

# Jordan

Access to Internet content in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan remains largely unfettered, with filtering selectively applied to only a small number of sites. However, media laws and regulations encourage some measure of self-censorship in cyberspace,<sup>1</sup> and citizens have reportedly been questioned and arrested for Web content they have authored.<sup>2</sup>



## Background

Watchdog organizations continue to criticize the Jordanian government's record on human rights. In 2006, Human Rights Watch noted that "Jordanian authorities continued ... to engage in practices that censor free speech," including charging journalists under controversial articles of the Penal Code.<sup>3</sup> Reports of prolonged detentions<sup>4</sup> of criminals and government harassment of opposition party members<sup>5</sup> have also surfaced. In June 2006 the government charged four parliamentarians from the Islamic Action Front (IAF) with fueling national discord and inciting sectarianism after the politicians visited the family of deceased al-Qaeda leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.<sup>6</sup> The constitutional monarchy has also

demonstrated its willingness to silence and punish those critical of its allies.<sup>7</sup>

## Internet in Jordan

Although the government provides schools with computers and encourages the growth of the Internet in Jordan,<sup>8</sup> connectivity prices remain prohibitively high for many Jordanians.<sup>9</sup> There are only five personal computers per hundred inhabitants, yet the country has achieved an Internet penetration rate of 12 percent—a relatively high figure for the region.<sup>10</sup> Most of this connectivity comes through the hundreds of Internet cafés<sup>11</sup> and community centers<sup>12</sup> in the country. A survey of 200 Jordanians, presented in

### RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Filtering	No evidence of filtering	Suspected filtering	Selective filtering	Substantial filtering	Pervasive filtering
Political			●		
Social	●				
Conflict/security	●				
Internet tools	●				
Other factors	Low	Medium	High	Not applicable	
Transparency	●				
Consistency			●		

**KEY INDICATORS**

**Source (by indicator):** World Bank 2005, 2006a, 2006a; UNDP 2006; World Bank 2006c, 2006c; ITU 2006, 2004

2004, showed that the Internet serves as an important networking and communication tool, with all respondents using the Web to e-mail or chat.<sup>13</sup>

In an effort to further increase the Internet penetration rate, the government launched “Knowledge Stations” across the country in 2001. Jordanians in rural areas can access the Internet and attend courses in computers at these Stations.<sup>14</sup> An ongoing plan called the Jordan Broadband Learning and Education Network Project aims to create an extensive educational network by linking 8 public universities, 3,200 public schools, 23 community colleges, and 75 Knowledge Stations nationwide.<sup>15</sup>

Jordan has an advanced, though expensive, telecommunications infrastructure as compared with other countries in the region.<sup>16</sup> The telecom sector serves as a key industry for the Jordanian economy, accounting for 10 percent of the GDP.<sup>17</sup> Since the sector was liberalized in 2004,<sup>18</sup> private companies—in particular Wanadoo and Batelco, which together claim 83 percent of the Internet service provider (ISP) market—have overtaken the government’s share of the market.<sup>19</sup> The government-owned National Information Technology Center (NITC) remains

the exclusive registrar for the country code top-level domain (ccTLD) “.jo”.<sup>20</sup>

### **Legal and regulatory frameworks**

Established in 1995, the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) regulates telecom and information technology services in Jordan.<sup>21</sup> Under the Telecommunications Law of 1995, the TRC is in charge of ISP licensing and telecommunications equipment.<sup>22</sup> Prospective ISPs must file a license application and document their financial resources, base prices, services and technologies, and geographical coverage areas.<sup>23</sup> ISPs must supply a mechanism for handling customer complaints and may increase user fees only after notification has run for at least one full month in two local newspapers.<sup>24</sup>

To obtain a license to open an Internet café, a party must submit an application with “an organizational site plan for the location to be used.”<sup>25</sup> The Internet Café Regulations state that records of Internet use, including personal information, should be kept and that “a special technique should be provided to block and filter the sites”<sup>26</sup> that contain pornography or offensive religious material, that promote recreational drug use or gambling, or that show “the method of manufac-

turing of materials for military uses in an illegitimate manner."<sup>27</sup> Café patrons under thirteen years of age must be accompanied by a parent,<sup>28</sup> and managers cannot be younger than twenty-five.<sup>29</sup> Although the Regulations state that personal data should remain confidential,<sup>30</sup> a café must disclose such information when the government requests it.<sup>31</sup>

The Telecommunications Law instructs ISPs to withhold access from users who have "violated public morals"<sup>32</sup> or who use the Internet in a way that "endangers the national good,"<sup>33</sup> but leaves these stipulations undefined. The Law also stipulates that "Any person who originates or forwards, by any telecommunications means ... messages *contrary to public morals*, or forwards false information with *the intent to spread panic*, shall be punished by imprisonment of not less than one month or more than one year, or a fine ... or by both penalties."<sup>34</sup>

Article 5 of Jordan's Press and Publications Law (1998) prohibits journalists from publishing material that goes against "national obligation ... and Arab-Islamic values."<sup>35</sup> Article 7(e) is equally broad, forbidding the publication of anything that is "bound to stir violence or inflame discord of any form among the citizens."<sup>36</sup>

In January 2007, Jordan's Lower House National Guidance Committee began consultations with media experts and officials about a 2006 Press and Publications Draft Law.<sup>37</sup> Publishers and proponents of press freedom hope lawmakers will scrap provisions that set jail terms for journalists and amend articles they say restrict free expression.

### ONI testing results

Testing conducted on three Jordanian ISPs—Batelco, Wanadoo, and Linkdotnet—showed no definitive blocking, though some filtering of political content is suspected given inconsistencies in the accessibility of certain sites.

Arab Times ([www.arabtimes.com](http://www.arabtimes.com)), a politically oriented news site that is sometimes critical

of Arab leaders, was found to be inaccessible on Batelco and Wanadoo but was accessible via Linkdotnet. Though this finding does not constitute proof of filtering, it is worth noting, as the Web site was reportedly blocked in 2004.<sup>38</sup>

### Conclusion

Jordanians appear to enjoy essentially unfiltered access to Internet content. However, the Press and Publications Law's broad provisions may lead some writers to engage in self-censorship. Although Jordan's government continues to develop initiatives to expand access to the Internet, laws restricting freedom of speech preserve an intimidating atmosphere that discourages free discourse on political and social issues.

### NOTES

1. Reporters Without Borders, Internet Under Surveillance 2004: Jordan, [http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=10737](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=10737).
2. The Initiative for an Open Arab Internet, Implacable Adversaries: Arab Government and the Internet (2006): "Jordan," <http://www.openarab.net/en/reports/net2006/jordan.shtml>; Human Rights Watch, "Jordan: Rise in arrests restricting free speech," June 17, 2006, <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2006/06/17/jordan13574.htm>.
3. Ibid.
4. National Centre for Human Rights, The State of Human Rights in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, May 31, 2005, <http://www.nchr.org.jo/uploads/nchr-report.pdf>.
5. U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2005: Jordan, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61691.htm>.
6. See "Jordan MPs face Zarqawi charges," BBC News, June 13, 2006, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/5075422.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5075422.stm).
7. In 2004, Ali Hattar was tried and sentenced to jail time for giving an "incendiary" anti-U.S. lecture at a conference. See Foreign Ministry of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, "Hattar presents defense statement," January 19, 2005, [http://www.mfa.gov.jo/events\\_details.php?id=8981](http://www.mfa.gov.jo/events_details.php?id=8981).

8. Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, The National Broadband Network Briefing, [http://www.moict.gov.jo/MoICT/MoICT\\_NBN.aspx](http://www.moict.gov.jo/MoICT/MoICT_NBN.aspx).
9. The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, "The Internet in the Arab world: A new space of repression?" <http://www.hriinfo.net/en/reports/net2004/jordan.shtml>.
10. See International Telecommunication Union, *World Telecommunication Indicators 2006*.
11. The Initiative for an Open Arab Internet, Implacable Adversaries: Arab Government and the Internet (2006): "Jordan," <http://www.openarab.net/en/reports/net2006/jordan.shtml>.
12. Deborah L. Wheeler, "The Internet in the Arab world: Digital divides and cultural connections," lecture presented June 16, 2004, at Jordan's Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies, [http://www.riifs.org/guest/lecture\\_text/Internet\\_n\\_arabworld\\_all\\_txt.htm](http://www.riifs.org/guest/lecture_text/Internet_n_arabworld_all_txt.htm).
13. Ibid.
14. See Knowledge Stations Web site, <http://www.ks.jo/>. There are 132 Knowledge Stations across Jordan.
15. This project was slated for completion in 2006 but appears to be unfinished. See Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, "The national broadband network briefing," [http://www.moict.gov.jo/MoICT/MoICT\\_NBN.aspx](http://www.moict.gov.jo/MoICT/MoICT_NBN.aspx).
16. The Initiative for an Open Arab Internet, Implacable Adversaries: Arab Government and the Internet (2006): "Jordan," <http://www.openarab.net/en/reports/net2006/jordan.shtml>.
17. Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, E-readiness Assessment of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 2006, [http://www.moict.gov.jo/MoICT/MoICT\\_Jordan\\_ereadiness.aspx](http://www.moict.gov.jo/MoICT/MoICT_Jordan_ereadiness.aspx).
18. In 1999, Jordan joined the WTO and fulfilled its telecom sector commitments in pursuit of full member status in 2000. See Telecommunications Regulatory Commission, Annual Report 2005, [http://www.trc.gov.jo/Static\\_English/doc/annual%20report%2005.pdf](http://www.trc.gov.jo/Static_English/doc/annual%20report%2005.pdf).
19. Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, E-readiness Assessment of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 2006, [http://www.moict.gov.jo/MoICT/MoICT\\_Jordan\\_ereadiness.aspx](http://www.moict.gov.jo/MoICT/MoICT_Jordan_ereadiness.aspx).
20. National Information Technology Center, <http://www.nic.gov.jo/En/au.htm>.
21. Telecommunications Regulatory Commission, [http://www.trc.gov.jo/Static\\_English/main.shtml](http://www.trc.gov.jo/Static_English/main.shtml).
22. Telecommunications Law no. 13, 1995, [http://www.trc.gov.jo/Static\\_English/doc/Telecom%20Law%20Translation%20\(%20Final\).pdf](http://www.trc.gov.jo/Static_English/doc/Telecom%20Law%20Translation%20(%20Final).pdf).
23. Ibid., Article 27.
24. See *ibid.*, Articles 52, 53.
25. The actual location must fulfill certain conditions such as size. See Instructions for Regulating the Work of the Internet Centers and Cafés and the Bases for their Licensing for the Year 2001, [http://www.reach.jo/Downloads/Legislative/Internet\\_Cafes\\_Regulations.pdf](http://www.reach.jo/Downloads/Legislative/Internet_Cafes_Regulations.pdf).
26. It is unclear what filtering technique should be used. See Instructions for Regulating the Work of the Internet Centers and Cafés and the Bases for their Licensing for the Year 2001, Article 6, [http://www.reach.jo/Downloads/Legislative/Internet\\_Cafes\\_Regulations.pdf](http://www.reach.jo/Downloads/Legislative/Internet_Cafes_Regulations.pdf).
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., Article 7.
29. Ibid., Article 17.
30. See *ibid.*, Articles 6.3, 11.2.
31. Ibid.
32. Telecommunications Law no. 13, Article 58, 1995, [http://www.trc.gov.jo/Static\\_English/doc/Telecom%20Law%20Translation%20\(%20Final\).pdf](http://www.trc.gov.jo/Static_English/doc/Telecom%20Law%20Translation%20(%20Final).pdf).
33. Ibid., Article 79.
34. Ibid., Article 75.
35. Press and Publications Law no. 8, Article 5, 1998. See Jordan Press Association, "Journalism laws," <http://www.jpa.jo/all/english.htm>.
36. Ibid., Article 7(e).
37. Ibtisam Awadat, "Press & Publications Draft Law 2006 under spotlight: Journalistic freedoms in the balance," *The Star* 18(133), February 1–7 2007, <http://star.com.jo/viewnews/DetailNews.aspx?nid=3879>.
38. Reporters Without Borders, Internet Under Surveillance 2004: Jordan, [http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=10737](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=10737).