale of 0 (least free) to 100 (most free). See the research methodology and report acknowledgements.



Key Developments, June 1, 2023 – May 31, 2024

Internet freedom in Jordan remains restricted. Although communication platforms were not blocked during the school exams that took place this coverage period, the passage of the 2023 Cybercrime Law has further stifled freedom of expression online. Journalists, activists, and social media users continue to face prosecution, harassment, and surveillance for their online criticism of the government or commentary on sensitive topics.

- The 2023 Cybercrime Law, widely regarded as restricting internet freedom, was approved in August 2023. The law imposes harsh penalties for crimes like defamation and criminalizes vaguely defined online activities, such as spreading “fake news” and “immorality” (see C2).
- Under the Cybercrime Law, social media platforms are required to establish a physical office in Jordan to comply with administrative and judicial orders related to account deletion and user data acquisition. Authorities can ban advertisements or throttle bandwidth if companies do not comply (see B6).
- Dozens of individuals were investigated or arrested for their online content, mostly under the new Cybercrime Law. A majority of these arrests were in relation to protests against the Israel-Hamas war (see B8 and C3).
- Several journalists, activists, and human rights defenders were found to have been targeted by spyware (see C5).

Political Overview

Jordan is a monarchy in which the king plays a dominant role in politics and governance. The parliament’s lower house is elected, but the electoral system and limits on civil liberties put the opposition at a disadvantage; the chamber wields little power in practice. The media and civil society groups are hampered by restrictive laws and government pressure. The judicial system lacks independence and often fails to ensure due process.

A. Obstacles to Access

A1 0-6 pts

Do infrastructural limitations restrict access to the internet or the speed and quality of internet connections?

5/6

Jordan's internet infrastructure improved significantly after telecommunications providers launched 4G long term evolution (LTE) technology for mobile networks in 2015.

More than 90 percent of Jordan's population is now covered by 4G LTE infrastructure. **1** In September 2022, the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) signed agreements licensing Jordan's main mobile service providers—Orange, Umniah, and Zain—to deploy 5G services (see A4). **2** Each company has committed to providing 5G services to no less than 50 percent of the population and to increase the coverage by 5 percent annually, with the goal of reaching 75 percent of the population by 2026. **3** During the coverage period, all three operators had started offering 5G services to the public. **4**

The majority of Jordanians access the internet on their phones. There were 9.14 million mobile connections in early 2024, and the mobile penetration rate stood at 80.4 percent. **5** The number of fiber-optic subscriptions has also increased in recent years. **6** Internet penetration stood at 91 percent as of early 2024.

Investment in telecommunications infrastructure led to improved internet speeds being observed during the coverage period. As of May 2024, the median mobile download and upload speeds were 26.08 megabits per second (Mbps) and 15.93 Mbps, respectively. The median fixed-line broadband download and upload speeds were 147.40 Mbps and 120.96 Mbps, respectively. **7**

A2 0-3 pts

Is access to the internet prohibitively expensive or beyond the reach of certain segments of the population for geographical, social, or other reasons?

1/3

Internet access varies based on socioeconomic status, gender, and geography. The taxation of mobile internet service is considered a key barrier to access, particularly for low-income individuals. **8**

While the sales tax on internet service increased from 8 percent to 16 percent in 2017, prices for internet service have dropped in recent years due to increased competition. **9** The most inexpensive fiber-optic 200 Mbps plan with a major service provider costs 20 Jordanian dinars (\$28) per month, excluding the 16 percent sales tax. **10** Monthly mobile internet prices range from 8 dinars (\$11) for a 40 gigabyte (GB) plan to 16 dinars (\$23) for a 275 GB plan as of August 2022. **11** The average monthly salary in Jordan is around 543 dinars (\$766). **12** However, in late 2023, three telecommunications companies raised the prices of personal prepaid mobile line subscriptions, including internet bundles, leading to consumer pushback. **13** In response, the minister of industry, trade, and supply referred the companies to the attorney general for violating competition law, claiming the price increase was coordinated. **14**

According to a 2021 survey conducted by the Jordan Department of Statistics, 8.6 percent of households that did not have access to the internet cited “cost of service” as the main barrier. Another 6.2 percent cited “cost of equipment” as the reason for their lack of access. **15** The price of a fixed-line monthly broadband package is roughly 12 percent of monthly gross national income (GNI) per capita. **16**

According to 2018 data from the Pew Research Center, 87 percent of adults in Jordan go online, and smartphone usage is widespread. While a majority of adults aged 50 or older use smartphones, older Jordanian adults are far less likely to use them than their younger counterparts. According to the report, gender differences in internet use are “modest”; for example, 85 percent of men reported using at least one social media platform or messaging app, compared to 78 percent of women. The Economist Intelligence Unit’s 2022 Inclusive Internet Index found that men’s access to the internet slightly exceeds women’s, by 2.3 percent, although the gap has narrowed in recent years. **17**

Mobile service providers Zain **18** and Umniah **19** offer access to Facebook’s Free Basics initiative, which provides free access to a limited number of websites under a zero-rating plan known as Facebook Flex. **20**

Does the government exercise technical or legal control over internet infrastructure for the purposes of restricting connectivity?

4/6

Score Change: The score increased from 3 to 4 because there were no reports of internet shutdowns during protests or blocking of apps during student exams.

The government exercises some control over internet infrastructure. During the previous coverage period, authorities conducted internet shutdowns amid protests and continued their annual practice of disrupting access to messaging applications during high school exams. However, these tactics were not used during this coverage period.

While there were no reported internet shutdowns during protests against the Israel-Hamas war, some demonstrators experienced slowed connectivity. However, local experts shared that there was no technical evidence proving interference. **21**

Internet shutdowns are rare in Jordan, although they have occurred in the past. In December 2022, authorities restricted internet access in several cities in the south of the country during protests. The internet shutdowns occurred in Ma'an and Karak amid demonstrations by truck drivers, who were protesting an increase in fuel prices. **22** Internet users and digital rights groups reported daytime disruptions to internet services for at least 10 days. **23** Restrictions to mobile internet services were also reported. **24** In addition, users reported issues accessing TikTok during this period, and authorities announced a "temporary" ban on the platform (see B1). **25** In April 2021, following what the authorities referred to as a "coup attempt," internet and telecommunications services were cut off for at least two days in the Dabouq neighborhood of Amman. Some virtual private network (VPN) services were reportedly inaccessible during this time (see B1). **26**

Authorities have restricted bandwidth on communications platforms in recent years. Following a royal decree to restrict the communications of Prince Hamzah in May 2022, Facebook Live was reportedly inaccessible for two and a half hours.

27 Facebook Live was also reportedly disrupted in July and August 2020, amid protests and strikes by members and supporters of the Jordanian Teachers'

Syndicate, particularly during larger demonstrations. In March 2021, protests took place in several cities after COVID-19 patients died due to oxygen shortages. Authorities reportedly responded by throttling access to Facebook Live and blocking the audio-based app Clubhouse. ²⁸ While Facebook Live was only temporarily inaccessible, Clubhouse remained blocked by internet service providers (ISPs) at the end of the coverage period (see B1). ²⁹ While the government has denied restricting access to Facebook Live, many social media users maintained that the authorities were behind the disruptions (see B3 and B8).

30

In the past, authorities frequently ordered ISPs to disrupt access to messaging and communications applications while students took exams (see B1). ³¹ For example, in June and July 2022, the TRC ordered three major ISPs to block access to messaging apps for two to four hours a day during high school exams. ³² However, there have not been any reports of blocking during exams within the coverage period. ³³

Orange Jordan remains the landing party for the FLAG Europe-Asia (FEA) submarine cable, ³⁴ the only east-west cable that serves Jordan. ³⁵ However, several providers, like DamaMax and LINKdotNET, have independent international connectivity. ³⁶ International connectivity is also provided via terrestrial connections from neighboring countries as an alternative to submarine cables. In 2015, the Regional Cable Network (RCN) was launched to provide a high-capacity terrestrial fiber-optic network from Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to Amman, ³⁷ an addition to the established JADI (Jeddah-Amman-Damascus-Istanbul) link that has operated since 2010. ³⁸

A4 0-6 pts

Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers?	3/6
---	------------

The TRC regulates the licensing of telecommunications providers and ISPs. Article 20 of the Telecommunications Law requires providers to secure a license to establish, operate, and administer telecommunications networks and provide telecommunications services. ³⁹ For an ISP, the initial licensing fees are \$42,300.

40

Generally, licenses are awarded “to all qualified applicants,” although this does not always apply in practice. The law lists what it calls “objectively justifiable reasons not to grant licenses,” such as national security restrictions, scarce resources, technical limitations, and cases in which awarding a license “would lead to an anticompetitive environment in the market.” **41**

Three mobile service providers dominate the market: Umniah, a subsidiary of Batelco Bahrain, Zain, and Orange Jordan. **42** Each provider controls more than 30 percent of the market. Orange SA of France owns 51 percent of Orange Jordan, with the remaining shares divided between Jordan’s Social Security Corporation, Noor Telecommunications, and others. **43** In July 2018, the then Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MoICT) confirmed that the government had no intention to license a fourth mobile service provider. **44**

In September 2022, the TRC signed agreements licensing Jordan’s three main mobile service providers to deploy 5G services (see A1). The agreement aims to boost competition and investment in the telecommunications sector and support the increasing development of information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure. **45**

The market power of the country’s largest telecommunications provider, Orange Jordan, has been diluted in recent years. Orange’s de facto monopoly on the international gateway and local backbone has been eroded by competitive terrestrial international connectivity and new fiber-optic backbones established by other providers. **46** In a 2020 market review conducted by the TRC, Orange was found to have a dominant market position in leased lines and wholesale broadband access, subjecting the company to additional regulations. **47**

In addition, long-awaited regulations to enforce full local loop unbundling (LLU) were issued by the TRC in 2017 in an effort to introduce more fixed-line sector competition by forcing Orange to open its networks to other providers. **48** However, according to a TRC report released in 2019, LLU “has not been implemented effectively,” limiting its ability to encourage competition. **49**

A5 0-4 pts

Do national regulatory bodies that oversee service providers and digital technology fail to operate in a free, fair, and independent manner?

1 / 4

The TRC, the sector regulator, does not always operate in an independent manner. It is governed by the Telecommunications Law and defined as a “financially and administratively independent juridical personality.” ⁵⁰ Nonetheless, it is accountable to the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship (MoDEE), ⁵¹ historically known as the MoICT and renamed in May 2019. The TRC’s board of commissioners and chairperson are appointed upon nomination by the prime minister based on the MoDEE minister’s recommendation. ⁵² The Telecommunications Law endorses free-market policies and governs licensing and quality assurance. ⁵³

In November 2021, the government proposed amendments to the Telecommunications Law that would allow the prime minister to discharge the chairperson and commissioners of the TRC board. ⁵⁴ The amendments had not been approved by the Council of Ministers as of June 2023.

B. Limits on Content

B1 0-6 pts

Does the state block or filter, or compel service providers to block or filter, internet content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards?	3/6
---	------------

The government periodically blocks websites and social media platforms, sometimes without justification. Certain VPNs that enable users to bypass censorship have also been blocked in the past. During the coverage period, hundreds of news websites were blocked for failing to obtain a license.

Some social media and communications platforms are blocked in Jordan. In December 2022, authorities blocked TikTok amid demonstrations by truck drivers who were protesting fuel price increases (see A3). At the time, the government said it was a “temporary ban” due to “misuse by some” and the “platform’s failure to address posts inciting violence and chaos.” However, the app remained blocked at the end of the coverage period. ⁵⁵ Following the blocking, TikTok pledged to remove over 300,000 videos that violated the platform’s community guidelines (see B2). ⁵⁶

Clubhouse was blocked in March 2021 following protests in several cities over an oxygen shortage that led to the deaths of COVID-19 patients. Clubhouse remained inaccessible in Jordan at the end of the coverage period; however, some users reported being able to access it via VPN. ⁵⁷ Clubhouse was widely used by activists, public figures, and dissidents—including those residing outside Jordan—and attracted a growing user base of Jordanians who used the platform to freely discuss the political situation in the country. ⁵⁸

In August 2023, the LGBT+ dating app Grindr was reportedly blocked in Jordan. ⁵⁹ The app remained inaccessible at the end of the coverage period.

Widely used VPN apps were reportedly blocked shortly after Clubhouse became inaccessible in March 2021. ExpressVPN, Proton VPN, NordVPN, and TunnelBear were inaccessible on a number of major service providers. ⁶⁰ Many of these VPNs remained blocked as of June 2024. The 2023 Cybercrime Law, which was passed during this coverage period, further seeks to prohibit the use of VPNs, proxy servers, and other anonymous communication tools, such as Tor (see C4). ⁶¹

Some websites are blocked in Jordan, often for failing to obtain a government-issued license. Since July 2023, the popular satirical news site AlHudood has been blocked. While authorities did not provide a reason for the block, many speculate it was due to AlHudood's critical coverage of the Jordanian royal wedding, which questioned the event's high costs. ⁶² As of 2023, the TRC reported that the total number of blocked websites and apps had reached 300. Among these, several were blocked at the request of the Land Transport Regulatory Commission to target unlicensed rideshare apps. ⁶³

In October 2021, there were reports that the website of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) was temporarily blocked hours before the release of the Pandora Papers, in which Jordan's King Abdullah II was accused of buying luxury properties through shell companies. ⁶⁴ Access to the ICIJ's website was restored before the investigation's results were published. ⁶⁵

In June 2021, the Media Commission (MC), previously called the Press and Publications Department, announced that it blocked an unspecified number of websites that violated licensing regulations. ⁶⁶ In 2019, new licensing regulations were enforced by the MC, and 45 news sites were subsequently blocked after

failing to obtain licenses (see B6). **67** However, many of these sites have since successfully applied for licenses, and their access has been restored. **68**

In 2017, the MC reissued a 2016 order to block access to the local LGBT+ online magazine My Kali after an Islamist member of parliament, Dima Tahboub, requested an inquiry into the site. **69** It remained inaccessible at the end of the coverage period.

From 2015 to 2022, the government, through the TRC, mandated that ISPs block access to messaging apps on the days when secondary school students took their national exam (*Tawjihi*). However, this practice was discontinued in 2023, allowing previously blocked apps to remain accessible during the exam period. **70**

B2 0-4 pts

Do state or nonstate actors employ legal, administrative, or other means to force publishers, content hosts, or digital platforms to delete content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards?

1 / 4

State pressure on online activists and editors of news sites to delete content is relatively common.

The 2023 Cybercrime Law states that social media platforms, page administrators, and other intermediaries now face legal responsibility for opinions expressed by third parties (see B3). Prior to the law's approval, the MoDEE stated that social media users must remove comments and replies made by other users on their accounts if they violate the law, or alternatively delete the post that the other user commented on. **71**

In January 2023, TikTok announced that it had deleted 310,724 videos from different accounts in Jordan after discussions with the Jordanian authorities, seemingly with the goal of getting the blocking order the government imposed on the platform in December 2022 lifted (see B1). **72**

In June 2022, a Jordanian media outlet took down an online article that compared the Israeli prime minister to Hitler, reportedly after being pressured by Israeli authorities to remove the article. **73**

In October 2021, AmmanNet, the only Jordanian media outlet to report on the Pandora Papers, was pressured by the General Intelligence Directorate (GID) to remove an online story about the investigation. AmmanNet’s director reported receiving a WhatsApp message from the GID’s liaison press relations officer asking him to delete an article covering King Abdullah’s foreign real estate holdings. The news outlet removed the article, fearing retaliation. **74**

In June 2020, cartoonist Rafat al-Khateeb deleted a caricature he published on his Facebook page after being attacked on social media and threatened with legal prosecution. The cartoon, which was posted shortly after the murder of George Floyd in the United States, depicted former prime minister Omar al-Razzaz kneeling on a citizen’s neck. Ultimately, no legal action was taken against al-Khateeb. **75**

In August 2020, Prince Ali bin Hussein, the half-brother of King Abdullah, deleted a tweet he published with a link to an article denouncing the UAE-Israel peace deal. The tweet included a picture of posters depicting UAE president Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, who was then Abu Dhabi’s crown prince, with the Arabic word “traitor” written across them. **76** According to media sources, the tweet disappeared after King Abdullah ordered Prince Ali to delete it to preserve Jordan’s relationship with the UAE. **77**

B3 0-4 pts

Do restrictions on the internet and digital content lack transparency, proportionality to the stated aims, or an independent appeals process?

1 / 4

Internet and digital-content restrictions sometimes lack transparency and proportionality. The sporadic blocking of Facebook Live (see A3), in addition to Clubhouse’s inaccessibility (see B1), raised concerns about the lack of transparency in blocking procedures. The TikTok ban, which was still in place as of June 2024, lacks proportionality (see B1).

Article 25 of the Cybercrime Law increased the liability for intermediaries, stating that a person responsible for managing a website, social media platform, account, public page, group, or channel is accountable for any illegal content posted on it, and is subject to the same penalties as whoever posted the content. This responsibility does not extend to public institutions and personal accounts unless

it is proven that the owner or manager failed to remove the illegal content upon request. **78** Government members have called for social media users to proactively remove content or comments that violate the law from their accounts (see B2). **79**

In practice, the TRC is the entity that issues blocking orders to ISPs. Civil society groups have raised concerns that the blockings of TikTok, Clubhouse, and VPN tools were performed extralegally, particularly because authorities failed to provide a legal basis for these restrictions. Unlike most blocking cases, the government provided some justification for the TikTok blocking, but the measures lack proportionality considering the duration of the ban and the large number of users affected. **80**

There has been a lack of transparency and consistency around who orders the restrictions of certain apps. A joint technical report from the Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI) and the Jordan Open Source Association found that Facebook Live was temporarily interfered with during the 2018–19 protests.

81 During another Facebook Live disruption in 2021, sources within the telecommunications sector confirmed that authorities blocked Facebook Live broadcasting for several hours. **82**

Additionally, in March 2021, the head of the TRC stated that his agency “ha[d] nothing to do” with the blocking of Clubhouse (see B1), while the MoDEE minister stated that Jordanian networks were operating normally. **83** Furthermore, the TRC denied that they had issued any orders to block VPN tools and claimed that they had not received any complaints regarding VPNs’ inaccessibility. However, some VPN companies confirmed that they received complaints from users in Jordan who were unable to connect. **84**

The blocking of news sites is carried out according to the Press and Publications Law (PPL), amended in 2012, which stipulates that news sites need to obtain a Media Commission license or face blocking. Publications subject to this provision are defined as any website “with a specific web address on the internet which provides publishing services, including news, reports, investigations, articles, and comments.” **85** Articles 48 and 49 of the law enable the head of the commission to block any website for failing to obtain a license or, more broadly, for violating Jordanian law. The law’s expansive definition of news sites could be interpreted to

include almost all Jordanian and international websites, blogs, portals, and social networks.

B4 0-4 pts

Do online journalists, commentators, and ordinary users practice self-censorship?

2 / 4

Many Jordanian journalists continue to self-censor, including on topics related to the armed forces, royal court, religion, and sex-related issues. **86**

Numerous organizations and experts have expressed concern that the 2023 Cybercrime Law will further intensify self-censorship among journalists and online users (see C2). Reporters Without Borders (RSF) warned that the law may cause journalists to hesitate to cover certain stories due to the risk of hefty fines or imprisonment under charges such as “disrupting national unity.” **87**

Recent arrests under the 2023 Cybercrime Law following the Israel-Hamas war have further contributed to increased self-censorship among journalists (see C3). This had the effect of “narrowing the shrinking space for journalism,” according to a local media expert, further silencing independent media in Jordan. **88**

A report published in 2021 shows that many media outlets practice prepublication self-censorship and that self-censorship is widespread among journalists due to the retaliation they face, including lawsuits, intimidation, and detention (see C3 and C7). Specifically, the director of the Community Media Network, an independent media nongovernmental organization (NGO), noted that journalists avoid critical topics and issues in their reporting. **89** According to one journalist, the government makes it difficult for journalists to access certain information or write about particular issues, which “pushes journalists to exercise self-censorship.” **90**

B5 0-4 pts

Are online sources of information controlled or manipulated by the government or other powerful actors to advance a particular political interest?

2 / 4

The online information landscape continues to be limited by direct bans on reporting on certain topics, particularly during sensitive or tense events. At least four gag orders were issued throughout 2022. **91**

Occasionally, online disinformation campaigns seek to manipulate content. In 2023, leaked documents reviewed by The Cradle revealed that the British Foreign Office and UK contractors planned to create a covert newsroom to flood Jordan's media with patriotic and anti-extremist narratives, with the intention to discretely leverage "citizen user, activist, and NGO generate content" to amplify the messages. **92** A report released in July 2021 by the Stanford Internet Observatory revealed the existence of a coordinated disinformation network active on Clubhouse and TikTok that pushed pro-military, pro-monarchy narratives. Some videos shared from the network's accounts were critical of Prince Hamzah, while others criticized the Islamic State militant group. **93** In a separate report, Facebook said that the network targeted domestic audiences and was linked to local individuals associated with the Jordanian military. **94**

Authorities have issued reporting bans to restrict coverage during politically sensitive moments and during demonstrations and protests in recent years. In April 2021, Public Prosecutor Hassan al-Abdallat banned the publication of any information related to the purported coup attempt involving Prince Hamzah. **95** The media ban was issued "to preserve the confidentiality of an ongoing investigation" and prohibited the sharing of videos and audio related to the case on social media. **96** The media ban was heavily criticized by journalists and social media users, **97** prompting al-Abdallat to clarify that the gag order did not ban the publication of opinions protected under international freedom-of-expression standards and that it was limited to the investigation documents and trial hearings. **98**

In September 2022, recordings of the former public security director, Hussein al-Hawatmeh, were leaked, implicating him in potentially unethical or criminal activity. Soon after the leak, the public prosecutor issued a gag order to prohibit media outlets from publishing anything related to the case. **99**

Since late 2016, two gag orders limiting independent coverage of the armed forces and the king have been enforced. All media outlets, including those that publish online, are banned from reporting news about the king and the royal family unless

it is obtained from official bulletins issued by the Royal Hashemite Court. ¹⁰⁰ The MC also bans the publication of any reports about the armed forces outside of statements made by the military's media spokesperson.

B6 0-3 pts

Are there economic or regulatory constraints that negatively affect users' ability to publish content online?

1/3

Several economic and regulatory constraints present obstacles for digital media in Jordan.

Article 36 of the 2023 Cybercrime Law requires online platforms with over 100,000 subscribers in Jordan to establish an office in the country in order to respond to user account or content removal requests made by legal and administrative authorities. ¹⁰¹ If they do not comply, platforms could face advertisement bans and gradual bandwidth restrictions. ¹⁰²

Licensing for online publications is regulated by the PPL, which defines news sites as "electronic publications," subjecting them to the same stringent restrictions imposed on print media by the 1998 law (see B3). ¹⁰³ Specifically, in 2017, the MC issued a bylaw that imposed a \$2,100 licensing fee and a \$71 annual renewal fee on news sites. ¹⁰⁴ The amended PPL requires any electronic publication that publishes domestic or international news, press releases, or comments to register with the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Supply. One of the requirements for a general news site to obtain a license is to have an editor in chief who has been a member of the state-controlled Jordan Press Association (JPA) for at least four years. Online journalists have been allowed to join the body since 2014. Additional constraints were imposed in a separate bylaw issued in 2017, which requires news sites to hire at least five journalists. ¹⁰⁵

In late 2018, the MC began enforcing these licensing criteria more vigorously. Beginning in 2019, both online and print publications without a full-time editor who worked exclusively at that outlet had 10 days to rectify the situation. ¹⁰⁶

Following the 2012 amendments to the PPL, most news sites hired editors in chief who were already JPA members in order to meet the criteria to obtain a license, a

concerning development for independent media given that most JPA members work in government or government-related media outlets. **107**

B7 0-4 pts

Does the online information landscape lack diversity and reliability?

3/4

Although users can access a wide range of news sources and information online, including through social media, state censorship of online content reduces the variety of information available on the internet. The narrow definition of a “journalist” under the Jordan Press Association (JPA) Law and the dominance of the JPA as a union are additional barriers to pluralism and diversity in online media. **108**

Local newspapers and media outlets often refrain from covering sensitive topics, especially if they might be perceived to undermine national security. In recent years, the coverage of stories pertinent to the king’s wealth or the royal family have been limited to official government statements. For instance, no media outlets covered the Pandora Papers investigation exposing King Abdullah’s ownership of luxury homes, **109** although some republished the Royal Hashemite Court’s official statement on the issue. **110** A majority of media outlets did not report on Prince Hamzah renouncing his title in April 2022. **111** Similarly, local newspapers remained silent about the alleged coup attempt in 2021. **112**

Certain communities are not well covered by traditional media: Specifically, information about members of the political opposition based abroad, LGBT+ individuals, and refugees can be challenging to access. A 2023 study revealed that journalists who address transgender rights face significant opposition and online harassment. **113** However, this information is often accessible through other channels, such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter). Additionally, some websites are mirrored via different, unblocked domains.

Although Jordan has the second-highest number of refugees per capita in the world, **114** a 2015 study of four news sites found that only 2 percent of sample media coverage focused on refugee issues. **115**

According to the Jordan Media Institute, 45.6 percent of Jordanians rely on social media as their primary source of news, despite the fact that Jordanians considered social media the least credible source for reliable news. This preference for social media creates an environment in which misinformation and disinformation can undermine users' ability to access accurate news. ¹¹⁶

B8 0-6 pts

Do conditions impede users' ability to mobilize, form communities, and campaign, particularly on political and social issues?

3/6

Score change: The score declined from 4 to 3 due to the increased use of the Cybercrime Law against online mobilization and protesters.

Social media is frequently used to organize demonstrations and protests as well as to campaign and communicate about political or social issues. However, authorities hindered online mobilization efforts amid protests in December 2022 by restricting internet access and blocking social media platforms (see A3 and B1).

On July 28, 2023, hundreds of people protested against the Cybercrime Law, calling for its withdrawal. The demonstration included civil society organizations, political parties, and public figures. Many journalists and social media influencers deactivated their accounts in protest, ¹¹⁷ while activists launched online campaigns using hashtags like *#دولة_مش_سجن* (*#ACountryNotAPrison*), and *#إسحبوا_قانون_الجرائم_الإلكترونية* (*#WithdrawTheCybercrimeLaw*). ¹¹⁸

Since October 2023, over a thousand protesters were arrested in pro-Palestinian demonstrations. ¹¹⁹ Dozens were charged under the new Cybercrimes Law for their social media posts supporting Palestinians, criticizing Jordan's deals with Israel, or calling for strikes and protests (see C3). ¹²⁰ According to an anonymous Jordanian researcher cited by Al-Jazeera, while some protesters were detained briefly, others were held for months for minor online activities like tweets or retweets, allegedly to discourage further dissent. ¹²¹ Activists have been reporting on arbitrary arrests that occur during protests by using hashtags such as *#لا_لتكليم_الافواه* (*#FreedomForPrisonersOfOpinion*), *#الحرية_لمعتقلي_الرأي* (*#NoToMuzzlingMouths*), and *#الحرية_لمعتقلي_دعم_غزة* (*#FreedomForTheDetaineesSupportingGaza*).

Since mid-December 2022, TikTok has been blocked in Jordan after protesters used the app to share videos of strikes against fuel price increases. ¹²² During the protests, authorities also restricted internet access in several cities in the south of the country. ¹²³

Social media platforms were crucial during the longest teachers' strike in the country's history, which took place in September 2019. When the 87,000 members of the largest Jordanian syndicate, the Jordan Teachers Association (JTA), went on strike, ¹²⁴ teachers used apps like Facebook and WhatsApp to better organize their efforts; spread messages through images, poetry, slogans, and other forms of art; and support the JTA's leadership. ¹²⁵ The hashtags #مع_المعلم (#WithTheTeacher) and #إضراب_المعلم (#TeachersStrike) were prominently used on social media by users who supported the protests. ¹²⁶

In the past, many protesters used Facebook Live to broadcast demonstrations. During the 2019 anti-austerity demonstrations, short video reports on these events received tens of thousands of views, ¹²⁷ overshadowing coverage by traditional and official media outlets. ¹²⁸

Facebook Live was disrupted on multiple ISPs when King Abdullah placed Prince Hamzah under house arrest in May 2022; Hamzah was accused of participating in a purported coup plot in April 2021. Soon after those initial accusations surfaced, tens of thousands of Jordanians showed their support for Prince Hamzah online. ¹²⁹ For example, the hashtags #الامير_حمزة_حر_شريف (#PrinceHamzahIsFreeAndHonorable) and #كلنا_الأمير_حمزة (#WeAreAllPrinceHamzah) trended that month. ¹³⁰

C. Violations of User Rights

C1 o-6 pts

Do the constitution or other laws fail to protect rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and press freedom, including on the internet, and are they enforced by a judiciary that lacks independence?

2/6

Although the constitution contains some protections for free speech online, several laws, including the penal code, impose disproportionate or unnecessary restrictions in practice (see C2).

Several constitutional amendments introduced in 2011 directly or indirectly touch on internet freedom. Terms such as “mass media” and “other means of communication,” which likely encompass online media, were added to provisions that protect freedom of expression, allowing it to be limited during states of emergency (see C5). Despite the passage of the Access to Information Law in 2007, several restrictions on requests for information about sensitive social and religious matters remain in place. ¹³¹

Furthermore, the passing of the 2023 Cybercrime Law further obstructs online forms of expression, ¹³² and many groups have argued it is unconstitutional (see C2). ¹³³

Judicial independence is limited. The king unilaterally appoints the entire Constitutional Court and the chair of the Judicial Council, which nominates judges for the civil court system and is mostly comprised of senior judiciary members.

C2 0-4 pts

Are there laws that assign criminal penalties or civil liability for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards?

1 / 4

Several laws impose criminal penalties and civil liability for online speech.

The penal code forbids insulting the royal family, state institutions, national symbols, or foreign states, and also bans “any writing or speech that aims at or results in causing sectarian or racial strife.” Defamation is a criminal offense. ¹³⁴ Authorities have also used lèse-majesté charges to penalize online users.

In August 2023, the Cybercrime Law came into force, replacing the 2015 version of the law. The new law introduces harsher criminal penalties for online speech, uses broad and vague language for crimes related to freedom of expression, and introduces additional punishments for the use of circumvention tools (see C4). According to Article 17 of the 2023 Cybercrime Law, internet users who publish

content that is deemed to incite sedition or disturb social order can face up to three years in prison, a fine of over \$28,000, or both. Under Articles 13 and 14, internet users can face up to six months in prison and a fine for any content deemed to promote, instigate, or incite immorality. ¹³⁵ Article 15 of the law criminalizes the publication or sharing of content that is deemed “fake news,” or content deemed to contain slander, defamation, or contempt against persons. Users can be charged with fines of up to \$28,000, face at least a three-month prison sentence, or both. ¹³⁶ The law has increasingly been used to penalize online expression (see C3).

Although the 2012 PPL prohibits jailing journalists for press offenses, online media can be criminalized under the Cybercrime Law. A 2015 decision ruled that the 2015 Cybercrime Law supersedes other legislation, rendering journalists’ immunity under the PPL largely irrelevant, ¹³⁷ as they can be jailed for articles that appear online. ¹³⁸

Several other laws continue to threaten access to information and free expression online. These include the 1959 Contempt of Court Law, the 1971 Protection of State Secrets and Classified Documents Law, the 1992 Defense Law, the JPA Law, and the PPL.

The PPL bans the publication of “material that is inconsistent with the principles of freedom, national obligation, human rights, and Arab-Islamic values.” ¹³⁹ Article 38 of the law prohibits any “contempt, slander, or defamation of or abuse of” religions or prophets. The same article prohibits the publication of any material that is defamatory or slanderous of individuals, who are also protected against “rumors” and “anything that hinders their personal freedom.” ¹⁴⁰

Amendments to an antiterrorism law passed in 2014 expanded the definition of “terrorism” to include a broader range of activities. ¹⁴¹ In addition to offenses such as attacking members of the royal court or provoking an “armed rebellion,” the definition of terrorism now includes any acts that “threaten the country’s relations to foreign states or expose the country or its citizens to retaliatory acts on them or their money,” an offense that had already been listed in the penal code. ¹⁴² The law also explicitly penalizes the use of ICTs to promote, support, or fund terrorist acts, or to subject “Jordanians or their property to danger of hostile acts or acts of revenge.” ¹⁴³

Are individuals penalized for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards?

3/6

Dozens of individuals were arrested, prosecuted, and imprisoned for their online activities during the coverage period. ¹⁴⁴ The 2023 Cybercrime Law has increasingly been used to arrest scores of activists for online content critical of Jordan's policies towards and relations with Israel. ¹⁴⁵

Social media content deemed critical of the government or its policies can result in criminal penalties. Anas al-Jamal, an activist and former member of the forcibly dissolved Partnership and Salvation Party (PSP), was detained for three months under Article 24 of the 2023 Cybercrime Law for three posts he made on X in October 2023. Al-Jamal was fined about \$7,000 and was released in January 2024, but remains subject to a travel ban. Prior to 2023, al-Jamal was detained in May 2022 after being prosecuted under Article 118 of the penal code, which criminalizes the disturbance of relations with a friendly country, based on a tweet he published in which he criticized a meeting between Egyptian, Emirati, and Israeli leaders. ¹⁴⁶

In December 2023, Ayman Sanduka, an activist, teacher, and secretary of the PSP, was arrested following a Facebook post in which he addressed the king of Jordan and criticized the country's diplomatic relations with Israel, as well as another post calling for general strikes. He was charged under both the 2023 Cybercrimes Law and Article 149 of the penal code by a military court with "incitement to oppose the political regime" and sentenced to three months in prison. ¹⁴⁷ As of July 2024 he was still in detention. ¹⁴⁸

In April 2024, an unnamed Jordanian woman was sentenced to three months in prison under the 2023 Cybercrime Law and subjected to a travel ban following her posts calling for protests and critical of the security forces. Dozens of others have been subjected to short-term detentions following their arrest due to social media posts related to the Israel-Hamas war. ¹⁴⁹

Journalists have also been subject to arrests during the coverage period. In late March 2024, security forces administratively detained photojournalist Sherbel

Disi (also known as Ahmad Mohsen) as he was covering protests near the Israeli embassy in Amman and sharing footage with the independent media outlet 7iber. ¹⁵⁰ He was released on bail after 20 days in detention. Journalist Khair Eddin Aljabri was also detained in March 2024 under Article 17 of the 2023 Cybercrime Law following a video he shared online. ¹⁵¹

In May 2024, journalist Hiba Abu Taha was arrested following an article she had published in April 2024 that criticized the trade route (dubbed the “land bridge”) between Jordan and Israel. In June 2024, after the coverage period, she was sentenced to one year in prison and charged with violating the Cybercrime Law. ¹⁵² In July 2024, after the coverage period, journalist Ahmed al-Zoubi was arrested and sentenced to 11 months in prison. Al-Zoubi’s sentencing followed a July 2023 ruling, in which he was charged over a Facebook post that criticized the government’s response to the December 2022 workers’ strike. ¹⁵³

C4 0-4 pts

Does the government place restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption?

2 / 4

Some restrictions on anonymous communication and encryption exist in Jordan.

In 2021, there were multiple reports of restrictions on VPNs, as several circumvention tools were reportedly blocked by service providers (see B1 and B3). The 2023 Cybercrime Law further seeks to limit online anonymity by introducing penalties of up to six months in prison or a fine for the use of proxy servers and other anonymous communication tools such as Tor (see B1). ¹⁵⁴

SIM card registration is mandatory for all mobile phone users. ¹⁵⁵ In 2018, the TRC announced that a biometric system for mobile and internet SIM card registration would be established, requiring users to submit their fingerprints. ¹⁵⁶ No developments have since been reported regarding the implementation of the biometric system.

C5 0-6 pts

Does state surveillance of internet activities infringe on users’ right to privacy?

2 / 6

State surveillance in Jordan threatens users' right to privacy. Many Jordanians reportedly have a long-standing belief that "someone is listening in" on their phone calls. This attitude has carried over to the internet, where security services are believed to closely monitor online comments, cataloging them by date, internet protocol (IP) address, and location. **157**

A 2024 Access Now investigation found that at least 35 civil society members in Jordan were targeted by the Israeli-made Pegasus spyware since 2019. **158** Targets include staff at Human Rights Watch, **159** journalists at the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), **160** human rights lawyers, and local journalists in Jordan, **161** among others. Citizen Lab and Access Now also identified several human rights lawyers, including Omar Atout and members of the National Forum for the Defense of Freedoms, as targets. One of these lawyers, Asem al-Omari, is involved in the case of Emirati dissident Khalaf al-Rumaithi, who was forcibly deported from Jordan to the UAE in May 2023. **162**

Reports also indicate that individuals were targeted more than once. Human rights lawyer Hala Ahed, who had provided legal support to the Teachers' Syndicate before it was dissolved by authorities in 2020, was first targeted with Pegasus spyware in March 2021, **163** and was later targeted again in February 2023. **164**

In April 2022, the Jordanian government, through the National Cybersecurity Center (NCSC), denied "that government agents had targeted the phones of Jordanian citizens" or that it had collaborated with other parties to surveil citizens. The NCSC also stated that the sanctity of private communications could not be violated under Jordanian law. **165**

In April 2022, Front Line Defenders and Citizen Lab reported that the devices of four human rights defenders were compromised between 2018 and 2020. The targets included Malik Abu Orabi, a member of the Teachers' Syndicate's legal team; Ahmed al-Neimat, a *Hirak* member; **166** and investigative journalist Suhair Jaradat. **167** Although the investigation was unable to "directly connect these names to any specific Pegasus operator," some domains used in the attacks likely originated in Jordan. **168** Several activists believe that these attacks were carried out by government agents. **169** According to Front Line Defenders, at least two

Pegasus operators are likely state actors, one of which has been active since late 2018 and the other since late 2020. **170**

Members of the royal family are not immune from surveillance. In April 2021, US outlet Axios reported that Jordanian authorities were in negotiations with NSO Group to obtain spyware, months before the alleged coup attempt. According to Axios, security agents had also been monitoring Prince Hamzah's communications for months. **171** It is unclear whether authorities purchased spyware during these talks, but the government is suspected to have acquired spyware from the NSO Group in the past. **172**

According to an investigation published in January 2023, Jordanian security services had received digital surveillance training from British intelligence agencies. According to the report, these training sessions were meant to bolster Jordan's counterterrorism efforts by extracting data from digital devices. However, these monitoring efforts could also be potentially used to target dissidents by "discrediting" them or planting "negative information" about them online. **173**

Article 18 of the constitution protects the right to privacy but allows for surveillance "by a judicial order in accordance with the provisions of the law." The antiterrorism law permits the prosecutor general to order surveillance upon receiving "reliable information" that "a person or group of persons is connected to any terrorist activity." **174** Under Article 18 of the 2011 constitutional amendments (see C1), judicial approval was added as a precondition for the confiscation of private communications. **175**

In 2019, the TRC issued new regulations for telecommunication operators and ISPs that included mandatory data retention requirements (see C6). The regulations include a vague clause that addresses when authorities can request such data. According to Article 9.2 of the regulations, the TRC can provide other entities with user data records in "public interest" cases. **176**

C6 0-6 pts

Does monitoring and collection of user data by service providers and other technology companies infringe on users' right to privacy?

2/6

Service providers and technology companies are required by law to assist the government in monitoring user communications. The Telecommunications Law requires that telecommunications providers take appropriate measures to enable the retention of user communications upon judicial or administrative order. **177**

In August 2023, after nine years in the drafting stage, Jordan passed a data protection law. This law is meant to regulate how personal data is collected, used, and published. While the law includes safeguards to protect personal information, it fails to ensure the independence of the proposed Data Protection Authority, which is chaired by the minister of digital economy and entrepreneurship and includes members of the government and the security forces. It also decreases the fines imposed on entities and companies for privacy violations. **178**

According to a 2019 report published by the London-based ImpACT International for Human Rights Policies and Access Now, some ISPs clearly violate customers' privacy by collecting user information without prominently disclosing that fact or explaining how the data is used. **179** In the absence of a personal data protection law, some tech companies state in their privacy policy that, by using their application, users give permission for the company to share user data with authorities if required to do so. **180**

In May 2018, the Ministry of Transportation published instructions for licensing rideshare apps, which grant the ministry, as well as judicial and security bodies, access to the companies' servers and databases without a court order. **181** With this data, the government can track the movements and activities of users.

C7 0-5 pts

Are individuals subject to extralegal intimidation or physical violence by state authorities or any other actor in relation to their online activities?

3/5

Journalists, human rights lawyers, and dissidents face harassment, intimidation, doxing, and death threats from both state and nonstate actors in retaliation for their online activities. Female journalists and LGBT+ individuals are disproportionately targeted for their online activities.

In June 2023, thousands of social media users participated in a smear campaign against human rights lawyer Hala Ahed after her a workshop on feminist concepts was announced. ¹⁸² Ahed received death threats, and it remains unclear who was behind the campaign. In June 2021, columnist Oraib al-Rantawi was targeted by a social media campaign after publishing an article in *Ad-Dustour* about the role of Fatah, the Palestinian group that now leads the Palestinian Authority, in the 1968 Battle of Karamah. Al-Rantawi said he was a victim of a “campaign of incitement and abuse,” but he did not specify who orchestrated the harassment. ¹⁸³

LGBT+ activists regularly face threats, surveillance, interrogations, phone searches, and asset control due to their online and offline activities. Reports have shown that LGBT+ people are targeted by Jordan’s security forces, including the GID and the Preventive Security department of the Public Security Directorate. In June 2023, ¹⁸⁴ one LGBT+ activist was the victim of a coordinated online smear campaign. Online users, including former members of parliament and politicians, posted messages doxing the activist, accusing him of “spreading homosexuality,” and sending death threats. This campaign was triggered after details of a private queer film screening were leaked online; the space that had intended to host the screening also faced online harassment, including death threats. ¹⁸⁵ Online leaks have also led to individuals being summoned for questioning—a staff member of a local human rights organization was called in for interrogation by the GID after details of a workshop on gender and sexuality held by their organization was leaked online. ¹⁸⁶ Due to the repeated intimidation campaigns by security forces, two LGBT+ organizations were forced to close operations in Jordan and flee the country for safety reasons during the coverage period.

Dissidents abroad have also been subject to intimidation campaigns, including harassment, threats, and detention, upon their return to Jordan. ¹⁸⁷

Online harassment campaigns targeted members of the Royal Committee for Modernizing the Political System (RCMPS), which was formed by the king and is mandated to suggest amendments to the legal framework governing elections and political parties. In June 2021, committee member Wafa al-Khadra said she faced “hate speech and bullying” by social media users who reacted to a Facebook post regarding Eid al-Adha–related sacrifice practices. Al-Khadra did not clarify if the campaign was organized by state actors but noted that she was facing charges

over her online content (see C3). **188** She resigned from the committee after facing harassment. **189**

C8 0-3 pts

Are websites, governmental and private entities, service providers, or individual users subject to widespread hacking and other forms of cyberattack?

2/3

Politically motivated cyberattacks against journalists, activists, and bloggers are not common; however, politicians' online accounts have been hacked in recent years, as have government websites. **190**

In late 2023, cybersecurity researchers found that state-sponsored Iranian hackers had targeted government and military digital infrastructure across the Middle East, including Jordan, for the purposes of surveillance. **191** This incident follows previous attacks by other Iranian-backed groups targeting government systems **192** and ministries. **193**

According to the National Cybersecurity Center (NCSC), the number of cyberattacks targeting government institutions in 2023 increased by over 80 percent compared to the previous year. Of the attacks, 169 were related to surveillance. The NCSC was established under the 2019 Cybersecurity Law to protect the national infrastructure from cyberthreats, overseeing 83 governmental institutions. **194**

The hacking of politicians' social media accounts is not uncommon. The Facebook profile of the former Islamist parliamentarian Saleh al-Armouti was hacked in July 2019 **195** and again in October 2020. **196** The Facebook profile of Naser Nawasreh, the deputy head of the Teachers' Syndicate, was hacked in October 2019. **197** The identities of the hackers are unknown.

Official institutions are also targeted. In February 2022, the Facebook account of the Royal Medical Services was hacked. **198** The official Twitter account of the government's anti-misinformation platform, Haggak.jo, was also hacked in February 2022. **199** The website of the Amman Chamber of Commerce was hacked in March 2021, though its database, which contains a directory of Jordanian firms, was left intact. **200** In July 2019, the official website of the

Constitutional Court was compromised by an “international hacker.” A picture with phrases insulting the Jordanian state and security forces was put in place of its home page. **201**

Footnotes

- 1** “State of Mobile Internet Connectivity 2018,” GSMA Intelligence, August 2018, <https://www.gsmaintelligence.com/research/?file=cobcc185be555f77478a8fd....>
- 2** “TRC inks 5G deal with Zain, Umniah and Orange,” Comms Update, September 12, 2022, <https://www.commsupdate.com/articles/2022/09/12/trc-inks-5g-deal-with-z...>; “TRC, telecom companies reach consensus on 5G service agreement,” Jordan News, June 26, 2022, <https://www.jordannews.jo/Section-113/All/TRC-telecom-companies-reach-c....>
- 3** Maria Weldali, “TRC signs agreements with Orange, Umniah to introduce 5G services,” The Jordan Times, August 11, 2022, <https://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/trc-signs-agreements-orange-umni....>
- 4** “Orange Jordan officially launches 5G : Orange 5G services now in Amman and Irbid, with continuous expansion”, Orange Newsroom, July 11, 2023, <https://newsroom.orange.com/orange-jordan-officially-launches-5g-orange...>; “Zain Group 2023 Revenue and Net Profit up 10% to reach USD 6.2 billion and USD 701m respectively”, Zain Press Release, March 6, 2024, <https://zain.com/en/press-release/fy2023>; “Umniah Expands 5G Network with 700+ New Sites across Four Main Governorates in Jordan”, Explore Umniah, December 2023, <https://www.umniah.com/explore-umniah/5g-sites/>
- 5** Simon Kemp, “Digital 2023: Jordan,” Data Reportal, February 15, 2023, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-jordan>.

More footnotes



On Jordan

See all data, scores & information on this country or territory.

See More >

Country Facts

Population

11,290,000

Global Freedom Score

33/100 Not Free

Internet Freedom Score

47/100 Partly Free

Freedom in the World Status

Not Free

Networks Restricted

No

Social Media Blocked

Yes

Websites Blocked

Yes

Pro-government Commentators

No

Users Arrested

Yes

In Other Reports

Freedom in the World 2024

Other Years

2023

Be the first to know what's happening.

Join the Freedom House weekly
newsletter

Subscribe

ADDRESS

1850 M St. NW Floor 11
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 296-5101

GENERAL INQUIRIES

info@freedomhouse.org

PRESS & MEDIA

press@freedomhouse.org

@2024 FreedomHouse