#Turn_around_and_Go_back

Internet in the Arab World
Introduction

The picture is not entirely obscure, as the acute violations of freedom of expression and freedom of the press and in particular citizen journalism and social networks, as it is evidence of the ongoing repression in the Arab world, it is also evidence that the defenders of democracy and freedom of expression did not surrender to this repression. As the severe repression is usually a reaction to strong oppositions.

The Arab Revolutions freed the Arab citizen from fear, from the Atlantic to the Gulf, and the Internet was one of the most important tools to demand change, especially among the Arab youth.

No one can forget the role of social networks in the revolutionary movement in the Arab region, and before that, the role of blogs. The number of Internet users in the Arab world has nearly multiplied three times during seven years, where the number was about 58 million users in 2009, while it is now approaching 157 million users.

The number of Facebook users in the Arab world, has multiplied more than six times during the same period, while the number was about 12 million in 2009, it became roughly 78 million users.

Which means that half the Arab Internet users are posting comments and publishing news on Facebook?

Therefore, it was natural for governments and Arab regimes, not only to support each other in the repression of opinion makers and critics, but also to stand up against the means that holds these views and criticisms, and while most of the traditional media, "TV Newspapers, radio," under strict government control, the online social networks are still more expansive and ready to support and embrace the views that are not desired by Arab governments.

Tunisia was under the rule of dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, competing with Saudi Arabia for the title of the most hostile regime to the Internet, and now, despite some difficulties experienced by the democratic path in Tunisia, it is the only Arab government that escaped from the Arab repression farm and became the most respectful in terms of freedom of expression and the freedom to use the Internet.
On the other hand, Kuwait was a model of respect for freedom of the press among all the Gulf states, yet it fell and became one of the most states that violates freedom of expression on the Internet, and the country that most prosecutes Twitter users specifically.

**Lef We Erga’a Tany (Turn around & go back)**

It is an Egyptian common colloquial expression that has a lot of meanings, such as “the road is blocked, choose another one”, “the mission is not yet accomplished and should be done”, or “to shout at someone to resume his/her role.”

The last meaning is what we mean by this title. So we ask the Internet to get back to resume its role, as the counterrevolutions and repressive governments haven’t changed yet, and democracy haven’t achieved yet. Thus, the Internet is one of the significant mean to confront repression, and support democracy. It responds to whoever asks for help, particularly the Arab governments are attempting to put a second wave of Arab revolutions down, to expand the circle of suppression, and then to censor the Internet as well as harass its users.

Most of the prisoners of conscience in the Arab world, except Egypt in this period, had been arrested for their posts on the Internet and social networks, whether for a tweet on Twitter, a group or a post on Facebook, or a video on YouTube!!!

For that reason, and the non-stop conflict- seemingly it wouldn’t end soon- we demand the Internet to turn around and go back to resume its role in achieving democracy.

Gamal Eid  
Executive Director  
Arabic Network for Human Rights Information
Acknowledgements

This is the fifth report on the freedom of Internet in the Arab world, by the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI). It tackles the freedom of Internet in 11 countries, in addition to numbers and statistics in 20 Arab countries, and the freedom of expression index in each country.

In addition to the researches that exerted efforts in this report, ANHRI thanks Maharat Foundation for its help in preparing and reviewing that part of Lebanon, to become a start to our cooperation that we hope it continues.

This report was compiled by technical expert “Mohamed Al-Taher”, lawyer “Karim AbdelRady”, researcher “Abdo Abdel-Aziz”, and translated by Ramy Rostom, programs coordinator, and Tereasa Shehata, translator at Translation Department.

Also, we can’t fail to thank the committee to monitor violations in Kuwait for its documentation and exerted efforts, the perseverance to highlight the victims of freedom of expression, particularly tweeps in Kuwait.
About This Report

This report endeavors to identify the developments or setback that the Internet in the Arab world witnessed during the period from mid-2012 to the beginning of 2015. It is released in continuation of a series of reports issued by ANHRI almost every two years and a half, 30 months, to identify the situation of freedom of Internet and respect for freedom of expression, and the Arab governments’ stances of it.

This report is the fifth since mid-2004. We monitor the situation of Internet in 11 Arab countries, distributed on all over the Arab region, in addition to statistics in connection with all the Arab countries.

Research Methodology:

The report relies on monitoring and documenting in order to identify the freedom of Internet in countries of the Arab world. 11 countries, where remarkable escalation of the Internet role was noticed and dealing with negatively and positively had been selected.

Tools:

Numerous tools have been used in this report, like:

- Making use of the reports issued by media organizations and various human rights institutions.
- Browsing websites of information and communications ministries along with ministries related to the Internet in each country.
- Making use of the files of cases that ANHRI working on in Egypt and Arab world.
- Using major search engines like Google & Yahoo, and the accurate and advanced search techniques.
- Receiving Testimonies and information from journalists and specialized activists.
- Using the monitoring and documenting of ANHRI’s Research Department.

Problems we faced:

The process of monitoring and documenting the situation of Internet in each country was not easy. That started by the lack of references and series studies that we can rely on, in addition to all these questions that need answer, like:

1- The magnitude of material that could give credibility to the report?
2- Do we target evaluation or trials for governments, or we endeavor to introduce the reality as its and highlight it?
3- Why these countries were precisely chosen?
4- Do we mainly search for the violations or try to monitor what is happening?
5- Do we have the right to evaluate each country?

Additionally, there were some qualitative problems, like:
1- Lack of credibility concerning statements released by many Arab governmental officials about the magnitude of achievements, and giving wrong numbers such as, “telephone numbers, justices of laws, or networks infrastructure.”
2- Lack of information and accurate statistics regarding the number of Internet users, and their serious inconsistencies.
3- The exaggerated description of the violation by some activists, overlooking some serious attempts to improve the ICT sector.
4- The tacit acceptance that a large segment of Arab citizens have concerning the principle of acceptance blocking and confiscating the dissenting views, and satisfaction with the criminal trials of opinion holders.

Numbers & Statistics:

It was the most difficult part of this report, which is monitoring the numbers and finding estimates and statistics close to the reality, particularly under the inconsistencies and differences among sources. Therefore, we didn’t rely on a certain source, rather we resorted to several comparisons between numbers and estimates of media institutions, specialized ministries in each country, International Telecommunication Union, and definitely our previous reports, in addition to social networking websites and their officials’ statements; like Facebook, Twitter and some smartphones users as well as specialized reports.

We rely on that way since more than ten years, when we started to prepare this series of report. And because our reports and statistics are always correct, we are deemed the most accurate and credible, till proving otherwise.

The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information
## Internet, Facebook & Twitter Users

### In the Arab World

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population by Millions</th>
<th>Number of Internet Users</th>
<th>Number of Facebook Users</th>
<th>Number of Twitter Users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>86 million</td>
<td>48 million</td>
<td>24 million</td>
<td>4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>31 million</td>
<td>19.6 million</td>
<td>8.5 million</td>
<td>7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>8.3 million</td>
<td>3 million</td>
<td>1.5 million</td>
<td>1.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>4 million</td>
<td>3 million</td>
<td>2.2 million</td>
<td>250 thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>2.3 million</td>
<td>1.85 million</td>
<td>1.4 million</td>
<td>500 thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>1.5 million</td>
<td>1.3 million</td>
<td>650 thousand</td>
<td>320 thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>11 million</td>
<td>5.8 million</td>
<td>4.4 million</td>
<td>110 thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>34 million</td>
<td>20.5 million</td>
<td>8 million</td>
<td>100 thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>39.4 million</td>
<td>8.5 million</td>
<td>5 million</td>
<td>100 thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>6.7 million</td>
<td>1.7 million</td>
<td>900 thousand</td>
<td>50 thousand</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Northern” Sudan</td>
<td>36 million</td>
<td>10 million</td>
<td>2.2 million</td>
<td>50 thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>10.3 million</td>
<td>250 thousand</td>
<td>180 thousand</td>
<td>5 thousand users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>4 million</td>
<td>Half a million</td>
<td>250 thousand</td>
<td>3,500 users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>27 million</td>
<td>6.2 million</td>
<td>2.2 million</td>
<td>75 thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>9.2 million</td>
<td>8 million</td>
<td>5 million</td>
<td>2.2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>4 million</td>
<td>3.3 million</td>
<td>1.1 million</td>
<td>120 thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>6.8 million</td>
<td>5.7 million</td>
<td>2.8 million</td>
<td>150 thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>33.8 million</td>
<td>3.5 million</td>
<td>2.5 million</td>
<td>75 thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>4.2 million</td>
<td>2.8 million</td>
<td>2 million</td>
<td>100 thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria*</td>
<td>20 million</td>
<td>4 million</td>
<td>3 million</td>
<td>150 thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>375 million</strong></td>
<td><strong>157.5 million</strong></td>
<td><strong>77.78 million</strong></td>
<td><strong>16.86 million</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Syrian population is around 24 million inhabitants, but there are around 4 million refugees, in addition to cutting the electricity in many Syrian cities which has affected Internet services.*
Internet Freedom Index
Where 100 is the best & 0 is the worst
Evaluation criteria of Internet Freedom:

1- Price of the service
2- Infrastructure of telecommunication
3- The laws are in accordance with the fundamental standards of freedom of expression
4- Respecting freedom of expression and the right to exchange information in the country
5- Blocking websites
6- Arresting opinion makers
7- The type of trials in freedom of expression on the internet cases “civil or criminal”
8- Protection of privacy
9- Encouraging and supporting Arabic content
10- Facilitating Internet access
Jordan

Overview

Resident Population around 6.9 million inhabitants

Electronic press in the Kingdom of Jordan is a phenomenon worthy of in-depth study and the reasons for behind that is its strength and its success in passing the legal and administrative obstacles, there are about 400 electronic news websites on the Internet, out of which about 200 websites have been licensed, practicing journalism and making money from advertising, run by journalists who did not find a place under the restrictions on freedom of the printed press.

However, the Jordanian government, instead of encouraging the popular press on the Internet, it is narrowing it down, and imposing restrictions that were not customary, such as, blocking websites and trying to force the websites managers to license, making it resemble the Gulf states, who have technology and tremendous potential, but with limitations and restrictions on who uses it to demand freedom and democracy.

ICT Sector

Kingdom of Jordan has an infrastructure on a high degree of sophistication in the telecommunications sector, which is constantly being updated and expanded.

Telecommunications services in Jordan have undergone several stages of development in line with global trade agreement, the Kingdom has sought to transform the telecommunications sector into a company and sold it in 2008, becoming France Telecom owns 51% of the company's shares, as well as stakes distributed between the General Organization for Social Security, Noor Financial Investment, and the armed forces and security services, and the remaining 7% of the shares for trading on the Amman Stock Exchange.
The first general telecommunications license was awarded to the Bahraini Jordanian Company for Technology and Communications Batelco - Jordan to provide land line phone services.

In terms of mobile phone services, the Jordanian government has sought to encourage investment in telecommunications projects and granted the first license to the company of Jordan for Mobile Telephone Services Fastlink, Jordan’s Petra for Mobile Communications MobileCom, to provide mobile phone service in the Kingdom.

The Jordanian government finally granted Orange the license to provide third-generation 3G mobile phone services in the Kingdom in 2009.

According to the latest Telecommunications Regulatory Commission statistics the number of land line phone subscribers has reached in the last quarter of 2014, 242,976 for home use, and 132,507 for commercial activity, 5%, while the number of mobile phone users exceeded 11 million users at the beginning of 2015.

The number of Internet users in December 2014 was about 5.7 million users which puts Jordan in a very high position in the field of Internet usage, both on the Arab and international levels, compared to the number of the population.

**The Legislative Environment**

The Jordanian authorities continued to impose new restrictions on the freedom to use the Internet, using laws that dates back to the British occupation of the kingdom or by using new amendments made to the old laws to accommodate developments in technology.

The articles used in this regard are the articles on insulting the king, or the monarchy, or other institution, or religion, and the "Press and Publications Law," or "Information Systems Crimes" law issued in 2010.

Or anti-terrorism amendments, all these laws give the Jordanian authorities wide powers to monitor the press, the media, whether broadcasted or online, where the authorities have blocked some news websites on the Internet.

In June 2014, Jordan passed amendments to the Anti-terrorism Act of 2006, which include the expansion of the definition of terrorism to include acts such as disturbing the links Jordan with a foreign country, a charge that already exists in Article 118 of the Jordanian Penal Code and used periodically to punish the peaceful criticism of foreign countries or rulers.

In January 2014, the government amended the law of the State Security Court in order to limit its jurisdiction to include only crimes of terrorism, espionage, treason, counterfeiting and drugs, but because the Penal Code contains loose phrases in the definition of terrorism offenses, the State Security Court was still able to prosecute online activists.

Blogs and Social Networks:

The numerous restrictions imposed by the Jordanian authorities that prompted many websites to use social networking websites, and Facebook comes top of the list of most commonly used websites, where the number of users is about 2.8 million users in February 2015, while YouTube comes second. As for Twitter and blog spot, Twitter has a low number of users relatively, estimated at about 150,000 users.

Security Prosecution

Zaki Bani Arshid

Jordan's state security court ruled on February 15, 2015, sentenced Zaki Bani Arshid to a year and a half in prison. On charges of "disturbing relationship with a sister nation" which is the UAE.

The Jordanian authorities have arrested Zaki Bani Arshid late in the night of Thursday, November 20, 2014, on the orders of the State Security Prosecution after an article written by Bani Arshid appeared in a number of websites and social networking sites criticizing the
United Arab Emirates government, after the classification of the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization.

Bani Arshid was on his way to the airport to travel to participate in the European dialogue in Zurich when he was stopped by the security forces, and taken to the General Intelligence Department then he was put in Jweida prison in Amman.2

**Youssef Al-Samady**

On Monday 22 september, 2014 morning, activist "Youssef Arandas Al-Samady" was arrested by Ajloun police and then he was transfered to the Prosecutor of the Ajloun, which referred his case to a state security court by the new Anti-Terrorism law for publishing an invitation to his page on Facebook "for the people of Ajloun city not to pray with King Abdullah II on Friday, Samadi stressed that "the account was infiltrated by hackers for a while".

**Mohammed Saeed Bakr**

The Military Commission of the State Security Court on Monday, February 2, 2015, decided to release Mohammed Saeed Bakar Abu Jaafar, after the expiry of his sentence, his charge was amended from incitement on the system to "being misbehaved".

**Journalist Nidal al-Faraena and Journalist Amjad Mala**

The security forces stormed the office of "Jafra news" website on 16 September, 2013 and arrested journalist "Nidal al-Faraena" and the editor in chief of the website journalist "Amjad Mala", they were detained for 14 days and charged with "disturbing the good relations with a sister nation" and "disseminating false news", the nation is Qatar, and this was because of posting a video on the website. They were both released on bail on December 31.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2014/11/141120_jordan_brotherhood_arrest
Basel Akour

Basel Akour, the editor of 'Go 24' was summoned by the court on charges of insults, and after a brief period of applying for a license, against the backdrop of mocking an MP in the allied parliament with the government, that MP has accused Akour and other journalists of putting pressure on the government by seeking foreign support to lift the ban on the website. The case is still being reviewed by the judiciary.

Website Blocking

The Jordanian government seeks to impose absolute control over the web and over the information published on it by means of two conditions

these two conditions are: registration; any website must obtain a permission form the government, and the website must have an editor in chief who must be a member of the journalists syndicate for at least 4 years, which led to the blocking of 300 websites during 2013.

Blocking 9 news websites

On 29 June, 2014 the Media Commission asked telecom companies to block 9 news websites which are: "Al-Raya News Agency", "Rima Gor", "Shihan Go", "Khabar Go", "Al-Moharer Agency", "Sondos", "Oyoun Al-Balad News Agency", and "Khabar", the decision was made according to the provisions of the new anti-terrorism Jordanian law, which was implemented starting 1 June, 2014.

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3 http://anhri.net/?p=97801

4 http://openarab.net/?p=5618
Blocking the website (7iber.org)

Media Commission has asked the telecom companies to block the mirror site for (7iber.org), after a year of blocking the website (7iber.com), along with approximately 300 other sites according to the amended Press and Publications Law, although the site has been working seven years ago and registered since 2009 with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

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5 [https://www.facebook.com/notes/10152158911817344/](https://www.facebook.com/notes/10152158911817344/)
Bahrain

Overview

Population: 1.5 million approx.

Being jailed is not only what you may face if you protested to demand reform, or exercised your right to the freedom of expression on Twitter or Facebook; exactly like what has transpired to human rights defender Nabeel Rajab with scores of Bahraini youth; the matter also may reach revoking your citizenship, like rights defender and blogger “Ali Abulemam” and roughly other 70 Bahraini citizens, whom the government decided to strip them of their citizenship.

Justice in Bahrain is not similar to its counterparts in countries of the world. It is blind that doesn’t see the victim or offender. Rather, it sees, differentiate and collaborate for the pro-authority fellows. Although those might be accused of torture, they do injustice to the opposition or critics, even if their crimes are just a tweet on Twitter or a critical post on Facebook.

And between the Saudi military forces deployed in Bahrain under the name “Peninsula Shield Force”, or the police men- many of them are naturalized Pakistanis or Indians-, or judges that were carefully selected to use justice to serve the authority, this small kingdom, which is under the Saudi political and paramilitary control, becomes one of the prominent anti-freedom of expression countries, particularly on the Internet.

ICT Sector

By the end of 2014’s third quarter, the mobile phones’ subscribers in Bahrain amounted to 2.4 million; achieving 9% increase compared to 2013, and 183% penetration rate.

The year 2014 witnessed a remarkable decline in prices of broadband services for both of individuals and small companies. This decline came due to the decision of Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), which was made in March 2014, to free the broadband services sector that is provided to both above mentioned subscribers.
There are about 250,000 land lines; with a 4.2% decline rate compared to the number of land lines in 2012, according to a most recent survey by TRA. Moreover, a number of wired land lines services continued to decline throughout 2013.

The decline in land line services in 2013 is likely due to the transition to mobile phones that are becoming popular.

Number of Internet users in Bahrain reached 1.3 million approx. in January 2015, compared to 700,000 users in mid-2012. Apart from the right to Internet, that number places Bahrain in an advanced rank in connection with the speed and widespread use of the Internet, not only in the Arab world, but globally.

As for the number of Facebook users in Bahrain, they amounted to roughly 650,000 ones by the end of 2014. To illustrate, 50% of Internet users in Bahrain use Facebook, while number of tweeps on micro-blogging site Twitter are 320,000 approximately.

Legal & Legislative Environments of ICT Sector & the Internet:

Social networking Websites & Blogs

Since 2009, the communications companies and Internet service providers have been seeking to tighten their control, and to block websites; in implementation of the instructions of Shaikha Mai bint Mohammed Al Khalifa- Minister of Information and Culture- who ordered to reach creative ways so as not to allow users to access to the blocked sites. Reportedly, the minister said that the government is just concerned over the “public morality”!!

However, most of the blocked websites in Bahrain are Shiite, political, human rights, and oppositional ones!

The matter wasn’t only about blocking, it reached the legislation and laws that mainly target Internet users, like the law no. 60/2014 concerning the cybercrimes, which came into effect from September 2014; including Article 24 that stipulates deterrent and harsh punishments for what is deemed insulting by Bahraini government. This, accordingly, is consistent with the vision of Sameera Ragab, Bahraini Information Minister, when she said: “It is important to make use of the international efforts that endeavor to regulate the e-media in
order to reduce the pressure on the region’s countries, on the pretext of the freedom of expression and opinion, which is misused for imposing certain points of views.”

**Blocking Websites**

*Ministry for Communications Blocks 70 Websites*

The State Ministry for Communication Affairs, on 3 August 2013, issued a list contains 70 websites to be blocked in Bahrain. The ministry has mentioned that the reason behind this block is their violation of the conditions and specifications approved in 2002. Moreover, they were deemed inciting sectarian terrorism. The list referred only to 3 of 70 websites to be blocked; they are the Lebanese website of Almanar, olamaa.net, and website of 14 February Revolution Youth Coalition. Meanwhile, the list didn’t mention the other websites, which most of them were political and human rights ones.

**Examples of Security & Judicial Prosecutions**

*Ali AlMearaj... 2 Years & a Half for a Blog*

On April 8, 2014, Bahraini judiciary sentenced blogger “Ali AlMearaj” to 2 years and a half in prison because of his criticism of governmental practices against “Luluwat Awal” blog.

In its indictment, the prosecution said AlMearaj had insulted the king by one of the public mean, and disturbed others through deliberate using of wired and wireless communication devices.

*Arrests & Harsh Sentences against 4 Bloggers & Internet Activists*

Bahraini authorities, on 17 October 2012, arrested 4 bloggers and accused them of insulting the king on account of a number of tweets, in which they demanded rapid political and economic reforms in Bahrain. The bloggers are Abdulla Al-Hashimi, Ali Alhaiki, Ali Mohamed, and Suliman Abdullah.

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6 Noonpost website in October 2014, [http://www.noonpost.net/content/4009](http://www.noonpost.net/content/4009), & visited on 3 February 2015.
Kid “Faisal AlShawfa”

The Criminal Court, on 25 June 2013, sentenced a child named “Faisal AlShawfa” to one year over charges of insulting the king, and undermining the country’s reputation through a tweet on the micro-blogging site of Twitter.

Noteworthy, Faisal, 17 years old, is a secondary-school student, and he was arrested from his house on March 12, 2013. He was detained for two months and then he was released on bail of 100 dinar.

Jaffar Al Dimistani

Forces of secret police, at dawn of 20 June 2013, stormed the house of “Jaffar Al Dimistani” and kidnapped him because of posting a number of tweets about torture in Bahraini prisons. On June 19, 2013, Al Dimistani published a tweet, which was the last prior to his arrest. This tweet was about his father who was beaten by mallets on his lower part of his back, leading to fracture in his tailbone.

Rights Activist Nabeel Rajab

A Bahraini Court, on January 20, 2015, sentenced prominent human rights defender “Nabeel Rajab” over an accusation of insulting the army and public institutions against the backdrop of a reply to a tweet on Twitter last year, in which he wrote that most of those who belong to hard-line terrorist organizations came mainly from military institutions.

In a separate case, the Bahraini judiciary sentenced head of Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), Nabeel Rajab, to two years in prison over a charge of participating in unlicensed protests, in addition to his calls for the protests via Twitter, dated 11 December, 2012.

The prominent activist had sustained the worst kinds of racial discrimination, as well as physical and psychological torture, in addition to being prevented from calling his family. Moreover, the government turned down all the calls and demands to his early release, even in cases stipulated by the law.
Lawyer Mahdi Albasri

Supreme Appeal Court in Bahrain, on 3 July, 2013, upheld the verdict returned against lawyer “Mahdi AlBasri” to be imprisoned for one year over an accusation of insulting the king for a tweet on Twitter. Accordingly, he was arrested on March 11, 2013, from his house in Karamah town.

One Year Prison Sentence on 4 Internet Activists

A Bahraini court, on May 15, 2013, sentenced 5 bloggers to one year in prison over an accusation of insulting the king of Bahrain on account of the tweets on Twitter, according to Article 214 of Bahrain Panel Code that criminalizes offending the emir of the country [the King], the national flag or emblem”.

On March 12, 2013, the security forces arrested lawyer “Mahdi AlBasri”, 25 years old, after storming his house in Karana, north of Bahrain; Mahmoud Abdel-Maguid Abdullah Al-Gamri, 34 years old; Hassan Al-Abdli Eissa, 33 years old; and Mohsen Al-Abdli Eissa, 26 years old. Later on, the forces arrested Ammar Mekki Mohamed Al-Ali, 36 years old.

Activist “Sayed Youssef AlMuhafza”

Bahraini security forces, on 17 December 2012, arrested activist “Sayed Youssef AlMuhafza”, monitoring and following up official at Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), over an accusation of posting false news about the state on Twitter, while he was covering incidents in the Bahraini capital of Manama in December. The activist was kept on remand until he was released on January 17, 2013, with continuing his trial.
Saudi Arabia

Overview

Population: 31 Million People

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is in complete contradiction in relation to providing communications and Internet services and developing the infrastructure efficiency on one hand, and the attempts to censor the contents that its citizens endeavor to publish on the Internet on the other.

Perhaps the government’s reactions to the international criticism made due to the sentence against activist Raef Badawi to 1000 lashes and 10-year in prison for criticizing The Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice - CPVPV via the Internet, illustrates the government’s unwillingness to accept international criticisms.

A diplomatic crisis between Saudi Arabia and Sweden has erupted following comments by the Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom in February 2015 over the judgment issued against Saudi activist “Raef Badawi”.

In response to the desire and pressure of Saudi Arabia’s delegate to the League of Arab Nations, the Swedish Foreign Minister’s speech at the opening session of the Arab Foreign Ministers meeting in Cairo, which was held on 9 March 2015, had been canceled following the arrival of Margot Wallstorm one day prior to the meeting. As she was responding to the invitation she received from the Arab League to honor her government’s initiative to recognize the Palestinian state.

However, the crisis has been cemented when Sweden ended an arms agreement with Saudi Arabia.

ICT Sector

A most recent report of performance indicators for the ICT sector issued by the Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) in Saudi Arabia referred that the increase in the total subscriptions to broadband services over mobile networks
continued to roughly 20.7 million subscriptions in the second quarter of 2014. Also, the growing prevalence of smart phones has led to a significant rise in the number of users.

The number of users of landline phones is about 4.7 million, including 3.3 million lines in houses, while the number of subscribers to the broadband Internet service reached 3.18 millions in the second quarter of 2014.

The Internet penetration is on the rise at high rates in the recent period where the estimated number of Internet users in KSA is about 19.6 million users, according to press statements by CITC’s Governor “Abdullah Al-Darrab.”

The Internet in Saudi Arabia has witnessed many developmental stages.

To illustrate, the cabinet issued Resolution No. (163) dated March 3, 1997, which entrusted the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST), then, with introducing the Internet service to the Kingdom. The day 15 December in 1998 was the first to witness the actual start of the online service.

Saudi Arabia has seen the largest restructuring of Internet service by issuing cabinet decision No. 229 on 27 September 2004, to distribute online service tasks on several points; and under this decision, the CITC assumed the task to oversee and regulate this service, and to grant licenses to the companies to provide online service. In addition, it assumed the supervisory tasks for filtering service, and domain registration service too. While the Standing Committee for Security develops the user controls, and a list of sites that could be blocked in the kingdom. The CITC has continued to provide the link service to the Internet to the academic and research bodies and some government agencies.

The supervisory missions were already transferred to the blocking service, and implementation of security controls and Saudi domain registration service to the CITC in November 2006.

There are three companies that provide the internet services in Saudi Arabia, They are Saudi Telecom Company, Integrated Telecom Company (ITC), and Bayanat Al Oula for Network Services.
The Legal Environment

Over and over again, the light that is made by the scientific progress in the field of internet and communications in KSA fades. Negatively, the Kingdom used all the technological and legislative possibilities to tighten its grip on the cyberspace, and to prevent users from interacting with the world.

The Kingdom wasn’t only content with the cybercrime law that was passed on 26 March 2007, which has made the transfer of any content to the Internet is a non-guaranteed consequences risk, and also the executive regulation of e-publishing issued by the Ministry of Culture didn’t satisfy its desire to ban. Moreover, it attempts to oblige every blog, forum or site owner to register at the Ministry of Culture & Information so as to obtain a license for their activity. It also approved a number of sanctions against the websites’ owners who are not registered or violated the e-publishing regulation. Such a matter has narrowed the cyberspace in the face of its users, especially with the continual policy of indiscriminate blocking of Saudi users’ websites.

The month of February in 2014 witnessed the issuance of the new anti-terrorism law and a series of related royal decrees. Those, consequently, formed a legal enclosure that in fact criminalizes all forms of thought and expression, deeming them as terrorist acts. Since this law was passed and by its harsh sentences, the space available to freedom of opinion and expression in the Kingdom has become very narrow.

The definition of terrorism in the first article of the law allows for the possibility of abuse of power, whereas the definition includes all acts that aim directly or indirectly to breach public order, or to destabilize the security of society and the stability of the state, or to endanger national unity, or to disable the Basic Law or some of its articles, or to harm the reputation of the state or its position.

These are vague definitions by which many human rights defenders and Internet activists had been previously accused. The law doesn’t use a specific definition of breach of public order and doesn’t determine what are the acts, which it considers harming the reputation of the state or its position.
The third article of the law considers the political opposition to be one of the terrorism crimes, while the fifth article allows the investigation body to suspend the accused for a full year. As for the sixteenth article, it gives the Minister of Interior or his authorized representative the right to enter homes and offices to inspect and arrest any person over any charges related to the crime of terrorism without a warrant.

Social Networking Websites & Blogs

The sites of Google (Google.com), YouTube (Youtube.com), Facebook (Facebook.com) and Twitter (Twitter.com) top the list of most visited sites by Saudi Arabia's population.

The social networking sites became the most visited ones, reflecting the Saudis’ interest in them. The number of Twitter users in the kingdom amounted to about 7 million, which makes it the second rank in subscriptions; while Facebook users reached approximately 8.5 millions in January 2015.

It is expected that Twitter will continue to spread among the population of Saudi Arabia, which makes it vulnerable to attacks from conservatives, especially the Mufti of Saudi Arabia has called it a site for "all evil and scourge" and a source for “lies and falsehoods.”

Following America and Brazil, Saudi Arabia came in third place globally concerning the views of YouTube in one day. The number of views in one day in KSA reached 90 million views.

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7 France 24 website on 12 October 2014 [http://www.france24.com/ar/20141021-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D8%A2%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B2-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%8A%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A/Visited](http://www.france24.com/ar/20141021-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D8%A2%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B2-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%8A%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A/Visited) on 6 February 2015

8 [http://alhayat.com/Articles/1157060/-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%83%D8%AB%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%8A%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%8B-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9](http://alhayat.com/Articles/1157060/-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%83%D8%AB%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%8A%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%8B-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9)
Meanwhile, the popularity of blogs has declined dramatically, as dealing with social networking sites is easier and faster, in addition to their popularity among citizens.

The social networking sites have a dramatic role in speaking out the human rights violation in the kingdom, as the rights defenders use Twitter and Facebook to publish images of torture and other violations, and to organize pro-campaigns.

**Examples of Security & Judicial Prosecutions**

**Raef Badawi**

On May 7, 2014, the Criminal Court sentenced human rights activist “Raef Badawi” to 10 years in prison, 1000 lashes, and a 1 million Saudi Riyal fine over an accusation of adopting liberal thought and insulting Islam. His liberal website was also blocked, which was the reason for the harsh prosecution he had faced.

This case dates back to 2012, when Saudi authorities arrested Badawi over a charge of disobeying his parents, which was thereafter detected as a trap to arrest him in a semi-legal manner. The following day to his arrest, he was referred to the court on charges of breaching the Saudi regime and setting up a website that harms public order and helps others to do so. The prosecution has cited some of his tweets.

Markedly, Badawi was brought to trial before the Supreme Court on an apostasy charge that is punishable by the death penalty according to Saudi Law. Nonetheless, the court found him not guilty and ordered his referral to the Criminal Court in Jeddah, which modified the sentence to 7 years and 600 lashes over the accusation of insulting Islam and criticizing the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (CPVPV). On the other hand, the prosecution has found the verdict is not deterrent, and appealed it before a new circuit, which returned its final verdict of 10 years in prison, 1000 lashes and a 1 million Saudi Riyal fine.
Waleed Abu Al-Khir

The Saudi Court of Appeal, in February 2015, sentenced Saudi activist Waleed Abu Al-Khir, who was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, to 15 years in prison.

The Criminal Court in Jeddah carried Waleed Abu Al-Khir a 15-year in prison sentence and a 200,000 Saudi Riyal fine over the charges of delegitimizing the state, insulting public order in the state, stirring up public opinion, downgrading and insulting the judicial authorities, publicly condemning the Shariah judiciary, defaming the kingdom by making international organizations hostile to it, and spreading undocumented data that harms the kingdom’s reputation. Certainly, some of his tweets on Twitter criticizing the absence of freedoms and rule of law have been used as evidence against him.

Accordingly, Waleed has refused to recognize the trial because it significantly depended on the recently-passed anti-terror law. Thus, Waleed has become the first human rights activist and politician to be put on trial in virtue of this law.

Mikhlif Al-Shammari

On 3 November 2014, The Specialized Criminal Court in Khobar city sentenced human rights activist Mikhlif Al-Shammari to 2 years in prison and 200 lashes over the accusation of hosting a dinner banquet, on March 2, 2012, following his release and inviting reformers to it without clearance.

A few weeks after being summoned to the General Intelligence Department on September 22, 2014, the verdict against Al-Shammari was returned. Furthermore, he was forced to sign a pledge to deactivate his account on Twitter within 48 hours.

The Criminal Court in Jeddah, during its hearing convened on 17 June 2013, carried Al-Shammari a 5-year sentence, travel ban, and inhibition of writing in newspapers or on the Internet. In addition, he was banned from appearing or speaking on media outlets or radio. This was due to posting a video on YouTube.
**Saad Al-Shammri**

Saudi authorities in October 2014 arrested female lawyer and activist “Saad Al-Shammri” because of her tweets on Twitter against religious and tribal leaders. These tweets have been deemed insulting to Islam.

Al-Shammri spent 90 days in a women prison in Jeddah, and she was released after signing a pledge to reduce her activity.

**Fawzan Al-Harbi**

The Criminal Court in Riyadh, on June 25, 2014, sentenced activist Fawzan Al-Harbi to 7 years in prison and prevented him from travelling throughout that period, in addition to precluding him from posting on the social networking sites.

Among the charges pressed against him were preparing, keeping and publishing data that could disturb public order, as he was trialed in virtue of Article 3 of Cybercrime Law that was passed on 26 March 2007, inciting to disobey the ruler by calling for protests, signing statements that stir up public opinion against authorities, describing Saudi regime as a police state, and joining an unlicensed association, “Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association”.

**Mohammed Al-Enazi**

On April 25, 2014, the Saudi judiciary issued a harsh judgment on journalist “Mohammed Al-Enazi”. He was sentenced to 3 months in prison and 100 lashes, and also he was banned from using Twitter for a similar period in view of a tweet on the social networking website “Twitter”, in which he lashed out head of Al-Hilal Saudi Club, Abdul Rahman Bin Saeed.
Sudan

Overview
Population in Sudan: 36 million approx.
Population in South Sudan: 11.5 million approx.

The Sudanese authorities have greatly imposed their security grip over the traditional media outlets, but the Internet managed to escape that grip to allow more openness to the freedom of expression.

The country witnessed a widespread uprising at the end of 2013, calling for deposing President Omar al-Bashir as well as economic reforms, under blackout by the traditional media outlets after the security bodies imposed significant restrictions to the extent that holding meetings with editors-in-chief to inform them not to publish any news about these protests, and to dismiss whoever doesn’t comply with the security instructions.

That period, the Internet was the only gate for Sudanese people to publish the news of their uprising, images and videos about what was transpiring, so that the whole world could watch the excessive violence on their protests.

ICT Sector in Sudan

Inflation in Sudan, the bad economic conditions, and high prices significantly influenced the telecommunications and Internet sector, as the Internet services prices have been risen; despite the Internet users’ ongoing complaint of the slow and poor quality service.

However, the increase in number of Internet users in the country did not stop. The number of Internet users until March 2015 reached about 10 million users, according to ANHRI’s estimates, while the number until the end of 2013 was roughly 8 million users9; representing 22% of population approximately. Their number in 2012, however, was 6 million users, pursuant to ANHRI’s report, while in 2000, their

9 “internetworldstats” Website
http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm
number was estimated 30,000 thousand. Both of Sudatel Company and Canar Telecom Company provide the landline services in Sudan.

The Internet users in Sudan widely depend on the services of mobile phones companies. Owing to the decline of landline users, the users in Sudan depend on the “USB Internet” services in a dramatic way, or they resort to browsing the Internet via their mobile phones. The number of mobile phone users amounted to more than 27 million, by the end of 2014; while they were 22 million users in 2011, according to ANHRI.

There are three companies that provide the mobile phone services. The three companies are topped by "Zain" company, and then the "Sudani" and the "MTN" company.

**Legal Environment**

Early in 2015, Sudan passed a law under the name of “Freedom of Information Law”. Apparently, its name aims to guarantee and regulate the right to information, but in its essence can be called “withholding information law”. Or as it is being seen by journalists and experts, it is legislation that aims to legalize withholding information. The law consists of 7 chapters and 12 articles that could impede the access to information and not vice-versa. The law’s most important restriction is that it makes the information seeker waits for 45 days to get them. Moreover, this law contradicts other several Sudanese laws, such as the cybercrime law, and National Security Law that some of its articles have the phrase “unless it is not protected by another legislation” before making the information available. This matter empties the law of its tenor and makes the information withheld in virtue of other laws remain as it is without access. Also, the law overlooked to determine which bodies that have the right to classify the information according to its secrecy, or even the criteria on which the classification could depend.

What’s more, the legislative environment to regulate the freedom of expression, ICT sector, or the Internet in Sudan didn’t witness any amendments during the period from June 2012 to March 2015. Both of the Criminal Code in Sudan and Press and Publications Act of 2009 regulate the freedom of expression. On the other hand, the Cybercrime Law of 2007 regulates the ICT sector, and also Electronic
Transactions Act regulates the ICT sector through means of communication and modern technologies.

**Social Networking Websites & Blogs:**

Recently, the social networks in Sudan have been facing severe attack, especially "Facebook", which is the most prominent network among Internet users in the Arab world in general and in Sudan, too. Many Fatwas (religious advisory opinions) have been issued to incite against the site, in addition to the chat application of "WhatsApp". This attack transpired especially after the important role played by social networks in spreading the news of protests taking place in Sudan from time to time, and many remarks published and attributed to Sudanese officials, whom threatened to withhold social networks within the Sudanese border.

In other words, that attack demonstrates the growing role of social networks in Sudan as a margin to express their opinion and an alternative source of information, whereas the Internet activists in Sudan were greatly depending on blogs during certain time. However, the great space to publish news that the social networks give, has made it escalates significantly to become side by side with blogs concerning publishing and dissenting opinions and facts that government seeks to hide.

In September 2013, mass protests staged in Sudan due to the inflation, high prices, and bad living conditions in the country. Hence, the Sudanese authorities dealt with those protests by excessive violence; leaving 200 people dead, according to unofficial statistics. Also, about 600 persons were arrested, according to Sudanese security body. Nonetheless, the magnitude of arrests was estimated thousands by activists and dissidents. With the escalation of those protests, Sudanese security bodies suspended numerous oppositional writers, and confiscated some independent newspapers, and then they held meetings with the editors-in-chief to impose censorship on them and to prevent them from publishing news about the protests; warning them of confiscation in case of violating the instructions. At that time, however, the Internet activists didn’t stand cross-handed and launched this hashtag “#Sudan_protests”, whereas the Internet managed to escape the security grip, under that censorship as well as the blackout
attempts. The activists published news, images and videos on social networks and YouTube.

The Sudanese bloggers are united under a network called “Unlimited Sudanese Bloggers” http://sdunlimitedbloggers.blogspot.com.

This network provides a guide to Sudanese blogs: http://blogfromsudan.blogspot.com.

Under the restriction on traditional media outlets, most of journalists and media professionals, who have critical opinions, have blogs or accounts on the social networks by which they can publish what couldn’t be published on the traditional media outlets, where they work.

The number of Facebook users in Sudan until November 2014 reached about 2.2 million, while they were less than a million until 2012; representing a great increase. ANHRI believes that this increase is due to the crackdown on traditional media outlets.

On the other hand, the number of Facebook users in South Sudan until February 2015 amounted to 130,000.

At the beginning of 2015, the number of Twitter users reached 50,000 users.

Owing to the growing increase in number of Facebook and Twitter users in Sudan, Telecommunications Regulatory Authority in Sudan started to search for a mechanism in order to curb them, and to include to the traditional media outlets. Meanwhile, Facebook board announced that it received demands from Sudan in 2014 to disclose some information about certain users. However, the board hasn’t revealed the number of these demands, and it didn’t respond to the government’s demands.

**Internet Censorship**

Sudan is one of the most Arab countries that imposes censorship on the Internet, and has history in blocking websites. The National Communications Authority also assigned a unit to block the websites in order to ward off risks, according to their description. The authority says 95% of the blocked websites are pornographic ones.
On its website, the authority designed an application to demand blocking any websites through filling in that application. http://www.ntc.gov.sd/index.php/ar/blocking-ar-men

Such a matter reveals Sudan’s blocking tactic. It is not only sufficed with the servant specialized in blocking affairs, it allows any citizen to block a website through sending an email or filling in the aforementioned application.

Sudan also established a unit in 2011 and called it "electronic jihad" to spy on the Internet and communications.

The Sudanese government uses techniques of an Italian company to spy on its citizens via a program called RCS that allows spying on the Internet users.10

**Blocking Websites**

**Websites Blocked by the Government:**

- In June 2012, Sudanese authorities blocked 3 websites of independent newspapers because of their political trend. These websites are Alrakoba, Hurriyat Sudan, and Sudanese Online.

- In September 2012, Sudan authorities blocked “YouTube” website because of posting a video deemed insulting to the Prophet Muhammad.

**Security Prosecutions of Internet Activists:**

On June 26, 2012, the Sudanese security bodies arrested female blogger and activist “Maha AlSenousi” from her house, following the raid on it. The arrest was due to her views concerning protests staged in Sudan at that time. The following day, he was released after interrogating her.

In mid-October, 2013, Sudanese security forces at Khartoum International Airport stopped Mohamed Hashim, oppositional student activist and deputy general coordinator of Sudanese Tamord campaign, and seized his passport during his return from Cairo. The activist was interrogated over his role in Tamord campaign, and his

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10Journalist Lamia Al-Geli’s blog published a topic entitled “Sudan, Digital Rights & Further Block Threats” http://goo.gl/Y0HhWh

(Last visit: 17 October 2014)
views on Facebook. Then, he was referred to National Security and Intelligence Services.
Kuwait

Overview

Population: 3.8 million people approx.

Even though Kuwait, a few years ago no more than hand fingers, was at the forefront of Arab countries in field of press freedom, it has been witnessing a dramatic setback since 2009. Eventually and after the Arab revolutions, it replaced its position by a lead of different type. To be accurate, it is not one lead, they rather are two:

The first is concerning the prosecution of Twitter’s tweeps and bringing them to criminal trials, some 280 cases throughout 2013-2014. The second is about the cases of insulting the Emir, which reached roughly 160 cases during the last three years. Most of these cases are due to tweets on Twitter, while some of them are due to speeches and columns. Therefore, this number is deemed a new Arab record exceeds its previous that was set by Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, as the number of cases during his 42-year rule amounted to 45 ones.

ICT Sector

The number of Internet users in Kuwait is roughly 3 million ones, representing a great increase, whereas in 2004 their number was approx. 600,000. In 2012, the number reached 1.7 million users. So the increase amounted to about five times in ten years.

As for the number of mobile phones users in Kuwait, it is nearly 6 million users; most of them use smart-phones that allow connecting to the Internet. The number of landlines, however, is about 700,000 lines.

Legal & Organizational Environments of ICT Sector

In May 2014, Kuwait approved Communications Law no. 37 of 2014, which contains 91 articles; including articles that regulate the establishments of telecommunication regulatory authority, which is responsible for regulating the ICT sector, supervising and censoring it.
In addition, this law imposes severe restrictions on the freedom of expression, such as the license and censorship. The Panel Coda imposes punishments, in 19 articles (from 64-83), up to five years imprisonment and heavy fines of up to 5000 dinars (about US$17,000) over vague charges, such as breaching public morality, provoking panic, outrage of modesty or libel. These punishments, accordingly, are unfair and contradict Kuwait’s ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which provides for the confirmation of freedom of expression in Article 19 thereof.

E-Government

Kuwait might be the best country that provides governmental services via the Internet for its citizens, as its website allows all citizens and official residents who have civilian number to get the website’s services, starting from passports and their renewal, or residence, to the potentiality to identify if he/she is embroiled in cases, or banned from traveling or not!

It is an updated website, as it is updated regularly and professionally. It includes services for most of ministries and agencies, in addition to the laws, legislation and advice on technology. The main websites and its subsites provide services in Arabic and English.

Its URL is (www.media.gov.kw )

However, the site does not have any indication about licensing the use of the published data, which is supposed to have a free license to use, and does not follow the dissemination of open data policy.

Social Networking Websites

The Internet may means to many residents in Kuwait, whether citizens, Bedoons or expatriate workers, Facebook and Twitter. Indeed, all residents use the Internet, but both of Facebook and Twitter have the biggest share, while Instagram is less than them. The number of Facebook users in one million and a half, and also Twitter has the same number. However, a great number of Twitter users resorted to creating anonymous accounts to escape the trap of the widespread publishing crimes in Kuwait, because of the government’s
hostility towards Twitter’s tweeps for allegedly insulting the Emir or Arab government. This is what has been expressed by the head of cybercrime unit in the Interior Ministry, Youssef Habib, after saying: “danger is coming with Twitter”11. Moreover, he issued a manual entitled “Beware of social networking sites.”

**Blocking, Censorship & Judicial Prosecution**

It is enough to on the Google search bar “arresting tweep”, you will be surprised by news that comes at the top of first twenty results! In Kuwait, you can write or criticize anything except: the Emir, rulers, judges, interior ministry, clergymen, government, army, state security body, Sunnis, Shiites,,, Otherwise, if there something remains to write about, then comes the cybercrime unit to judge whether you have written necessitates prosecution or not.

Some 2029 cases concerning use of the Internet throughout 29 months have been lodges starting from January 2012 to May 201412. The defamation, incitement to immorality cases come first, followed by insulting the Emir cases, which the cybercrime unit stopped to count or clearly indicate, in order not to confirm the bad record regarding the hostility to freedom of expression; whereas the number of these case amounted to about 160 ones, included in more than 300 cases against Twitter’s tweeps. 280 of them were only during 2013 and 2014.

Also, cases of insulting the state came at high rank, topped by the claims of insulting Saudi Arabia by 12 cases.

**Examples of those who are accused of insulting the Emir:**

Ayyad Al-Harbi
Dr. Salah Al-Fadly
Ahmed Fadel

11 Annahar Kuwait, Interview on 19 October 2014 (last visit on 3 February 2015) http://www.annaharkw.com/annahar/Resources/PdfPages/19-10-2014/P10.pdf

12 Previous reference
Mohamed Al-Agami
Mohamed Jasser Al-Gadi
Rana Al-Sadoun
Fahad Al-Agmi
Ahmed Al-Damkhi
Khaled AlShatti
Abdullah Attaallah
Saleh Al-Mula
Saqr Al-Hashash
Abdel-Aziz Al-Mutari
Hamad Al-Rabas
Hegab Al-Hagry
Abdullah Fayrouz
Nasser Al-Mutari
Fares Al-Balhan
Rashed AlAnzi
Faisal Al-Sawagh
Sarah Al-Daris
Hamad Al-Agami
Hamed Al-Khaledi
Badr Al-Rashidi
And others,

Accordingly, this has made several activists, topped by activist Rana Al-Sadoun, to set up the “National Committee for Monitoring Violations”.

**National Committee for Monitoring Violations**

In March 2013, the Internet activists, and defenders of freedom of expression and human rights set up a voluntary committee to monitor
the situation and violations of human rights. Basically, the committee works towards publishing the violations on twitter, and also the schedule to weekly trials. This committee includes scores of human rights defender in Kuwait, although many of them are facing smear campaigns and being prosecuted.

“Through our independent human rights activities, we endeavor to monitor the irregularities and speak them out, protect rights of this country’s subjects, and make them aware of their constitutional and legal rights; in an honest call from as to the concerned officials to do their role in protect citizens and whoever lives in this nation,” activist Rana Al-Sadoun said about the committee.
### جدول الأعذاب لهذا الأسبوع 22-6-2023

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**توجه من كل من يتم استدعاؤه وإتهامه بقضايا من قضية حقوق الإنسان وقضايا أخرى تتعلق بالدفاع عن الأصوات:**

ncvkwt@gmail.com
99938956

ترجى أن تتزامن الحضور مع الأوقات المذكورة في النص.

**التحذيرات:**

- لا تغلق الاتصالات الإدارية.
- تابع التقارير والبحوث.
- تطبيق القواعد الإدارية في حالات الأوراق.
- تعزيز الاتصالات الإدارية.
- دعم القاضي في تحقيق التقارير الإدارية.
- تزويد القاضي بال겠습니다اءات الإدارية.
- دعم القاضي في تحقيق القضايا الإدارية.
- تعزيز الاتصالات الإدارية.
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- تزويد القاضي بال wysoko.
- دعم القاضي في تحقيق القضايا الإدارية.
- تعزيز الاتصالات الإدارية.
- دعم القاضي في تحقيق القضايا الإدارية.
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- دعم القاضي في تحقيق القضايا الإدارية.
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برحى من كل من يتم استدعاه وإنهاءه يدلي بيانًا مكتوبًا يوضح الكتابة والتحريات المراسلة للجنة الوطنية لرصد الانتهاكات.

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### الإحصائية الخاصة بإدارة مكافحة الجرائم الإلكترونية خلال الفترة من 1/1/2012 إلى 12/31/2012

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Morocco

Overview

Resident Population around 34 million inhabitants

The constitutional amendments made by the Kingdom of Morocco in the second half of 2011, were primarily to survive the winds of change that swept across the Arab region, especially since the Arab Spring was in full swing. Despite the authorities subsequently allowed relatively fair parliamentary elections to take place, and the participation of members who belong to the Political Islam in forming a government after winning a parliamentary majority, it did not achieve any significant change with regard to freedom of expression in the Kingdom as the pro-democracy movement in the country did not stop.

Although Morocco is one of the countries that provide good services and at good prices in the field of telecommunications and Internet, and also seeks to achieve growth in the ICT sector in economic terms, yet this is met by a severe crackdown on freedom of expression online.

As the Moroccan authorities continued to restrict freedoms, freedom of Internet received the largest share of attacks by authorities on freedom of expression in general, which amounted to closing Lakome online news portal, and referring its editor, the well-known journalist Ali Anouzla to trial. 

Morocco is suffering from deteriorating economic conditions and high unemployment, as well as the long conflict with the Polisario Front, which seeks independence for Western Sahara.

ICT Sector

Since the beginning of the 21st century, Morocco introduced new economic trends to liberate the ICT sector, which led to opening and a significant growth in the ICT sector in the country, and the diversity of telecommunications and Internet service providers, and in early 2015, the Moroccan authorities approved to grant the mobile phone service providers in the country licenses to expand the fourth generation network services (4G), which would increase the number
of users of Internet services through mobile phone and improve the level of service.

Morocco comes at the forefront of the region's countries in terms of cheap telecommunications and Internet service prices, the contribution of the ICT sector in the GDP was estimated by 7%. There are 3 companies that offer land line and mobile Internet services, namely "Maroc Telecom" and most of its shares are owned by Emirates Telecommunication Corporation "Etisalat", "Meditel" which is owned by the French Orange, Inc. and "Inwi" formerly known as "Wana".

The number of subscriptions to mobile phone services in Morocco until the end of 2014 was about 44 million, such a tremendous growth in the number of mobile phone subscribers, was met by the ongoing decline of land line users in the Kingdom of Morocco which was by the end of 2014 about 2.5 million subscribers, including 810,440 land line telephone subscribers in limited mobility, compared to 3.7 million subscribers in land line services in 2011.

The number of Internet users in Morocco until 2014 was about 20.5 million users, which is more than 60% of the total population, compared to 49% in 2011.

The Legislative Environment:

In early 2015, the Moroccan parliament began to discuss a new law to regulate the mail and transportation provided by the Moroccan government to replace the current law with the goal of developing new legal mechanisms for the management of telecommunications services and also to give the National Agency for Telecommunications Regulation "the regulatory authority of the ICT sector in Morocco" new powers, the law also seeks to open the field of development and use of modern technologies for telecommunications service providers.

In addition to the Criminal Code, which contains many of the restrictive provisions on freedoms and at its center come freedom of expression in Morocco, under which many journalists and writers on the Internet were brought to trial, which was widely rejected by Internet activists who launched a campaign against it called "#the_criminal_code_will_not_pass".
Social Networks:

As its neighbors, Morocco, which was characterized by the abundant number of blogs, has seen a decline in the use of blogs in contrast to social networks, which had a crucial influence on the political events of the Kingdom of Morocco in the past few years, a good example for that is the February 20 Movement, which is the most prominent civil and democratic power that enjoys the ability to crystallize the demands of the Moroccan people and leads most of the protests against the Moroccan government, February 20 Movement began as an idea over the social networks, and especially on "Facebook", then it managed, like any other social movement, to move to the ground and influence the overall political climate in Morocco.

At the end of 2014, the Moroccan government prepared a new draft law to regulate the online content, which aimed at restricting the use of the Internet, and monitoring online content, but the Moroccan activists responded with an online campaign against this law and created pages and hash tags on the social networks, such as, #No_to_the_Internet_law and #Online_disobedience which had a huge success and interaction by Internet users, which led the Moroccan government to refrain from presenting the law to the parliament, and to postpone its discussion indefinitely.

"Facebook" comes at the forefront of social networks used by the Moroccan citizens, while the users of Twitter are declining in favor of other social networks such as YouTube and blog spot and Google.

Facebook continued to rise massively in Morocco which is the most active country in the Maghreb Region on social networks, where the number of users in the Kingdom amounted to about 8 million users until the beginning of 2015.

Meanwhile Twitter, which was known for its slow growth in Morocco, has witnessed a rapid development in recent times, doubling the number of its users to become about 100,000 users in early 2015, compared to about 40,000 in 2011.
Internet Censorship

Morocco is one of the countries which uses malicious spyware programs to monitor Internet users and prosecute them, and to spy on their conversations and personal data by buying software from companies specialized in this type of software, and according to a report by the organization "Citizen Lab" specialized in digital security: the Moroccan government is using software which enables them to monitor the content and e-mails of Internet users, through using the software purchased from companies "Hacking Team" an Italian company which according to the report works with the Moroccan and the UAE governments.13

Shutting down Lakome website and referring Ali Anouzla to trial

The fact that the prominent Moroccan journalist Ali Anouzla took off his work to the Internet was not enough to stop the Moroccan authorities from the hobby of prosecuting him, in September 17, 2013 the security forces arrested Ali Anouzla the editor of Lakome website from his home because of an article criticizing terrorism published on the website on September 13, and it included a link to a video posted on the Spanish newspaper "El País" which contains a jihadist message to the militants, and even though the essay on Lakome website was criticizing the video and its contents, the authorities arrested Anouzla and stormed the headquarters of the website and confiscated eight computers which are the central units through which the website is run, Ali Anouzla was detained in "Sala 2" prison and brought to trial under the Criminal Code and the Terrorism Act on charges of "material support for terrorism" and "glorifying terrorism" and "incitement to carry out terrorist acts". On October 25, Ali Anouzla was released on bail, and his trial continued to be deliberated in court, until it was postponed indefinitely without issuing a final decision, to remain a sword hanging over the neck of the journalist, and a restriction on his freedom that can be used against him at any time.

13 - An article published on the AlQuds newspaper entitled "Morocco among the countries which spies on the personal data of Internet users.”
http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=210060 (Published on 21 August, 2014) (Last visited on 2 March, 2015)
Despite the release of the journalist, since storming its headquarters the Lakome website is still blocked until the writing of these lines, despite repeated requests by its editor Ali Anouzla for the government to lift the block, but the judiciary says they did not issue a decision to block the website, while the government requests a decision by the judiciary to lift the blocking... the site remains blocked until today.

The case of “Mohamed Khalij” an official at the website "Noun Today":

On March 2, 2015 the Court of First Instance in the municipality of Guelmim handed down journalist "Mohamed Khalij" the official at the website "Noun Today" a one month prison sentence and a MAD 2,000 fine, and a compensation for the Urban Community of Guelmim estimated at 50,000 dirhams, on charges of defamation and dissemination of false news against the backdrop of an article published on the "Noun Today" website criticizing how the Municipality of Guelmim deals with the waste problem, which led the President of the Municipal Council of Guelmim to file two lawsuits against the journalist who received this ruling.

Examples of the most common violations of Internet freedom:

- The national director of police filed a complaint against journalist and director of the website "Badil" Hamid Al Mahdaoui, demanding the government to ban him from practicing journalism for 10 years and a fine of 25 million centimes, against the backdrop of a series of articles published about the murder of "Karim Al-Ashqar" in "Al Hoceima", the case is still pending before the judiciary, and it seems that the national security director wants to repeat the incident of preventing the Moroccan journalist "Ali Lmrabet" from writing for 10 years, which was a strange conviction handed down to "Ali Lmrabet" 10 years ago.

- On July 2, 2014, the security forces confiscated a camera from a reporter for Hespress, Ismail Azzam, during the coverage of the sit-in that was organized by the association “Freedom Now”, they deleted the contents of the camera and then returned it.
Tunisia

Overview

Population: 11 million

Tunisia is not only the start of Arab Spring uprisings; it is also the country of the first Internet martyr “Zuhair Yehiyawi”, who was the first online activist against Zine El Abidine’s repressive regime, and owner of online magazine “TUNeZINE”.

This year, 2015, marks the tenth anniversary of his death. In 2005, Yehiyawi held an online referendum, asking: “Is Tunisia a republic, kingdom, zoo or prison?” Such a matter raised the regime’s ire; leading to his trial and accordingly he was sentenced to two years in prison, during which he died. Thus, he became the first Arab Internet martyr.

Now, Tunisia became the first Arab country close to democracy, following fair presidential elections, whereas the presidency was delivered from interim president “Moncef Marzouki” to elected president “Mohamed Beji Caid Essebsi”. The Internet is still playing a significant role in disclosing the anti-democracy practices and corruption, and a field for expressing opinions. On the other hand, it also became used for prosecutions.

ICT Sector

ICT sector in Tunisia has been a growing one, particularly during the recent years. Tunisie Telecom is a government owned company which provides communications services in Tunisia. The landline services are provided in Tunisia by three corporations. First, Tunisie Telecom has the largest share of the number of landline users (1.94%). The second is Orange Tunisia Company (9.5%), while the third and last is Ooredoo, formerly was Tunisiana, whose share is (.005%). Total number of landline subscribers in Tunisia estimated roughly 1.1 million users at the beginning of 2015.

As for the mobile phone services, they are provided by the same three companies (Tunisie Telecom, Orange Tunisia & Ooredoo). The number of mobile phone users in the three companies is 13 million
users. Certainly, this number exceeds the population in Tunisia, 11 million people.

Also, the number of Internet users in Tunisia reached approximately 5.8 million users at the beginning of 2015, which is different to the total number of Internet services subscribers; taking into account the multi-use of the same subscription. The three companies (Tunisie Telecom, Orange Tunisia & Ooredoo) operate the internet services in accordance with the National Authority for Communication in Tunisia.

The Legal Environment

There are some laws about the Internet activity in Tunisia. Law 83 of 2000 is about the exchanges and electronic commerce. Also, Law 1 of 2001 is concerning the issuance of telecommunications code and its supplementary laws such as Law 46 of 2008 and Law 10 of 2013. Additionally, there are some laws that concern the cyber activity such as the Basic Law 63 of 2014 on the protection of personal data.

In November 2013, the Technical Agency for Telecommunications (ATT) was introduced in virtue of the decree no. 4506 of 2013, dated on November 6, 2013. ATT’s main mission is to ensure the technical support for the judiciary in connection with handling the cyber crimes and search systems. In parallel with the introduction of ATT, the National Constituent Assembly received a bill about anti-cybercrime, which accordingly led to scathing attack by numerous activists on account of its vague terms that afterwards may be used as a pretext to curb freedoms and censor Tunisians with no exceptions. To illustrate, the law stipulates that whoever deliberately uses the information and communication system to publish contents constitute offense or assault on morality is punishable by imprisonment for six-month term and a fine of 5 thousand dinars. Noteworthy, Tunisian activists interpreted this law as a return to “Ammar 404”, a name given, by Tunisians, to the e-censorship during the fugitive autocrat president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali’s rule.

Social Networking Websites and Blogs

Facebook is one of the most important and most visited websites in Tunisia. Its users reached 4.4 million in January 2015, which means
that 80% of Internet users in Tunisia have Facebook accounts, almost 42% of users are female, and while 58% approx. are men.

Despite the significant role played by Twitter activists, in the Arab world and in Tunisia in supporting the Tunisian revolution; its users’ number is still reasonable, whereas they are no more than 110 thousand users. Seemingly, there are no updated and accurate statistics about the number of other social networking websites in Tunisia, however, ANHRI’s estimates point out that the most used social networking sites in Tunisia are Facebook, Twitter and Google+ respectively.

Milestones in the Freedom of Internet:

#Yezzi_fok (يزي فوك) Hashtag

Hashtag #Yezzi_fok is a campaign launched on the social networking sites by a group of Tunisian activists in the second half of 2012 so as to lift the injustice against Tunisian prisoners that face political charges. The campaign aimed to refuse the policy of disparity in dealing with cases depending on the prisoner’s political affiliation, to hold those who were responsible for neglecting the rights of prisoners on hunger strike accountable, and to release whoever is not proven guilty.

The campaign coincided with the death of two prisoners; belong to the Salafi current, following the hunger strike they staged in order to be released, as they hadn’t faced any charges pressed against them. It received widespread attention by Tunisian activists and started to be in the actual framework, as numerous pro-campaign events were organized and a number of activists and figures participated in them.

Remarkably, the word (Yezzi fok) is a common term in Tunisian slang and similar to (Hel Ana) phrase in Egypt, and its meaning refers to getting bored with political situations and illegal arrests in Tunisia.

Insulting Qatar Campaign

In April 2013, president “Moncef Marzouki” stated that whoever insults Qatar would bear the responsibility before his/her conscience and the law. Hence, some activists launched a campaign entitled “Insulting Qatar”, in which more than 30 thousand Tunisians on both
Facebook and Twitter participated. The participants scathingly attacked the practices of Qatari government and its foreign policies. Nonetheless, part of this campaign was to challenge the presidential (or parental) statement that was released then by the interim president.

Security Prosecutions

Aziz Amami

In May 2014, the public prosecution in Tunisia ordered the suspension of blogger and political activist “Aziz Amami” over the accusation of possessing drugs. Amami is a blogger who rose to fame during the Tunisian revolution. In one of his tweets, prior to the incident, Amami referred that the police endeavors to trump up a drug possession charge on account of scathingly attacking the Tunisian security on local media outlets.

In the same month, Amami was acquitted of the pressed charge. It is worth mentioning that during his trial, Amami said that the police concealed the drugs in his stuff and overtly accused them of trumping up the case.

Yassen Al-Aiary

Tunisian blogger Yassen Al-Aiary has received a harsh three-year sentence that was reduced to one year then. Thereafter, in March 2015 it was reduced to 6 months in prison against the backdrop of criticizing military officials.

Noticeably, Al-Aiary is one of the freedom of Internet defenders, supporter of open source, and a blogger who opposed the rule of Bin Ali.

Later, following Al-Aiary’s return to Tunisia, the case was discontinued, although there is a travel ban imposed on him until the time of writing this report.

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14 Insulting Qatar Campaign https://www.facebook.com/events/295924353874407
Olfa Riahi

In March 2014, the Tunisian judicial authorities banned blogger “Olfa Riahi” from travelling out of Tunisia, after accusing her of “revealing hypocrisy and scandal” and “disturbing the public peace” through the Public Telecommunication Network and publishing documents without the authorization of its owner. These accusations are because Riahi impeached Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rafiq Abdel-Salam, with squandering public money under the rule of interim president “Moncef Marzouki” and also accused him of infidelity. Later, in July 2014, the travel ban was lifted.

Jaber Al-Mejiri

In 2012, Tunisian blogger “Jaber Al-Mejiri” was sentenced to 7 years in prison in view of publishing caricatures deemed insulting to the prophet. In February 2014, a presidential pardon to release him was issued after he had spent two years in prison. However, the blogger was released, on March 4, one month after the pardon had been issued.

Nawaat Launches Private & Secure Website to Leak Confidential Documents

In March 2013, a team of Nawaat launched one of the most important websites, which is managed by a group of Tunisian bloggers and activists, under the name “Nawaat Leaks”15. It is a secure and encrypted site to receive confidential documents and files. The team mentions that the software used in this website protects leakers even from the team itself. By these techniques, it wouldn’t be easy to identify the leaker or his location, neither by their email nor their e-relatives. Also, the team deletes all the Metadata, which help in disclosing the e-source of documents- whether audio, video, images or documents- before publishing the leaked confidential data.

Additionally, the team announced that it would do reports and write investigative articles to be attached to the documents. This is to add

15 Nawaat website [https://nawaat.org/portail/leaks/](https://nawaat.org/portail/leaks/)
value to the leaked documents and to open debate, commentary and modification by the readers.

The website, remarkably, uses hidden link by using an extension to Tor, which is onion. One can’t open the link, unless they use Tor, which is free software which enables anonymous communication, and protects visitors from the surveillance on the Internet.16

16 Nawaat Launches Private & Secure Website to Leak Confidential Documents published 21 March, 2014 visited on 11 October, 2014

http://nawaat.org/portail/2014/03/27/%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D9%84%D9%82-%D9%85%D9%88%D9%82%D8%B9%D8%A7-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%A7-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D9%84%D9%82-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%A7-%D9%88-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B3%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88/D8%AB/
Qatar

Overview

Population: 2.3 million

In 2013, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani stood down to his son Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, to become Qatar’s new ruler. That country has controversial stances in connection with Arab Spring uprisings, and its relation to Muslim Brotherhood Group on one hand, and its ownership of the well-known channel of Al Jazeera on the other hand.

Qatar is inhabited by 2.3 million people, 12% of them are indigenous people while the rest hold other different nationalities. Primarily, it depends on oil as a national income source.

Information & Communication Technology Sector

Qatar’s ICT Sector is the most advanced compared to the other Arab countries. Globally, it has a high rank concerning the progress of communications with its infrastructure. In December 2014, the number of Internet users in Qatar reached 1.85 million users. Qatar has a remarkable amount of computers, for example; 75% of houses in Qatar have laptops, and 69% have tablets, while 71% have smart phones.

In addition, Qatar’s population has good average Internet speed in the home service, as 14% of population enjoys more than 4 MB Internet speed, 48% use Internet speeds between 1-4 MB, 23% use 256KB to 1MB Internet speeds, while 1% of population use Internet speed less than 256 KB. Remarkably, there are two communication corporations that provide Internet services in Qatar. They are Ooredoo and Vodafone Qatar. The first provides the land line and mobile phone services, and also the various Internet services; while Vodafone Qatar provides the mobile phones services.
Legal & Organizational Environments of ICT Sector

In 2013, the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology started to manage the sector, while it was formerly being managed by the Supreme Council of Information and Communication Technology. Also, the ministry regularly releases reports on its activities, as well as statistics on Internet users and social networking websites.

Anti-Cybercrime Law

In 2014, Qatar passed the Anti-Cybercrime Law. Notwithstanding the Qatari government’s allegations that this law aims to guarantee and regulate the transactions and online publishing, it is within a series of practices and laws by which the Qatari government restrict online freedom of expression and opinion. Nonetheless, this law was came under scathing attack by activists, human rights defenders and pro-freedom of expression organizations. According to this law, the government is allowed to block those websites that seem “threatening to the country’s security”, and punish whoever publishes or exchanges digital contents that may undermine the social values in Qatar or its public order; but it (the law) doesn’t define or explain or determine these vague terms. As such, the law makes a condition on the Internet providers in Qatar to block any website or to inform the government with any evidence or records, upon request and without resorting to the judiciary.

E-Government

Qatar has a large number of websites affiliated to ministries and a website for governmental services on the Internet, in addition to a website concerned with publishing open information. On the website “Hukoomi”, Qatar’s inhabitants can get governmental services, and also the businessmen, students, citizens, residents in Qatar and visitors can make use of it.

The open governmental data website in Qatar “Qalam” is an up-to-date website that has published data. However, the website has no reference to a license for using the published data, which supposedly
should have free use license. Moreover, most of the website’s available content is in monopolized font, and the published data is very general and lacks details. Those previous points couldn’t be overlooked in the open data publishing policy.

Social Networks

The rate of social networking websites’ users in Qatar is growing remarkably, as the Internet users reached 87%, while “Facebook” and “WhatsApp” are getting popular. The number of Facebook users reached 1.4 million in January 2015, and also the number of WhatsApp users is approaching the same number of Facebook users.

As for Twitter, its users number in Qatar exceeded half a million, and also this number is true of Google+ users.

From 2012 to 2014, Qatar submitted roughly 26 requests to identify some information about Twitter users. Nonetheless, all those requests had been turned down.

Block, Censorship & Prosecution

Notwithstanding the great number of Internet users in Qatar, it is one of the most websites-blocking countries in a systematic way and without a clear criteria or known rules. Blocking websites without notice, reason or reply to the inquiries of the blocked website’s owner was, for example, like what transpired to the website of Aks Alser that haven’t received any reply yet, since 2013, from the ICT Ministry to know the reasons 17, starting with the religious, political and news portals to the pornographic websites; in addition to blocking several proxy sites that are used to bypass the blocked websites.

Mohamed Bin Al- Dheeb

The case of poet “Mohamed Bin Al- Dheeb” dates back to February 2011, when Al- Dheeb was arrested against the backdrop of publishing a poem entitled “Jasmine” on the Internet, in which he

17 Aks Alser website July 2013
   http://aksalser.com/?page=view_articles&id=a00a288bcd287e7b3fa15ee1c22aef0 visited on 2 February, 2015
expressed his support for the Tunisian Revolution, saying: “We are all Tunisia in the face of the repressive”. He also criticized all the Arab regimes describing them as thieves. In strong implicit phrases, he wished that the waves of the Arab Spring revolutions would reach Qatar.

Mohamed Bin Al-Dheeb’s case lasted for two years. On November 29, 2012, he was carried a life sentence. However, the Appeal Court in Qatar on February 26, 2013, reduced his sentence to be imprisoned for 15 years.

In August 2013, a group of activists in Dawadmi province launched an e-campaign entitled “Tamem Pardon Million-Man”; calling on Qatari Emir to pardon poet “Mohamed Bin Al-Dheeb”. The activists used the social networking websites Facebook & Twitter in their campaign. A website for the campaign was launched as well. The campaigners called on the poet’s fans to participate in the campaign by writing two-stanza poems or an expressive thought in order to reach a million petition18.

However, the campaign was met with no success and the Qatari poet is still in jail so far.

18 Sabq online news portal - Dawadmi province youth launch a campaign to release “Bin Al-Dheeb”. Published on 7 August 2013 – visited on 18 October 2014 http://sabq.org/koAfde
Lebanon

Overview

Resident Population around 4.8 million inhabitants

In the past, Internet and mobile phone services used to be expensive, slow, unreliable and difficult to access, especially in rural areas outside the capital Beirut. Since March 2012, the average Internet speed has multiplied, but Lebanon's classification has fallen in relation Internet download speed from the 151st position to 165th, it ranked worst in terms of download speed as it came in the 173rd position according to the index by OOKLA for Internet. According to the "Akamai" Report on the status of the Internet, which measures the global upload and download speeds on the Internet across 185 different countries, Lebanon in terms of download speed ranked penultimate with 0.10 Mbps.

On the other hand, it does not seem that the Lebanese government has a clear vision and political will to improve this in the near future, both in terms of improving the Internet service, or freedom of expression on the web.

ICT Sector

By the end of June 2014, the number of mobile phone lines in Lebanon amounted to 4 million lines; almost 100% of the Lebanese people have a mobile phone, while the number of land lines amounted to about 900,000 lines.

The number of Internet users in Lebanon is nearly 3.3 million users, which means about 75% of Lebanon's population uses the Internet.

On the other hand, the Lebanese government has taken some steps during 2014 to reduce Internet service rates on land lines and 3G networks, as the Minister of Communications made the decision to cancel the mandatory electronic identity registration "IMEI" for

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19 - OOKLA Global Internet Index http://www.netindex.com/download/2,104/Lebanon
20 - Now website http://goo.gl/Iky9t5
mobile phones, and launched a project for paying land line phones and Internet bills via the Internet and via credit cards, in addition to introducing the DSL technologies and optic fiber cables to seventeen telephone stations in rural areas and remote towns.21

According to «Measuring the Information Society 2013» report issued by the International Telecommunication Union, Lebanon has made progress in the ICT sector development variables IDI index from 4.62 out of 10 to 5.37 out of 10. The report says that Lebanon came in first place in the world in terms of increasing value and came second in terms of increasing in rank after the United Arab Emirates.

The report estimates the number of digital citizens in Lebanon at about 306,940 people, representing 7.2 percent of the total population, while the percentage of digital youth is about 40.1 % of the youth population.22

**The Legislative Environment:**

Till the writing of this report, a draft of the electronic transactions and personal data bill prepared by the government, has not been discussed inside the committees of the Lebanese parliament in preparation for its submission to the General Assembly for approval. The Act of organizing the ICT sector in Lebanon No. 431 of 2002 is still frozen and the government has not appointed new members in the governing body of the ICT sector provided for in the law, despite the end of the mandate of its members in 2012, and the Law No. 140, which aims to safeguard the right to confidentiality of conversations conducted by any means of communication, issued in 1999, which was not implemented until 2005, till the the decrees of the law were issued, and even these decrees were not applied till 2009. Moreover, the government has mishandled the implementation of the law regulations and its complementary provisions and exposed the personal data of citizens to the risks of privacy and violations contrary to the

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21 - The Ministry of Communications website http://goo.gl/Fn0rWR
provisions of the law and the Lebanese Constitution. The Media and Communications Parliamentary Committee is still discussing the new media draft law put forward by Maharat Foundation, which includes a special section about electronic media which guarantees freedom to create websites without a prior license or censorship.

In terms of digital privacy protection, there are no specific laws for that, but there are some sporadic articles in different laws, which does not do the job at all, such as elastic articles of the wiretapping law, and despite the presence of the Cyber Crime and Intellectual Property Rights Bureau in Lebanon, there is no comprehensive law for cyber crimes but some legal article such as the protection of intellectual and artistic property law and the Penal Code.

**Blogs and Social Networks**

Facebook is the most visited website in Lebanon, by nearly 2.2 million users, while Twitter comes in second place, but by a large margin with an estimated 250,000 users.

The administration of both websites did not comply with any of the 18 petitions by the Lebanese government to reveal the identity of user accounts since 2013.

**Legal Prosecution of Journalists and Online Activists**

The situation of restricting freedom of expression online got worse by subjecting journalists, bloggers and activists across the electronic news and social networking websites to the authority of the Cyber Crime and Intellectual Property Rights Bureau, (Cybercrime which was established against the law, the office summons and intimidates these activists and journalists by interrogating them for long hours and obliging them to sign vows not to mention again the people they have mentioned in their articles, in a flagrant violation of freedom of expression, which is enshrined in the Constitution and in the

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23 - Telecosm data requests violate Constitution, article in Lebanese The Daily Star newspaper - http://goo.gl/AsJr3U

24 - www.freetoexpress.org
conventions and treaties that Lebanon is committed to implement, and which forms part of the laws that have to be observed.

On 26 July, 2013 the "Cyber Crime and Intellectual Property Rights Bureau", summoned the editor in chief of "Now" website in Arabic Muhannad al-Hajj Ali, on charges of defamation and inciting sectarian hate against the backdrop of sharing an article on the website, "Mohasaba" (the electronic platform of the national campaign to prosecute the civil war criminals). Al-Hajj was interrogated for 5 hours non-stop and faced harassments. On September 13, 2013 journalist Muhannad al-Hajj was summoned again by the "Cybercrime Bureau” in Beirut to follow up on the investigation with him in the same complaint, but the Lebanese journalist refused to come to the Bureau, and led a campaign by a group of activists, journalists and lawyers to refer the case from the discriminatory cybercrime bureau to the public prosecution, headed by a civilian judge for further consideration of the case in accordance with the provisions of the Lebanese Publications Act.

Although journalist Muhannad al-Hajj Ali, a member in the journalists syndicate, was able to draw such a strike to the so-called Cybercrime Bureau, but the thousands of online opinion makers are not professional journalists, and therefore they are still vulnerable to the practices of this Bureau, such as:

Jean Assy

On February 2014 activist (Jean Assy) was sentenced to two months on charges of libel and slander against the president, Assi was interrogated in June 2013 against the backdrop of a series of tweets posted on Twitter and was released after ensuring his place of residence. It is worth mentioning that in the same month Assy was handed down the prison sentence, the activist sent a letter of apology to the Lebanese president concerning the content of his tweets.25

25 - Al-Akhbar newspaper - Publications Court: Two Month in Prison for Activist Jean Assy
http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/200546
Imad Bazzi

On March 13, 2014, the Lebanese blogger Imad Bazzi’s refusal to sign a pledge not to mention the former minister Panos Manjian, as Bazzi had written on his blog, "Trella" blog a post titled "the minister's mustache" in December 2013, thus, Manjian filed lawsuit against the blogger, he was interrogated for three hours in the Cybercrime Bureau, which ended with Bazzi’s rejection to sign the pledge, but he just signed a petition that states he will not physically attack the minister or his property or his relatives, and was released on bail ensuring his place of residence and the case was referred to the public prosecutor in Jabal Lebanon.26

Rita Kamel

On 13 August, 2013 the Cybercrime Bureau summoned Rita Kamel against the backdrop of a lawsuit filed by an awards company Pan Arab Web Awards last summer, after Kamel published an article entitled "Congratulations! You are a fool! Fraud in the Pan Arab Web Awards" In the post, she shed some light on the work of the "Academy" arguing that it "does not have any legal system which regulates its work or how to grant awards or which sets work standards." Kamel also touched on "the standard of transparency and its association with the interests of the consumer, who might be a victim of false marketing and advertising.27

On 12/01/2014 Kamel was summoned by the Cybercrime Bureau to interrogate her concerning a second complaint filed by the same company for failing to comply electronically to being silent about the company and they claim she published a new comments online related to the previous case.

In this context "Maharat Foundatio" submitted a written letter addressed to the Minister of Justice, Major General Ashraf Rifi on the first of December, 2014 recorded in the Office of the Ministry of Justice No. 5616/3 ,, in which it requested the minister to intervene in accordance with the powers and to demand of Public Apellate

26 - Maharat news website, Imad Bazzi and Rita Kamel a Threat on Society! http://goo.gl/xhZhHL
27 - Al-Modon website http://goo.gl/k1NGjG
Prosecutions not compel journalists, activists and individuals who are facing publication, expression and exchanging information on the Internet cases, to sign a "pledge of silence", which is depriving and undermining the freedom of expression, which is void and contrary to the preamble of the Constitution and international conventions and the natural human right to say, and express opinion, which is a fundamental inalienable right. 28

**Gino Raidy**

Against the backdrop of writing a post about a product of "Bunova" company, the Cyber Crime and Intellectual Property Rights Bureau interrogated Lebanese blogger Gino Raidy, Gino has written the post on his blog in July 8, 2013, and was interrogated in January 29, 2014 against the backdrop of a complaint by the company.

After interrogating him for two hours, they asked him to sign a pledge not to mention the company, "Bunova" but the blogger refused, he was released after he signed a pledge not libel and slander against the company only, which was accepted by the blogger.29

**Rabee Faran**

Against the backdrop of an article written on the website (Al-Mokhtar) entitled (Leila Abdul-Latif coffee chitchats), Rabee Faran a Lebanese journalist was interrogated on charges of libel and slander on January 26, 2014, in a lawsuit filed by Leila Abdul Latif (a fortune teller) against him, and after his interrogation, he signed a pledge not to mention her. Faran had written an article in which he said that what Leila Abdul-Latif presents are just stories and novels out of her imagination.30

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28 - Lebanon media watchdog slams detention release policy article in Lebanese The Daily Star newspaper  http://goo.gl/Y2MyqJ

29 - Maharat news website, Gino "the extraordinary" in front of the "Cybercrime Bureau"  http://goo.gl/ElbYSn

30 - Maharat news website, Journalists in the case of the "Cybercrime Bureau"  http://goo.gl/akZXv7
Karim Hawa

On November 13, Karim Hawa, an online activist and a student at the Faculty of Information at AUST University, has been summoned to the Cybercrime Bureau, for interrogation for "sharing" a post on his "Facebook", along with others, of an article published on a blog "961 citizen ", about the Lebanese Interior Ministry signing a contract with the company "Inkript" within "the Lebanese border control project ", for the processing of arrival and departure in public security in the border points by a system made by "Gemalto", and it was said that the official in this company is suspected of having links with Israel. After 5 days of detention, Hawa (21 years) was brought to a hearing before the Public Prosecutor Appeals Judge Claude Karam, who decided to release him on bail ensuring his place of residence, following of the slander lawsuit filed by Interior Minister Nihad Al-Mashnouq against Hawa.31

Blocking and Censorship

The Government hands over Communications Data to the Security

In March 2014 the Lebanese government handed over all communications data in Lebanon to the security services, after the Cabinet approved its delivery despite the polemic debate about this step and objections from the citizens and some governmental and political currents, which is a violation of the privacy of Lebanese citizens. It is noteworthy that this data related to mobile phones users for telecom service providers in Lebanon, which means that the Lebanese devices got all the users' data, and this data often cover a period of two months, since the Law on the protection of secrecy of investigations allows to give the data for two months maximum.

Internet Service Providers in Lebanon Spy on the Users

Lebanese newspapers and websites revealed that on June 7, 2013 a decision was made according to the order issued by the Public Prosecutor forcing Internet service providers in Lebanon through land

31 - A statement by Mahart Foundation on 17/11/2014
http://maharatfoundation.org/?p=1774&lang=ar
and wireless lines, for homes and businesses, and all cafes and shops that provide its customers with access to the Internet, are required to activate access to the Internet, through their servers and routers and to save files, and prepare a saved copy of the data in case it gets lost from the system for a period of one year at least. The data includes at least during each process, the user's adopted username, and the user's IP address, and the sites that the user has visited, and the protocols used in the process, in addition to identifying the user location.  

**Blocking outside the law**

During 2013 17 websites have been blocked in Lebanon, without disclosing any reasons for blocking and to what extent it is legal, many Lebanese activists criticized these practices where there is a complete absence of any information about the blocking mechanism or any information about the criteria upon which these sites get blocked.

While six websites believed to be pornographic sites were blocked in 2014, where the decision was made by the prosecution to block the websites, the resolution was sent to OGERO-Governmental Authority for Internet Service Providers- to all Internet service providers in Lebanon, and despite the objections to the blocking decisions, the issuance of the decision from a judicial authority may limit the recourse to this anti-freedom of expression on the Internet measure.

On 30 October, 2014 Lebanese Minister of Justice asked the Prosecutor General to take action to block Websites that promote digital drug without basing that decision on any legal basis or

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32 Now website Internet Service Providers in Lebanon spy on their clients A report published on 8/12/2013  http://goo.gl/BAP8Lv
scientific justification for blocking such a kind of websites, which include digital files on behalf of the "Digital Drugs" or "iDoser" which are sound clips if heard across different sound frequencies for a long period of time to several sensations such as feeling sleepy or vigilant or dizziness or relax or discomfort.33

33 - Maharat news website - Internet freedom in the jaw of "Digital Intelligence" http://goo.gl/908Nb
General Overview

Number of "Resident" Inhabitants 86 Million

In June 2012, Dr. Mohammed Morsi, who belongs to the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) got elected as Egypt's President. At this time all powers and currents of the Egyptian society came to realize the important role the Internet has played as a tool for mobilization and as an open space for expressing opinions. On top of them were those who used to mock the Internet activists who called for taking the fight for democracy to the Internet and the electronic networks, which eventually led to the multiplication of the number of users of the web and its applications.

The situation did not change a lot in Egypt after Dr. Morsi took power, except for the state of revolutionary momentum during that period, which led to pushing the boundaries of freedoms a lot further, yet the new Egyptian regime kept the ruling legislative environment, which limits Internet freedom.

But by the end of June 2013 there was a surprising change in the general climate in Egypt, as the back then, Minister of Defense, Abdel Fattah El Sisi, overthrew the MB from power, and transferred power to Adly Mansour, the Head of the Supreme Constitutional Court, followed by the dispersal of the MB's sit-ins in both Rabaa al-Adawiya and Nahdet Misr squares in August 2013, especially after the Egyptian Authorities declared their war on terrorism, something which gained the support of most of the traditional media outlets and political powers, which increased the importance of the Internet as an alternative to express the various political opinions and ideas, thus, the space for opposition to the new authority over the Internet was increasing, and such space was decreasing on the traditional media
outlets, especially after Field Marshal Abdel Fattah El Sisi got elected president in June 2014.

5 channels got shutdown and 4 satellite networks were stormed after the overthrow of the MB, several shows stopped due to self-imposed censorship by the networks, this is the fruit of the first days for the Egyptian authorities after June 30, which shows to what extent the margin of freedoms was diminished, while the Internet was big enough for millions of user accounts for the Egyptian citizens on the social networks, thus, the Internet became once again the arena for holding opinions, after the boundaries for freedom of expression shranked in the traditional media outlets.

The number of inhabitants in Egypt at the beginning of 2015 was around 86 million, the number of families who had access to the Internet at home was 57.14% till November 2014, with an annual growth rate of 7.92% according to the Ministry of Telecommunication and Information Technology.34

**Internet & Telecommunications Sector**

At the end of 2014 the communication and information technology sector contribution to the GDP amounted to a total of about EGP 66 billion, which is equivalent to the contribution of 4.1% of GDP, the rate of growth in the sector amounted to 13%,35 while the export of technology outsourcing services was worth EGP 11 billion and

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34 A Brief Report on the Telecommunication and Information Technology Index Released by The Ministry of Telecommunication and Information Technology.
(Publishing date: December 2014) (Last visited: 21 March, 2015)

35 Article in "Dot Net" newspaper entitled "Minister of Communication: EGP 120 billion Investments of the Sector by the Year 2020"
http://goo.gl/P35W1F
electronic services by EGP 14 million during the same fiscal year, according to the Egyptian Minister of Communications and Information Technology, who confirmed that the target of the ministry was to reach a level of contribution by the telecom sector’s exports in GDP to 8% by 2020.36

Egypt is considered to be one of the best environments for investment in the field of communications and information technology, according to the Minister of Communications, about 17 submarine communications cables37 pass through it and more can be added, the number of companies operating in the telecommunications sector and IT companies has reached around 6166 till November 2014, including around 965 companies that provide IT services, and 4754 IT companies, and 447 communications companies, with an annual growth rate that reached 10.38%, while the total issued capital in the telecommunications sector in November 2014 amounted to about EGP 46.94 billion with an annual growth rate that reached 1.10%, according to the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology.38

It is noteworthy that the Egyptian state has a monopoly over the land lines communications through (TE - Telecom Egypt) who is responsible

36 An article in AlMasry ALYom newspaper entitled (Communications: aims to reach technology exports contribution in GDP by up to 8% by the year 2020) http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/531753
(Publishing date: September 25, 2014) (Last visited: 8 October, 2014)
37 - An article in Al Youm 7 newspaper titled (Minister of Communications: EGP 11 billion the export of IT services this year)http://goo.gl/nfx344
(Publishing date: September 30, 2014) (Last visited: 8 October, 2014)
38 -A Brief Report on the Telecommunication and Information Technology Index in June 2014 Released by The Ministry of Telecommunication and Information Technology.
(Publishing date: June 2014) (Last visited: 8 October, 2014)
for its operation and supervision, while mobile phone services are offered by three companies (Vodafone, Mobinil, Etisalat)

At a time where the total number of land line service providers' capacity increased to be 15.88 million lines in November 2014 offered by 1656 service providers all over the country, while it was 14.79 million lines in November 2013 offered by 1704 service providers, this indicates that the number of subscribers for the land line services has decreased to become 6.24 million in November 2014, as opposed to 6.70 million in November 2013, while it was 8.66 million subscribers in May 2013. According to the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology, while it was around 9.6 million subscribers in 2010 according to "Square & Keyboard" issued by The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information.

The number of mobile phone users has reached around 96 million lines by November 2014, in contrast with 101.76 million lines by May 2014, this decline in the number of users is due to the action taken by the government in collaboration with the telecommunications companies to cancel all the unregistered lines, in addition to the citizens struggle with the mobile companies and the feeling that the prices are exaggerated, and also the complaints from the bad service.

The number of Internet users has multiplied till November 2014 to more than 3 times the number of users in 2009, in January 2011 to around 48 million users as opposed to 33 million users in July 2013, while ANHRI has estimated the number of users in 2009 to be around 15 million and in mid 2012 to be around 31 million.

This huge increase in the number of Internet users can be considered to be a direct result to some direct factors, on top of them comes the rapid technological development which was accompanied by an increase in smart phones in the Egyptian market that was used for browsing the Internet, in addition to the important role the Internet has played in the political changes that Egypt has gone through, which
was reflected by the millions of users who started using the social networking websites and on top of them facebook.

**The Legislative Environment:**

The organizing legislative environment didn't witness any major developments when it comes to organizing telecommunications, yet it did witness some amendments that might infringe freedom of expression in general by any of the available methods for expressing opinion.

The new Egyptian Constitution which started to be implemented in mid January 2014 guarantees freedom of thought, opinion and expression in article (65), which states that "Freedom of thought opinion is guaranteed. All individuals have the right to express their opinion through speech, writing, imagery, or any other means of expression and publication.

Yet the very same constitution contains a very ambiguous and very broad and unclear, by means of which the state can control the telecommunications and Internet sectors in a huge an unprecedented way, which is article (31) which says "The security of information space is an integral part of the system of national economy and security. The state commits to taking the necessary measures to preserve it in the manner organized by law."

Till now, none of the articles of this constitution that address freedoms has been translated into laws, yet the governing legislative environment stayed as it is without any positive change worth mentioning, as a law which guarantees and organizes the right to exchange of information hasn't been made, while the legislations which restrict freedom of expression and exchange of information is the same, and in addition to that, the amendments which were introduced during the period after overthrowing the Muslim Brotherhood from power.
And although there were no amendments to law No. 10 for the year 2003 which deals with organizing telecommunications, the National Telecommunications Regulatory Authority has prepared some amendments to the law in July 2014, in preparation to submit it to the President, and until the completion of this report, these amendments did not take effect.

These amendments included a ban on cutting off communications or stopping them entirely or partially except by a decision of the President based on a proposal by the Cabinet of Ministers.

**Internet Surveillance**

In June 2014, the independent Egyptian Al-Watan newspaper revealed that the Ministry of Interior (MOI) has called for a limited tender to provide and operate software that monitors Internet activities. Titled the “Social Networks Security Hazard Monitoring Operation for "Facebook, Twitter, Viber and WhatsApp" (public opinion measurement system) in which the Ministry requests from Technology companies to bid to develop, supply and install a software which enables security agencies to censor social networking.

Far from denying the newspaper’s report, an official from the MOI has confirmed the news, insisting, however, that this system is not an encroachment on privacy and freedoms of information and expression. this coincided with with a significant increase in monitoring social networks and the arrest of several administrators of the pages of social networking websites, the most recent arrest of Islam Ramadan Tawfiq admin of "Rajab El-Masry" page on the social networking website Facebook on charges of incitement against the police and the army in March 2015.

To add to the dozens of issues related to these pages, that took place in 2014, such as the arrest of the admin of "Afareet Damanhour" page and "Khalid Mohammed Abdel Al Ahmad" admin of both "Ana
Rabaawy" & "Ultras Rabaawy" pages, and the arrest of "Ibrahim Mohamed Hassanen Metwally" the admin of both "Nabd Rabaawy" and "Masr Islameya" pages, and the arrest of "Mohammed Islam Abdel Hafiz" a customs employee and admin of "Black Bloc Rabaawy" and "Revolutionary Alliance to support the Muslim Brotherhood" and the page "Enta Ayel Makhtouf Zehneyan" and "Mozahrat AlFarasha", as well as Tariq Mohammed Madani Radwan, the admin of "Ain Shams Today" page, and others, on charges of inciting violence against the police and the army.39

**Blogs and Social Networks**

Blogging has continued its decline compared to the rise of social networks that provide all the ways of sharing, social networking and more interactive mechanisms between activists and Internet users, and offers the possibility of posting photos, articles, and links to the web, as well as other materials, and the chance to make comments immediately.

At a time when the number of Internet users was going up, it was only natural that such an increase would be reflected on the social networking users, especially after the growing role which made it become one of the basic means of communication and publication owned by the activists and the network users, thanks to the wide margin and the large area for expression of opinion it offers, and the exchange of ideas, news and information.

Such a great evolution in social networking, whether in the number of visitors or the tools it offers, made the state institutions, the media and

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39 - An article in "Al-Mesreyoon" newspaper entitled "The Ministry of Interior Arrests Facebook Pages Users"

[http://goo.gl/IYMRFH](http://goo.gl/IYMRFH)

(Publishing date: June 5, 2014) (Last visited: 21 March, 2015)
also informal institutions, political parties and others race to own pages on social networks to interact with its users, and to share their programs through those pages.

Facebook has continued its tremendous growth in Egypt, where the number of users at the beginning of February 2015 was about 24 million users, while the number of Twitter users reached at the beginning of February 2015 nearly 4 million users in Egypt, compared to 400,000 in mid 2012. Which means that Egyptian Twitter users have multiplied by up to about 10 times in less than three years.

**Examples of Internet Cases In Egypt:**

**Teacher "Beshoy Kamil Kamel":**

- On September 27, 2012 "Tama" Misdemeanor Appeal Court in Sohag Governorate decided to uphold the judgment of the Sohag Misdemeanors Court, sentencing to 6 years in prison teacher "Beshoy Kamil Kamel" on charges of contempt of religion and insulting the prophet Mohammed and insulting President Mohamed Morsi through what he published in a post on his Facebook account, the post was shared by his colleagues at work, then a compliant was filed to the public prosecution against him, who referred him to trial under the Egyptian penal code, he received this harsh sentence and the teacher is carrying out his sentence behind bars, till the writing of those lines.

**Blogger Alber Saber:**

On December 12, 2012 Al-Marg Misdemeanors Court issued its ruling to imprison blogger "Alber Saber Ayad" accused of contempt of religion, three years with the force and EGP 1000 bail till the appeal with the refusal of civil claims against him by a number of citizens, against the backdrop of the activist's sharing material on his Facebook account.
The public prosecution had accused Alber of publishing content on the Internet which condemns him of contempt of religions and sedition.

The incidents of the imprisonment of Alber dates back to September 2012, when the police arrested him from his home when some of his neighbors accused him of contempt of religions through his accounts on the social networking websites, and then they gathered around his house and began shouting enticing chants, prompting his mother to call the police for help out of fear that the mob might break into her home, but she was surprised as the police come to arrest her son and took him to Al-Marg Police Station after confiscating his computer, and at the police station Alber was physically assaulted due to direct instigation by one of the officers, which has been demonstrated in the prosecution's investigation, an appeal has been submitted to this judgment issued against Alber, and he paid the bail to be released and then left the country, before the decision of the first instance court was upheld by the Court of Appeal sentencing the activist to prison.

A Court Ruling to Block "YouTube":

On February 9, 2013 the Administrative Court, issued a decision to block "YouTube" and all the other sites which shared the offensive video to the prophet of Islam based on a lawsuit filed by lawyer Mohamed Hamed Salem, and sued by both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Communications and the National Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, demanding the cancellation of the negative decision not to block YouTube and other sites that show the film in which, considering it to be against the Islamic faith and the status of the prophet, and despite this ruling has been issued, but it has not actually been implemented.
Video Blogger Ahmed Anwar:

On March 17, 2013 a warrant to arrest video blogger Ahmed Anwar was issued after Tanta District Court set a hearing to consider Case No. 5975, 2013 Tanta I Misdemeanors on May 4, after the public prosecution pressed charges of insulting the Ministry of Interior and deliberate harassment of others using the means of communication based on a memorandum made by the Director General for Legal Affairs Directorate of Security Al-Gharbeya on the video that Ahmed Anwar posted on his Facebook account and on his YouTube channel titled "The relationship between artist Marwa and the Ministry of Interior and the state of lawlessness," in which he criticizes and makes fun of the performance of the Ministry of Interior and its failure to maintain security, and in the hearing held on January 22, Tanta Economics Misdemeanors I Court issued its ruling, sentencing the blogger to three months in prison and a bail of EGP 1,000 to stop the execution, and a EGP 10,000 fine, Anwar's defense appealed the verdict, during the appeal hearing the blogger was absent so the Court of Appeal cosidered it as if nothing happened, and he has one last chance to challenge a progress appellate judgment, the blogger still at large, and has not been arrested to carry out the sentence.

Mahmoud Abou Zeid photographer of "Demotix" website:

On August 14, 2013 security forces arrested photojournalist "Mahmoud Abou Zeid" a reporter for both websites "Demotix" and "Corbis", while he was covering the dispersal of the Muslim Brotherhood's sit-in at Rabaa, and despite Abou Zeid submitted documents stating that he was assigned by "Demotix" website to cover the events, nevertheless the security services accused him of belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood, and using violence, the photographer is still awaiting trial since his arrest till the writing those lines, pending the case known as the "Dispersal of Rabaa" case.
The case of Rasd News Network known as "Sisi Leaks":

On November 12, 2013, the Egyptian security services arrested one of the founders of Rasd News Network journalist Amr Salama al-Qazzaz from his home, and confiscated his computer, his mobile phone, and some papers and documents that were in his home, as well as his car. On November 18, security bodies arrested Rasd News Network journalist Islam al-Homsi after he got out from one of the classrooms at his college.

Then they were referred to the military prosecution which accused them along with soldier Mohamed Abdel Moneim Nasr, and two other journalists living outside the country; Amr Abdel Moneim Farag and Omar Ibrahim Chahine, collectively accused of illegally obtaining a secret of State Security, and broadcasting the secret over the Internet. The secrets are recorded video clips posted on Rasd News Network website.

This was against the backdrop of posting video clips showing, back then, Deputy Prime Minister and Feild Marshal Abdel Fattah al-Sisi who was a potential presidential candidate talking about some of the Egyptian public affairs issues, and there was no mention of any military issues.

On February 23, 2014, the military prosecution referred them to trial before a military court, the Court turned the case to a felony to be considered by North Cairo Military Criminal Court, with the aforementioned charges, and the Misdemeanors Military Court started considering the initial case hearings on February 24, 2014, and at its hearing held on 4 March 2014, the Court decided the incompetence for the consideration of the case, and referred it to the military prosecution to take the necessary measures, because the crime has been committed by publishing, and the publishing cases are specific to criminal courts.
The case was then referred to the criminal court, which began its consideration on the hearing session of March 18, 2014, after deliberating the case by hearings and listening to the witnesses testimony and the defense, the court issued its ruling on the hearing held on April 10, 2014, declaring Amr Salama al-Qazzaz innocent, and sentencing Islam al-Homsi to one year in prison and a fine of EGP 500, and sentencing Mohamed Abdel Moneim Nasr to 3 years in prison and a fine of EGP 500, and sentenced in absentia to imprison Amr Farrag, and Omar Chahine for 3 years and a fine of EGP 500.

**The case of Journalist Mohammed Ali Hassan "Akhbar Masr":**

On Friday, December 12, 2014, the Egyptian security forces arrested "Akhbar Masr" journalist Mohammed Ali Hassan from his home, and referred him to the public prosecution in case No. 24464/2014 Agouza Misdemeanors on charges of joining a group founded outside the law which aims to hinder the state institutions and to infringe on public freedoms, promoting in writing the objectives of the group, obstruction of the work of public authorities, incitement to demonstrate without a permit to disrupt public security and halt production, receiving money from abroad to carry out the crime of incitement to resist the authorities, broadcasting false news likely to disturb public security, and the misuse of the Internet, and since then Hassan is still in pre-trial detention pending the case.

**The case of Mohammed Ali El-Meligy:**

On February 15, 2015, the Egyptian security forces arrested Mohammed Ali El-Meligy from his home and brought him before the public prosecutor in Case No. 1681 for 2015 Badrashin Misdemeanors on charges of libel and insulting public figures on social networks, and the misuse of social networking websites, and he is still in pre-trial detention pending that case till the writing of those lines.
Mauritania

Overview

Resident Population around 4 million inhabitants

In mid-2014, General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania was elected for a new presidential term, the Mauritanian opposition both participated in, and blessed the election, while a broad sector, both inside and outside the country, doubt its impartiality. Abdul Aziz came to power in August 2008 after leading a military coup which overthrew the civilian elected president Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh, thus, becoming the sixth military head of Mauritania since its independence.

The successive military coups in Mauritania led to its diplomatic marginalization for many years by its neighbors from the Maghreb countries. Moreover, there are many other factors such as its geographical location and its desert nature, which made it one of the most unsafe and unstable places, due to the proliferation of weapons and also the constant conflict with extremist terrorist groups, which greatly affected development in such an impoverished country, which also affected the telecommunications and Internet sector.

Despite all of that, Mauritania is in a better position compared to its neighbors when it comes to ensuring freedom of expression, or rather, to be more precise, it is less than its neighbors in the restrictions on freedom of expression, but it remains one of the countries that pursue opinion makers with repression and harassment.

ICT Sector

During the past years, Mauritania has adopted policies aimed at the liberalization of the ICT sector in an effort to develop the sector and increase its contribution to the economic development within the country, but this sector is suffering from a severe decline in
comparison with other countries, especially since Mauritania is one of the countries that suffer from extreme poverty and the poor state of the economy of the country, communications and Internet users suffer from the poor services provided to them and the high prices, according to the World Bank representative in Mauritania; the ICT sector does not accommodate more than 1.7% of the active Mauritanians.40

The Internet was first introduced in Mauritania in 1998, the Mauritanian government began the liberalization of the ICT sector in 2000, when it granted licenses to provide all mobile phone services to two companies, the first "Mauritel Mobile" which is the fruit of a Moroccan Mauritanian partnership, and the second is "Mattel" which is the fruit of a Tunisian Mauritanian partnership, in 2007, another company "Chinguitel" joined them, which is the fruit of a Sudanese Mauritanian partnership, that set of three companies are the operators that provide mobile services in the country.

In 2001 "Mauritel" the national telecommunications company that had a monopoly on fixed land lines at that time was privatized, and afterwards the three companies entered in providing fixed line services after the liberalization of the ICT sector.

According to the Mauritanian regulatory authority in the latest census; the number of fixed telephone subscribers is 2.42% of the total population, which is equivalent to 78,400 subscribers, while the number of mobile phone subscribers, 71% of the total population, which is about 2.5 million subscribers.41

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- 40 An article in Essirage news website entitled: "The World Bank: 1.7% the Capacity of the ICT Sector in Mauritania"
  http://essirage.net/index.php/news-and-reports/16417--17-.html
  (Published on 10 May, 2014) (Last visited on 15 October, 2014)
- 41 A report by the Mauritanian Ministry of Employment, Vocational Training and New Technology entitled "National Strategy for the modernization of management and information technology 2012-2016"
  http://www.emploi.gov.mr/SETN/Ar/StrategieTICSSPOAR.pdf
The number of Internet users in Mauritania has reached almost half a million users in January 2015.

**Developments in the Legislative Environment Governing the Internet and Telecommunications:**

The Mauritanian Constitution explicitly provided the right to freedom of expression, and the electronic press in Mauritania is subject to the press law when it comes to publishing crimes.

At the beginning of July 2013, the National Assembly or the "parliament" approved a new law to regulate electronic communications, this law determined the jurisdiction of the regulatory authority, which regulates the ICT sector in Mauritania, and regulates the issuance of licenses for telecommunications companies in the country, the law also gives the regulatory authorities control over the telecommunications market prices, and monopoly practices, protection of consumers' rights, it also regulates the electric radio licenses, and the establishment and exploitation of communications networks.

In April 2014, the parliament began discussing a bill that raised the ire of bloggers, online activists and all those who care about freedom of expression and Internet freedom in Mauritania, it is "The legal framework of the Mauritanian Society of Information" or what is known as the law of the "three memes," which pushed the activists to organize wide protest campaigns, both on the Internet and on the ground inside the country, to the extent of organizing protests in front of the parliament building to refuse to pass the bill, because it aims at imposing strict censorship on the Internet and stipulates harsh penalties that amounts to imprisonment and a fine for the violation of its elastic provisions.

Since then the "three memes" law was brought to the parliament to discuss and ratify it, but after the extensive campaigns against such a
law, it was postponed indefinitely, then the parliament began to discuss it again by the end of 2014, and till the writing of these lines, a final decision hasn't been reached regarding this law.

**Social Networks:**

Mauritania has seen a boom in blogs and social networks, because of the Arab Spring, but it remains quite low for a country the size of Mauritania, and as a result of the country's political movement, the blogs and social networking websites provided a space for exchanging ideas and expressing opinion, especially for criticizing the government and the news.

Despite the small number of blogs and the suffering from the poor Internet services, it is moving significantly as a window from which the opposition of such a poor country look out onto the world, the Mauritanian bloggers were able to show the world what is going on in their country through their blogs. A new type of blogs also appeared in the country during the recent period, it is called "local" blogs, which are blogs that specialize in publishing news about the cities in the country.

Nothing proves the rising influence of blogs in Mauritania more than awarding "Ahmed Ould Gedo" the prominent Mauritanian blogger http://ahmedjedou.blogspot.com the Bobs Award for the Best Arabic blog for 2013.

Bloggers and online activists in Mauritania are interested in posting photographs and defining the situation in this country, next to discussing the political and the human rights situation, as it makes most of the content published online by the Internet users in Mauritania.

Meanwhile the social networks are rapidly increasing among Internet users in Mauritania, a wide sector of online activists has attributed the government's need to pass the "three memes" law to its desire to
control the social networks and to curb the rapid growth, especially since it is being used to criticize the authorities and to call for reform and to demand democracy.

"Facebook" is considered the most prominent social network in the country, and the number of users until early 2015 is around 250,000 users.

While Twitter users are estimated at 3,500 users until early 2015.

**Violations of Internet Freedom in Mauritania:**

**Blogger Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mkhaitir**

In early January 2014 the Mauritanian security forces arrested blogger Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mkhaitir from the city of Nouadhibou in Mauritania and accused him of insulting the prophet of Islam, against the backdrop of an article published on the Internet in which he criticized some of the decisions taken by the prophet and his companions concerning jihad, and it was not sufficient that the blogger withdrew his article a few hours after it was published, he was brought to trial on the charge of "apostasy" and some Islamist groups and currents organized protests in the country calling for the death penalty against him, as well as putting pressure on his lawyer, describing him as the advocate of atheism, and till the writing those lines, the blogger was still behind bars pending his criminal trial.

**Blogger Babbah Weld Abidine**

On Tuesday, 7 August 2013, the security forces arrested Mauritanian journalist and blogger Babbah Weld Abidine, who works as a correspondent in the Region of Tagant for the website “Reporters – Mourasiloun”, and he is also the editor of "Lebjawi" News blog.

Weld Abidine, who was detained briefly, had headed to the General Prosecutor Office in the state to inquire about a rape incident that took
place in the countryside of Tagant Region, and the victim's family accuses the security forces of closing the case and releasing the offender.

**Website Blocking**

There are large segments within Mauritania who try to put pressure on the authorities in order to block the so-called pornographic sites, where a campaign was launched under the title "No to pornography" in an attempt to put pressure on the regulatory authority to block the websites that offer sexual content.

Although the authorities did not resort to blocking websites, they did not take any action to prevent Internet service providers from issuing decisions to block websites either.

- On December 6, 2013, Middle East News Agency published an article in which it said that "Chinguitel" company blocked the agency's website on its Mauritanian 2G services a few days after the publication of an article in which the agency criticized the company and its services.
Graphs Appendix

Population by millions
Number of Twitter Users by Millions

The Percentage of Internet Users in the Population
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