***Dirasat*: Human and Social Sciences, Volume 53, No. 12, 2026, 11321**

Deanship of Scientific Research

Authoritarianism in the Digital Age: The Cybercrime Law and the Erosion of Public Freedoms in Jordan

***Mohammed Torki Bani Salameh*[1], *Mohammed Zaid Obeidat*[2*]**

[1] Yarmouk University, Department of Politics and International Studies,

[2] Jadara University, Faculty of Media, Department of Media and Communication Technology

Received: 7/4/2025
Revised: 11/5/2025
Accepted: 15/6/2025
Published online: 1/9/2026

* *Corresponding author:*
m.obaidat2@gmail.com

Citation: Bani Salameh, M. T., & Obeidat, M. Z. (2026). Authoritarianism in the Digital Age: The Cybercrime Law and the Erosion of Public Freedoms in Jordan. Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences, 53(12), 11321.
https://doi.org/10.35516/Hum.2026.11321

© 2026 DSR Publishers/ The University of Jordan.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC) license https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

Abstract

Objectives: This study critically examines the political and legal dimensions of the 2023 Jordanian Cybercrime Law, with a focus on its effects on fundamental public freedoms, including freedom of expression, digital rights, and civic engagement.

Methods: Utilizing a qualitative analytical framework, the study conducts a comprehensive review of constitutional provisions, reports from civil society organizations, and relevant international legal standards to assess the law's implications for civil liberties, legal accountability, and democratic governance.

Results: The analysis reveals that the Cybercrime Law incorporates vague and expansive terminology that facilitates state surveillance, arbitrary detention, and the suppression of dissent. These legal provisions have contributed to a pronounced contraction of civic space, emblematic of a broader strategy to consolidate authoritarian governance under the pretext of reform.

Conclusion: The enactment of the 2023 Cybercrime Law constitutes a significant regression in Jordan's political reform trajectory. To advance genuine democratic transformation, the study underscores the urgent need for comprehensive legal reforms, enhancement of judicial independence, and robust protections for civil society actors. Without such reforms, the law is poised to further erode public trust and entrench authoritarian practices under the guise of modernization efforts.

Key Words: Cybercrime Law, Freedom of Expression, Authoritarianism, Political Reform, Civil Society

السلطوية في العصر الرقمي: قانون الجرائم الإلكترونية وتآكل الحريات العامة في الأردن

***محمد تركي بني سلامة*[1]، *محمد زيد عبيدات*[2*]**

[1] قسم الدراسات السياسية والدولية، جامعة اليرموك الاردن

[2] قسم الاعلام وتكنولوجيا الاتصال، كلية الاعلام، جامعة جدارا الاردن

ملخّص

الأهداف: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقييم الأبعاد السياسية والقانونية لقانون الجرائم الإلكترونية الأردني لعام 2023، وقياس تأثيره على الحريات العامة، وخصوصاً حرية التعبير والحقوق الرقمية والمشاركة المدنية.

المنهجية: اعتمدت الدراسة منهجاً نوعياً تحليلياً، استند إلى تحليل النصوص الدستورية، وتقارير منظمات المجتمع المدني، والمعايير القانونية الدولية، من أجل دراسة أثر القانون على الحريات المدنية والمساءلة القانونية والحكم الديمقراطي.

النتائج: أظهرت النتائج أن قانون الجرائم الإلكترونية يتضمن مصطلحات غامضة وفضفاضة تسمح بالمراقبة الحكومية، والاعتقالات التعسفية، وقمع الأصوات المعارضة. وقد أدت هذه الأدوات القانونية إلى تضييق كبير في الفضاء المدني، وتعكس نهجاً أوسع في ترسيخ الاستبداد تحت غطاء الإصلاح.

الخلاصة : يُعد قانون الجرائم الإلكترونية لعام 2023 انتكاسة خطيرة لمسار الإصلاح السياسي في الأردن. ويتطلب تحقيق التحول الديمقراطي الحقيقي إصلاحات قانونية عاجلة، وتعزيز استقلال القضاء، وتوسيع الحماية القانونية للمجتمع المدني. وبدون هذه الإجراءات، سيواصل القانون تقويض الثقة العامة وترسيخ الممارسات السلطوية تحت مسمى التحديث.

الكلمات الدالة : قانون الجرائم الإلكترونية، حرية التعبير، الاستبداد، الإصلاح السياسي، المجتمع المدني.

1. Introduction

In recent years, Jordan has experienced a noticeable tightening of public freedoms, particularly concerning Freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. While the 1952 Jordanian Constitution guarantees these civil liberties, enshrined in Articles 15, 16, and 17, their implementation has faced growing challenges due to legislative measures and administrative practices that have expanded executive authority (Bani Salameh & Darawsheh, 2018). A prominent and recent example is the 2023 Cybercrime Law, which has generated significant public debate and criticism from legal scholars, civil society organizations, and international observers regarding its implications for digital freedoms and civic engagement (Alakayleh et al., 2024; Amnesty International, 2024).

Jordan has often portrayed its reform trajectory as gradual and consistent, especially following the Arab Spring. Reform initiatives such as the 2011 constitutional amendments and the 2021 Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System have been presented as steps toward democratization. Nonetheless, some scholars argue that these initiatives have not fully addressed key structural constraints, as they have tended to preserve centralized governance rather than establish more robust democratic institutions (Bani Salameh & Ananzah, 2015; Day, 2015). The constitutional framework affirms fundamental civil liberties, yet in practice, some legal instruments continue to be used in ways that raise concerns about the balance between national security and individual rights. The 2023 Cybercrime Law, for example, includes broad provisions such as criminalizing "spreading false news" and "undermining national unity," which have drawn attention from human rights organizations for their potential to be interpreted and applied in overly expansive ways (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

The Law, enacted in August 2023, was introduced as part of the government's response to rising concerns about cybercrime, hate speech, and digital misinformation. However, critics have pointed to the ambiguity of key terms such as "provoking strife," "offending religious values," and "promoting immorality," which are not clearly defined in legal terms and may lead to inconsistent or discretionary enforcement (Simpson & Weiner, 1989; Alakayleh et al., 2024). Legal experts have noted that these ambiguities may not fully align with constitutional principles of legal clarity and proportionality, nor with Jordan's international commitments to safeguard civil liberties (Library of Congress, n.d.; UN Human Rights Office, 2023). Reports by rights organizations suggest that these provisions have, in certain instances, facilitated legal action against individuals, including journalists and activists, for their online expressions of political or social opinion, raising further concerns about the Law's practical impact (Amnesty International, 2024).

Between August 2023 and August 2024, various legal cases were filed under the Law concerning digital content perceived as critical of public institutions. These developments have prompted reactions from civil society organizations, political parties, and professional associations such as the Jordanian Bar Association, many of whom view the Law as a potential constraint on free speech and democratic participation (CPED, 2021; Teller Report, 2023). At the same time, government officials have defended the legislation as necessary to safeguard social cohesion and address the growing threat of cybercrimes in the digital age (Arab News, 2023).

This article offers an in-depth assessment of the 2023 Cybercrime Law's implications for public freedoms, particularly in the digital realm. Rather than approaching the Law as a restrictive measure, the analysis situates it within Jordan's broader legal and political context. It examines the intersection between reform narratives and governance practices. It seeks to understand how legal frameworks navigate emerging digital challenges while balancing national security considerations and civil liberties.

The article's structure is organized as follows: Section 2 outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the analysis. Section 3 presents a comprehensive review of the existing literature. Section 4 offers a historical examination of public freedoms in Jordan, focusing on constitutional guarantees and the legal-institutional structures shaping civic rights. Section 5 provides a critical analysis of the principal provisions of the 2023 Cybercrime Law. Section 6 explores the Law's implications for digital rights, particularly its impact on journalists, activists, and civil society organizations. Section 7 assesses the Law's implementation in practice, highlighting patterns of surveillance, arbitrary arrests, and responses from both domestic and international stakeholders. Section 8 analyzes the gap between the rhetoric of political Reform and the realities of authoritarian consolidation, and offers policy recommendations to safeguard public freedoms. Finally, Section

9 concludes with a reflection on the broader implications of the Cybercrime Law for democratic governance in Jordan.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Research Problem

Despite constitutional guarantees of civil liberties in Jordan, enacting the 2023 Cybercrime Law has raised significant concerns regarding its impact on public freedoms, particularly digital expression, civic engagement, and the role of civil society. The Law's vague provisions, expansive prosecutorial powers, and potential for arbitrary enforcement suggest a shift toward legal authoritarianism that undermines democratic reform efforts. There is a pressing need to examine whether the Law is a legitimate tool for combating cyber threats or consolidating executive control and suppressing dissent in the digital age.

2.2. Research Questions

1. How does the 2023 Cybercrime Law affect the exercise of public freedoms in Jordan, particularly Freedom of expression and digital rights?
2. In what ways does the Law align or conflict with Jordan's constitutional and international human rights commitments?
3. What are the implications of the Law for civil society organizations, journalists, and political activists?
4. To what extent does the Cybercrime Law reflect broader patterns of authoritarian consolidation under the guise of political Reform?
5. What legal and institutional reforms are necessary to reconcile national security concerns with democratic governance and public freedoms?

2.3. Research Objectives

1. **Analytical Objective:**
2. To critically analyze the legal provisions of the 2023 Cybercrime Law in light of constitutional guarantees and international legal standards.
3. **Empirical Objective:**
4. To assess the real-world impact of the Law on civil society, media freedom, and political activism in Jordan.
5. **Theoretical Objective:**
6. To contextualize the Law within Jordan's political reform trajectory and evaluate its role in the broader authoritarian governance model.
7. **Policy-Oriented Objective:**
8. To propose policy recommendations that balance the need for cyber regulation with protecting civil liberties and democratic accountability.

2.4. Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value in both academic and policy circles:

- **Academic Significance:**
- It contributes to the literature on legal authoritarianism, digital repression, and state-citizen relations in hybrid regimes. Analyzing Jordan as a case study adds depth to the comparative analysis of Middle Eastern governance models and cyber legislation trends.
- **Practical Significance:**
- The study offers actionable insights for policymakers, legal practitioners, and civil society advocates. Its findings can inform legislative reform efforts, judicial review strategies, and advocacy campaigns seeking to protect civic space and promote democratic norms.

- **International Relevance:**
- As Jordan maintains strategic ties with Western democracies, the research informs international human rights bodies and donor agencies about the domestic impact of legal developments framed under modernization narratives.

2.5. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study integrates three key dimensions:

a) Legal-Political Interface:

- Anchored in **constitutionalism** and **international human rights law**, this dimension examines the compatibility of the Cybercrime Law with Articles 15–17 and 128 of the Jordanian Constitution and relevant international covenants (e.g., ICCPR).

b) Authoritarian Resilience and Managed Reform:

- Drawing from theories of **authoritarian resilience** and **managed liberalization**, the framework analyzes how legal tools such as the Cybercrime Law project Reform while reinforcing executive dominance (Bani Salameh et al., 2024; Yom, 2020).

c) Digital Civic Space and Surveillance State:

- This component focuses on **digital rights theory** and the **politics of surveillance**, assessing how vague legal definitions and enforcement mechanisms impact online freedoms and shape public discourse (Simpson & Weiner, 1989; Access Now, 2023).

3. Literature Review

The literature on Jordan's political trajectory reveals a persistent contradiction between the discourse of political Reform and the reality of entrenched authoritarian governance. Scholars such as Bani Salameh and Ananzah (2015) argue that constitutional amendments and political initiatives since the early 2000s, including the widely publicized Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System in 2021, have primarily served as symbolic gestures. These reforms, often initiated during periods of domestic unrest or international scrutiny, have rarely resulted in substantive redistribution of power or enhanced institutional accountability (Bani Salameh et al., 2024). This disconnect between formal commitments and actual outcomes is emblematic of a broader political logic described by Yom (2020) as a "bread and fear strategy," whereby regimes combine limited economic concessions with expansive legal controls to maintain order. Muasher (2011) similarly attributes the failure of reform efforts, such as the 2005 National Agenda, to resistance from entrenched elite networks and informal power structures that persist beneath the surface of constitutional governance.

In this context, the enactment of Jordan’s 2023 Cybercrime Law stands as a paradigmatic example of what Cavatorta and Haugbølle (2021) term "performative reform" in hybrid regimes, whereby legislative innovation serves to modernize authoritarian control rather than expand democratic rights. The Law has faced widespread criticism from domestic and international observers for its vague terminology and broad prosecutorial powers. Human Rights Watch (2023), Amnesty International (2024), and Access Now (2023) warn that criminalizing expressions such as "spreading false news," "undermining national unity," and "offending religious values" introduces ambiguity that undermines due process and legal proportionality. Simpson and Weiner (1989) emphasize the centrality of legal clarity to the rule of Law, a principle that the Cybercrime Law notably violates. In addition, provisions targeting the use of privacy-enhancing tools like VPNs further illustrate the Law's restrictive orientation, especially for journalists, human rights defenders, and civil society actors seeking to operate securely in digital environments (Alakayleh et al., 2024; Access Now, 2023).

Jordan's civil society, once a vital engine of democratic Reform, has come under increasing pressure. Reports from the Phenix Center (2021), CIVICUS (2023), and the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists (2020) document a deteriorating civic space, characterized by the suppression of labor unions, closure of professional associations, and increased state surveillance. These developments intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, when emergency powers

were used to justify critics' arrest and suspend constitutional freedoms. Scholars such as Clark (2018) and Shteiwi (2012) have long emphasized the importance of civil society in fostering political pluralism, yet recent developments indicate that this role is now severely curtailed. Rahman (2023) frames this transformation as the emergence of a "controlled civic ecosystem," where civic actors are tolerated only if they avoid challenging the regime's authority.

Methodological limitations have also marked the academic literature. While rich in qualitative insights, most studies rely on legal interpretation, discourse analysis, and policy critique. Few attempts have been made to quantify the societal impact of cyber laws or gauge public perceptions of digital rights. An exception is provided by the Center for Strategic Studies (2022), which used opinion polling to assess public trust in recent reform efforts. More recently, Al-Rousan and Al-Kharabsheh (2023) have employed survey-based methods to examine how the Cybercrime Law has contributed to heightened self-censorship and declining trust in online platforms as avenues for civic engagement.

Official narratives have framed the Cybercrime Law as necessary to address cyber threats and misinformation. According to Arab News (2023), Jordanian officials argue that the surge in cyber-related complaints justifies stronger legal mechanisms to maintain public order and national cohesion. However, international organizations such as the United Nations and Freedom House (2024) have raised concerns that these justifications primarily obscure the Law's coercive function. Similar dynamics have been observed across the Middle East and North Africa, where governments use cybercrime legislation to fortify regime stability under the banner of modernization (Khalil & Fabbri, 2022). Deibert (2022) has identified this trend as a global shift toward "digital legalism," where authoritarian governments rely less on overt censorship and more on expansive, ambiguous laws to regulate dissent.

Jordan's Cybercrime Law is emblematic of a broader strategy of authoritarian consolidation. Yom and Al-Khatib (2022) argue that reform initiatives in Jordan increasingly function as instruments of international legitimacy rather than genuine democratization. This insight is reinforced by the continued legal marginalization of opposition groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, as documented in Bani Salameh's work (2021, 2023). Far from empowering representative institutions or expanding civil liberties, legal reforms have entrenched executive dominance while constraining independent political activity. The manipulation of electoral laws, control over civil society, and strategic use of legal frameworks all reflect a sophisticated form of authoritarian governance that adapts to new challenges while maintaining core power structures.

Despite resistance from domestic actors, such as the Jordanian Bar Association, political parties, and youth-led movements, structural impediments to Reform remain formidable. Legal appeals, advocacy campaigns, and media activism continue, but their impact is constrained by the legal environment they seek to reform. The present study builds upon this literature by offering a comprehensive analysis of how the 2023 Cybercrime Law operates as a legislative innovation and political instrument. It situates the Law within the broader context of managed Reform, securitized governance, and digital authoritarianism. In doing so, it addresses a critical scholarly gap by linking legal analysis to the lived experiences of citizens navigating a shrinking civic space.

4. Historical Context of Public Freedoms in Jordan

The historical trajectory of public freedoms in Jordan reveals a complex interplay between constitutional guarantees and state control mechanisms. While the 1952 Constitution formally enshrines civil liberties, including Freedom of expression (Article 15), association (Article 16), and peaceful assembly (Article 17), the actual implementation of these rights has often fallen short due to restrictive laws and political practices (Bani Salameh & Darawsheh, 2018).

Jordan's first significant encounter with political liberalization occurred in 1989 following a series of economic crises and widespread protests. This period marked the beginning of parliamentary elections and the legalization of political parties. The National Charter 1991 outlined broad civil and political rights, aiming to institutionalize Reform (Bani Salameh & Ananzeh, 2015). However, the reforms remained largely symbolic, as the monarchy retained broad powers, including the authority to dissolve Parliament and appoint key government officials (Bani Salameh et al., 2024).

Subsequent attempts at Reform, such as the 2005 National Agenda Committee, which proposed comprehensive political and socio-economic reforms, were similarly diluted. The committee's recommendations—from promoting civil liberties to restructuring the electoral system—were sidelined due to opposition from entrenched political elites and security institutions (Muasher, 2011). The monarchy continued to control the pace and scope of reforms, preserving its dominant position in the political structure.

The Arab Spring in 2011 marked another turning point. King Abdullah II initiated a new round of constitutional amendments in response to regional uprisings and local demonstrations. These reforms established the Independent Election Commission and other institutions to enhance transparency and accountability. However, again, critics argued that these changes were insufficient and did not meaningfully empower democratic institutions or safeguard public freedoms (Day, 2015; HRW, 2024).

More recently, the formation of the Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System in 2021 under Samir Al-Rifai was framed as a new chapter in democratization. The committee proposed amendments to electoral and political party laws to increase youth and women's participation (Petra, 2021). However, scholars contend that these reforms, like their predecessors, were largely cosmetic. They argue that the initiative failed to address executive overreach, suppression of dissent, and weak legislative authority (Bani Salameh et al., 2024).

Parallel to these reform initiatives, Jordan has increasingly relied on restrictive legal tools to control civic space. The Law on Societies (2008), Public Gatherings Law (2011), and more recently, the 2023 Cybercrime Law, have been used to limit Freedom of association, peaceful protest, and digital expression (CPED, 2021; Freedom House, 2024; HRW, 2023). The Cybercrime Law, in particular, has introduced vague legal provisions that criminalize “spreading false news” and “undermining national unity,” thereby institutionalizing state control over online discourse (Amnesty International, 2024; Middle East Monitor, 2023).

In conclusion, Jordan's history of public freedoms is marked by periodic reformist rhetoric that masks enduring authoritarian practices. While constitutional texts project a commitment to civil liberties, successive governments have failed to translate these principles into practice. The state's preference for managed Reform and legal instruments of control underscores the ongoing tension between modernization discourse and political authoritarianism. This aligns with: “The Endless Reform Process...” which critiques symbolic reform as a tool of control. (Bani Salameh et al., 2024).

4.1 Legal and Constitutional Framework Governing Public Freedoms

Jordan's legal and constitutional framework offers a paradoxical landscape. Earlier reformist visions, such as those presented by Bani Salameh (2007), called for a genuinely democratic constitutional transformation that would realign legal authority with popular sovereignty. However, subsequent amendments have largely reinforced executive control. While the 1952 Constitution formally enshrines public freedoms—including Freedom of expression, opinion, assembly, and association (Articles 15–17)—these rights are rendered conditional by clauses that limit their exercise to what is "permitted by law". This language has enabled the executive and legislative branches to pass restrictive laws undermining the freedoms the Constitution claims to protect (Bani Salameh & Darawsheh, 2018).

Among the most significant tools curtailing these freedoms is the Law on Societies (Law No. 51 of 2008). Although Article 16 of the Constitution guarantees the right to association, this Law institutionalizes excessive state control over civil society organizations (CSOs). The Ministry of Social Development holds discretionary powers to dissolve organizations, veto foreign funding, and appoint state administrators to replace elected NGO leadership (Phenix Center, 2021). These provisions have weakened CSOs' ability to operate independently and have eroded their role in promoting accountability and Reform.

Similarly, Freedom of expression is compromised by a complex web of laws, including the Press and Publications Law, the Anti-Terrorism Law, and most recently, the 2023 Cybercrime Law. These laws employ vague and overbroad terminology—such as "spreading false news," "undermining national unity," or "offending religious values"—that facilitate arbitrary application and have led to the criminalization of dissent, particularly online (Human Rights Watch, 2023; Bani Salameh et al., 2024). Journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens have faced arrest or harassment for expressing critical

opinions on social media platforms, further narrowing civic space.

Despite several rounds of constitutional amendments, particularly in 2011 and 2022, scholars argue that these reforms have been mainly symbolic. Key powers remain centralized in the monarchy, including judicial appointments and the authority to dissolve Parliament (Bani Salameh & Ananzeh, 2015). Rather than serving as a check on executive overreach, the judiciary often reinforces it, given its structural subordination to royal authority.

As The Endless Reform Process notes, Jordan's legal system has evolved to permit the appearance of Reform while entrenching authoritarian control (Bani Salamehe et al., 2024). Though the Constitution espouses civil liberties, the state's legal architecture, reinforced by emergency powers and vague criminal codes, prioritizes control over constitutionalism. Jordan's public freedoms exist more as aspirational ideals than enforceable rights.

5. The 2023 Cybercrime Law: Content and Controversies

The enactment of Jordan's 2023 Cybercrime Law marked a critical juncture in the legal treatment of digital rights and Freedom of expression. While introduced under the pretext of combating cyber threats, hate speech, and misinformation, the Law has been widely criticized for expanding state control over online spaces and undermining public freedoms. Legal scholars, human rights organizations, and civil society actors contend that the Law poses a significant threat to civic space and Freedom of expression in Jordan (Human Rights Watch, 2023; Freedom House, 2023). Critics argue that the new cybercrime law curtails citizens' freedoms and suppresses dissent. Vedant Patel, a spokesperson for the US State Department, expressed concerns that the Law restricts Freedom of expression and could hinder economic and political reforms (Royanews, 2023).

Representative Yanal Freihat expressed concerns that the Law could stifle dissent and target citizens' Freedom of expression, allowing the Public Prosecution to file lawsuits without personal complaints. In contrast, Minister of Digital Economy Ahmed Al-Hananda defended the Law, stating that it focuses on cybercrime and its penalties are marginal compared to the harm caused (Teller Report, 2023).

The Law's vague and overly broad terminology is at the core of the controversy. It criminalizes ambiguous offenses such as "spreading false news," "undermining national unity," "offending religious values," and "promoting immorality"—terms that lack a clear legal definition and invite arbitrary enforcement (Alakayleh et al., 2024). This legal ambiguity contradicts international standards, which require clarity and specificity in criminal Law to ensure due process (Simpson & Weiner, 1989).

Among the Law's most contentious features is Article 15, which penalizes online expression with fines and imprisonment, often in cases involving criticism of state institutions or policies. Paragraph B of the same article allows public prosecutors to initiate cases without formal complaints, bypassing victims and enabling state-driven prosecutions (International Federation of Journalists, 2023). This provision contradicts constitutional protections under Article 17, which ensures citizens' right to petition public authorities (Library of Congress, n.d.).

The Law also criminalizes virtual private networks (VPNs), tools often used to protect user privacy online. Critics argue that banning VPNs undermines digital security and increases the risk of surveillance, especially for journalists and activists operating in sensitive contexts (Access Now, 2023). The Law compromises fundamental rights to anonymity and data protection by equating digital privacy with criminal intent.

Notably, the legislative process was rushed and lacked meaningful public engagement. The Law was passed in Parliament following the 2022 constitutional amendments without adequate consultation with civil society or digital rights experts, raising concerns about its legitimacy and intent (Reuters, 2023; Middle East Eye, 2022). Analysts view the Law as part of a broader strategy to consolidate executive control amid mounting socio-economic pressure and eroding trust in state institutions (Satloff & Schenker, 2013).

The Law's chilling effect is already evident. Civil society organizations have reported self-censorship among their members, especially on social media. Activists and journalists now risk prosecution for posting politically sensitive content, even if factual and constitutionally protected. The 2023 conviction of journalist Ahmad Hassan Al-Zoubi over a Facebook

post illustrates the Law's punitive potential and its use for silencing dissent (Endless Reform, 2024).

The new Law contradicts Article 15 of the Jordanian Constitution, which states, 'The State shall guarantee Freedom of opinion; and every Jordanian shall freely express his opinion by speech, writing, photography, and the other means of expression, which guarantees Freedom of opinion and expression. The Law's vague language and extensive provisions undermine Article 128 of the Constitution, which states that 'laws protecting rights and freedoms must not infringe upon their fundamental principles'. Consequently, the Law poses a significant threat to Freedom of expression and political Reform in Jordan, granting excessive power to ruling authorities and restricting the advancement of a more democratic society.

The Law's vague language and broad enforcement powers allow the executive to curtail these rights at will, reinforcing patterns of legal authoritarianism masked by modernization discourse (Bani Salameh et al., 2024). The Law's provisions also allow executive authorities to impose severe penalties on individuals who exercise their right to free speech. By punishing those who share information deemed false or defamatory, the Law places the burden of determining accuracy on the authorities, potentially silencing opposition and independent media. This Law will likely impact public freedoms in Jordan, as evidenced by Freedom House's designation of Jordan as a non-free country in 2023. The Kingdom's reputation may also suffer, potentially reducing financial aid from foreign donors, particularly the United States, which emphasizes the necessity of safeguarding public freedoms and Freedom of expression.

In conclusion, while framed as a national security measure, the 2023 Cybercrime Law operates primarily as a legal instrument for restricting dissent, surveilling citizens, and reinforcing executive dominance. Unless substantively revised to reflect constitutional guarantees and international legal standards, the Law will continue to erode civic space and obstruct meaningful political Reform in Jordan.

6. Digital Rights and Freedom of Expression Under Threat

The state of digital rights and Freedom of expression in Jordan has deteriorated sharply following the enactment of the 2023 Cybercrime Law, which is widely regarded as a turning point in the country's management of online civic space. While the Jordanian government claims that the Law is essential for curbing cybercrime and protecting societal values, critics argue that it empowers state authorities to arbitrarily restrict speech, deepen surveillance, and suppress dissent, particularly on digital platforms.

The Cybercrime Law of 2023 includes a series of vague and broad provisions criminalizing "spreading false news," "undermining national unity," and "offending religious values" (Human Rights Watch, 2023). This lack of precision violates the legal principle of clarity in legislation, as noted by Simpson and Weiner (1989), who emphasize the importance of unambiguous legal language in safeguarding due process. Such ambiguous terminology allows authorities to interpret the Law subjectively, raising concerns about arbitrary enforcement and self-censorship.

According to Salameh et al. (2023), the entrenched role of the "deep state" in Jordan's governance structure allows the security apparatus to circumvent democratic safeguards. The Cybercrime Law reflects this institutional configuration by providing legal cover for executive overreach into private digital activity. In this context, the Law functions as a tool of coercion rather than protection, reinforcing authoritarian tendencies under the guise of modernization.

The implementation of the Law has also threatened Jordan's fragile relationship with its civil society. Shteiwi (2012) highlights the central role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in political Reform and democratization. However, under the new cybercrime framework, many CSOs report restrictions on their digital campaigns, heightened surveillance, and fear of prosecution. These constraints have made it increasingly difficult for advocacy groups to operate online, eroding Jordan's civic infrastructure.

This legal crackdown must also be understood in the broader political-economic context. Yom (2020) links regimes like Jordan's to a political logic that balances "bread and fear," where authoritarian resilience is maintained through economic concessions and coercive control. The current digital repression falls squarely within this framework, especially as the government navigates economic instability and rising public discontent.

The international community has voiced strong opposition to the Cybercrime Law. Human Rights Watch (2023) warned that the Law could violate Jordan's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Similarly, the European Union and UN human rights bodies have urged Jordan to revise the Law by international standards for Freedom of expression (HRW, 2023).

What makes the 2023 law particularly troubling is its timing and process of enactment. Yom and Al-Khatib (2022) describe Jordan's political reform trajectory as an impasse, where reforms are announced for international consumption but rarely translate into meaningful domestic change. The rushed passage of the Cybercrime Law, with minimal public consultation, exemplifies this "reform without transformation pattern."

Moreover, Jordan's strategic importance as a Western ally has often shielded it from external accountability. Satloff and Schenker (2013) observe that Western governments prioritize stability over democratic values when engaging with Jordan. This dynamic may explain the government's confidence in pushing forward restrictive laws without fearing significant international repercussions.

In sum, the 2023 Cybercrime Law represents a setback for digital rights and Freedom of expression in Jordan and a continuation of deeper authoritarian strategies. Unless the Law is reformed to ensure clarity, proportionality, and judicial oversight, it will further shrink Jordan's already limited civic space and reinforce a digital environment dominated by surveillance and fear.

6.1. Impact on Journalists, Activists, and Civil Society

The tightening grip on civil liberties in Jordan has profoundly impacted journalists, activists, and civil society organizations (CSOs), especially after legal reforms and emergency legislation during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the Jordanian Constitution theoretically guarantees Freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, an evolving legal framework and increasing executive authority have enabled widespread censorship and repression.

Civil society in Jordan has historically played a vital role in supporting social development, rights advocacy, and government accountability. However, the enactment of restrictive laws, such as the Press and Publications Law, the Cybercrime Law, and the Public Gatherings Law, has curtailed the ability of journalists and civil society to operate freely (Clark, 2018; Day, 2015). These laws have enabled security services and regulatory bodies to impose vague and sweeping restrictions on speech, association, and assembly, often under the pretext of national security or public morality.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated this shrinking civic space. Under the Defense Law No. 13 of 1992, the government activated emergency powers that allowed for the suspension of key rights, including press freedom and the right to protest. Defense Order No. 8, for example, prohibited the publication of any content deemed to "cause panic," which was broadly interpreted to arrest critics, journalists, and social media users (Phenix Center, 2021). The government's use of such orders revealed a deliberate strategy of repression rather than public health protection.

According to the CPED report, civil society actors faced disproportionate restrictions compared to other sectors. The government shut down the Teachers' Syndicate, arrested its board members, and dissolved several unions, including the Jordan Engineers Association and the Journalists' Syndicate (CPED, 2021). This weakened organized labor and sent a chilling message to other activist groups. Activists reporting on corruption, migrant labor, or governance faced harassment, arbitrary detention, and surveillance (International Crisis Group, 2018).

Journalists also bore the brunt of these repressive tactics. The Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists documented numerous instances of arrests, gag orders, and online censorship during the pandemic. Notably, journalists covering protests or controversial issues, such as the closure of the Teachers' Syndicate or vaccine procurement, were detained or charged with spreading false news (Phenix Center, 2021). These actions were often justified using the ambiguous provisions of the Cybercrime Law or the Penal Code, effectively suppressing public debate.

International assessments underscore these challenges. The CIVICUS Monitor has rated Jordan's civic space as "obstructed," citing legal constraints and authoritarian governance as core issues. Organizations like DAWN (2024) have called for an end to the harassment of opposition parties and activists, noting that political dissent is increasingly criminalized.

While some reforms have been proposed, including efforts to modernize the political system, these have largely failed to address the systemic issues undermining civil society. Without substantive changes to the legal environment and a genuine commitment to democratic norms, the prospects for press freedom, civil rights, and civic engagement in Jordan remain bleak.

7. **Cybercrime Law in Practice: Arbitrary Arrests and Surveillance**

The 2023 Cybercrime Law in Jordan has raised alarm among civil society actors, journalists, and international organizations due to its expansive powers, enabling arbitrary arrests and digital surveillance. Though framed as a legal response to cyber threats, the Law's implementation in practice reveals its utility as a tool for controlling dissent and monitoring public discourse.

A key feature of the Law is its vague and sweeping language. Article 15 criminalizes the sharing of "false news," "defamation," and content deemed offensive to religion or national unity, without clear definitions (Phenix Center, 2021). This vagueness has resulted in a legal environment where law enforcement authorities can interpret the Law arbitrarily, leading to numerous detentions of journalists and activists (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

One prominent example is the sentencing of Jordanian journalist Ahmad Hassan Al-Zoubi to one year in prison over a Facebook post that allegedly insulted a public institution. This case illustrates how the Law is weaponized to penalize peaceful expression and online dissent (Endless Reform, 2024). Notably, Article 15 of the Law allows public prosecutors to pursue such cases without a formal complaint from the aggrieved party, effectively enabling the state to prosecute speech without due process (Endless Reform, 2024).

Expanded surveillance capacities further reinforce this authoritarian trend. The Law allows authorities to monitor online activities and collect user data under the justification of national security. According to the CPED report (2021), such practices were already widespread during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Cybercrime Law has provided further legal legitimacy to mass surveillance.

Surveillance and legal intimidation have had a chilling effect on civic activity. Activists, unionists, and independent journalists have reported being summoned for questioning, surveilled, or charged with vague offenses after publishing critical content online (CPED, 2021). These actions disproportionately affect individuals reporting on corruption, political Reform, or labor rights.

International bodies have voiced serious concerns. The European Union and the United Nations have criticized the Law for failing to meet the legality, necessity, and proportionality standards required by international human rights law (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Human Rights Watch (2024) noted that the Law reinforces Jordan's trend toward shrinking civic space and deepening digital authoritarianism.

In addition, marginalized groups such as journalists working with independent outlets and foreign workers are particularly vulnerable. During the pandemic, for example, a Bangladeshi journalist was detained after reporting on the mistreatment of migrant laborers, showing how the Law can be used to silence voices on the margins (CPED, 2021).

In sum, the practice of the 2023 Cybercrime Law reveals it to be a repressive tool rather than a legitimate response to cyber threats. Its broad legal reach, unchecked prosecutorial authority, and increased surveillance have turned Jordan's cyberspace into a heavily policed environment. If left unreformed, the Law risks solidifying a system where fear overrides Freedom and surveillance eclipses privacy.

7.1. Domestic Reactions: Opposition and Advocacy Efforts

Jordan's 2023 Cybercrime Law has ignited considerable domestic opposition, particularly from political parties, civil society organizations (CSOs), legal professionals, and human rights advocates. Many perceive the Law as a significant setback to Freedom of expression and public liberties in a political landscape already marked by centralized control (Clark, 2018; Daly & Jones, 2020).

Opposition political parties were among the first to condemn the Law, warning that its vague provisions could easily be manipulated to criminalize dissent and silence criticism of public officials (Dawn, 2024). The Jordanian Bar Association also objected to the Law's ambiguous language—terms like "fake news" and "hate speech"—calling them potential traps for journalists and activists (Teller Report, 2023). As Davis (2022) noted, these developments reflect a broader pattern of consolidating royal authority under the guise of Reform.

CSOs were equally vocal in opposing the legislation. The Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies reported that CSOs in Jordan already operate under strict controls, facing scrutiny over foreign funding, registration, and permissible activities (CPED, 2021). The Cybercrime Law only deepens this pressure by introducing punitive measures restricting advocacy and watchdog efforts. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, many civil society groups were coerced into surveillance arrangements or compelled to financially support government initiatives to retain operational approval (CPED, 2021).

Youth movements and grassroots activists have also mobilized against the Law, launching digital campaigns and organizing protests under hashtags like #NoToCyberCrimeLaw. Ironically, participants in these actions risk prosecution under the same Law they seek to overturn. Their opposition is grounded in the belief that the Law contradicts constitutional guarantees of free speech and assembly (Yom & Al-Khatib, 2022).

Academics and analysts argue that the Law illustrates the government's resistance to meaningful democratic Reform. Yom (2020) characterized Jordan's regime as "coalitional authoritarianism," where power is maintained through legal coercion and patronage. Farag and Abudalu (2022) similarly assert that laws such as the Cybercrime Law reflect “veto player uncertainty,” whereby influential actors block democratic change to preserve their privileges. These dynamics reinforce the authoritarian features of Jordan’s political system, despite periodic reform rhetoric (Day, 2015).

The Jordanian public, especially younger generations, remains skeptical of reform promises. The National Center for Human Rights (2018) highlighted a decline in public confidence in democratic institutions, citing repeated legislative rollbacks and unmet political commitments. This disillusionment has contributed to a growing shift in public discourse, with activists calling not only for legal Reform but also for broader structural accountability and political transformation.

Domestic advocacy efforts have gone beyond public protest. Legal professionals have filed constitutional appeals arguing that the Cybercrime Law violates Articles 15 and 16 of the Jordanian Constitution, guaranteeing Freedom of expression and association. Human rights defenders have also partnered with international bodies to increase global awareness of the Law's implications, using diplomatic pressure as a counterweight to domestic repression (Yom & Al-Khatib, 2022). As Bani Salameh (2020) notes, endemic corruption further weakens institutional accountability, fostering legal frameworks prioritizing regime stability over transparency and reform.

In conclusion, domestic opposition to the 2023 Cybercrime Law underscores deep-rooted frustration with Jordan's democratic stagnation. From political parties to CSOs and youth-led movements, the growing chorus of dissent reflects a widespread belief that the Law aims to entrench authoritarianism rather than address cyber threats. Nevertheless, the persistence of legal challenges, mobilization campaigns, and civic resistance highlights the resilience of Jordanian society in defending its civic space.

7.2. International Response and Human Rights Criticism

The 2023 Cybercrime Law in Jordan has provoked widespread international criticism, highlighting persistent concerns about the country's human rights record and democratic backsliding. International organizations, foreign governments, and academic observers have denounced the legislation as a severe blow to Freedom of expression and civic participation in Jordan.

Human Rights Watch (2023) issued a comprehensive statement calling for repealing the Cybercrime Law, citing its vague language, harsh penalties, and potential for abuse. The organization argued that the Law criminalizes legitimate expression, especially online dissent, and contradicts international human rights norms. Similarly, Freedom House (2024) downgraded Jordan's rating in its Freedom on the Net report, emphasizing how the Law enables government censorship and discourages online activism through fear of reprisal.

The United Nations also expressed concern. In a statement by UN Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Expression and Peaceful Assembly, the Law was described as "disproportionately restrictive" and incompatible with Jordan's international legal obligations. These experts urged Jordan to reconsider provisions that restrict encryption tools, criminalize vague acts like “spreading false information,” and allow the targeting of journalists and activists (Jordan, 2023).

This backlash reflects more profound international skepticism toward Jordan's reform narrative. Scholars such as Bani Salameh and Ananzeh (2015) have pointed out that while symbolically promising, constitutional amendments have failed to translate into meaningful legal protections for fundamental rights. These reforms, often touted in international forums, are perceived by critics as superficial efforts that entrench authoritarian control under the guise of modernization.

In this context, the endless cycle of promised reforms and legal reversals has eroded confidence in the monarchy’s reform agenda. Bani Salameh et al. (2024) argue that initiatives like the Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System have served mainly as legitimizing mechanisms rather than engines of substantive change. They caution that international actors must not be misled by cosmetic legal updates that fail to dismantle institutional barriers to civic freedoms.

Civil society networks in Jordan have played a critical role in communicating these concerns internationally. In cooperation with global partners, local organizations have submitted reports to international human rights bodies, including the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism of the UN Human Rights Council. These efforts have brought Jordan’s shrinking civic space to the attention of key stakeholders, pressuring the government to adopt more transparent and accountable practices.

Media coverage from international outlets such as the Middle East Monitor (2023) and reports from rights-based coalitions have further spotlighted the impact of the Cybercrime Law. The narrative portrayed in these reports emphasizes a steady erosion of the right to free expression and the rule of Law, portraying the Jordanian government's use of legal frameworks as a tool for repression rather than protection.

In response to international criticism, Jordanian officials have defended the Cybercrime Law as necessary for national security and social cohesion. They argue that misinformation, cyberbullying, and online defamation necessitate tighter regulations in the digital space. However, these justifications are widely viewed as disingenuous attempts to stifle political discourse under the pretense of public order. Jordanian officials have defended the 2023 Cybercrime Law as a necessary measure to address the rise in online crimes, including misinformation, cyberbullying, and online defamation, which they argue threaten national security and social cohesion. Faisal Shboul, Jordan's Minister of Government Communications, stated that the amendments aim to combat the increasing number of cybercrimes, citing over 16,000 complaints filed in 2022 and another 8,000 during the first half of 2023. He emphasized that the Law seeks to enhance user privacy and curb misinformation and disinformation about national security and the economy (Arab News, 2023). However, these justifications have been met with significant criticism from international human rights organizations, which contend that the Law's vague and overly broad provisions suppress Freedom of expression under the guise of maintaining public order (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

In conclusion, the international community has responded to Jordan's Cybercrime Law with alarm and disappointment. Far from aligning with international human rights standards, the Law is seen as emblematic of Jordan's regressive approach to civic space. Critical voices from academia, civil society, and international institutions have emphasized the urgent need for legal reforms prioritizing individual rights over authoritarian stability.

8. Political Reform Discourse vs. Authoritarian Consolidation

Jordan’s political reform narrative has long been central to its domestic and international legitimacy. Since the early 2000s, the monarchy has advanced an image of gradual democratization, often marked by committees, constitutional amendments, and policy papers promising inclusive political participation. However, critical scholars and human rights organizations argue that these efforts often serve as instruments of authoritarian consolidation rather than genuine democratic transformation.

Bani Salameh (2017) contends that Jordan's political reform discourse is more symbolic than substantive, aimed

primarily at deflecting domestic unrest and external pressure. While the regime introduced multiple waves of Reform, particularly following the Arab Spring, many initiatives were carefully designed to preserve monarchical authority rather than shift power toward elected institutions. The Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System, established in 2021, exemplifies this pattern. Though it proposed reforms such as strengthening political parties and youth engagement, a poll by the Center for Strategic Studies (2022) revealed widespread public skepticism about its effectiveness, with many perceiving the outputs as disconnected from meaningful structural change.

One of the clearest indicators of authoritarian entrenchment is the strategic use of legal frameworks. Bani Salameh and Ananzah (2015) assert that despite constitutional amendments in 2011 and 2016, key powers remain concentrated in the executive, and checks on authority are either absent or ineffective. This is compounded by manipulations of electoral laws and gerrymandered districts that weaken opposition voices. As Bani Salameh (2023) highlights in his study of electoral districts, these arrangements have institutionalized disproportionate representation, mainly benefiting tribal and loyalist constituencies while marginalizing urban and Islamist opposition. The state's treatment of the Muslim Brotherhood—Jordan's most prominent opposition movement—illustrates a broader strategy of containment rather than genuine political inclusion. The regime has effectively curtailed the group's influence through legal restrictions and internal fragmentation. This selective suppression of dissent is often accompanied by public displays of controlled political participation, allowing the state to project a reformist image while maintaining tight control over the political landscape (Bani Salameh,2021). See also Bani Salameh, 2024, for an in-depth critique of the post-Arab Spring constitutional amendments and their failure to foster true parliamentary governance (Bani Salameh, 2024).

The 2023 Cybercrime Law marks a turning point in the state's consolidation of power under the guise of modernization. Human Rights Watch (2023) and Freedom House (2024) have criticized the Law for curbing online expression and criminalizing dissent through vague provisions such as "hate speech" and "spreading false information." These legal tools mirror authoritarian patterns elsewhere in the region, where states use digital legislation to monitor and punish opposition.

Moreover, international observers have noted the contradictions between Jordan's reform discourse and governance practices. The Middle East Monitor (2023) and follow-up documentation (Jordan's New Cybercrimes Law, 2024) have emphasized that the Law has been weaponized against journalists, activists, and civil society groups, contributing to a shrinking public sphere. These developments illustrate the paradox of a state publicly embracing Reform while structurally reinforcing authoritarian resilience.

A compelling explanation for this phenomenon points to the influence of entrenched informal networks and security institutions that function beyond the reach of formal political structures. These entities play a critical role in preserving regime stability by curbing the effectiveness of legal and institutional reforms. Rather than enabling meaningful democratization, they often override formal legal changes and institutional processes, reinforcing authoritarian resilience and obstructing political transformation (Bani Salameh et al., 2023).

In conclusion, Jordan's political reform discourse has often been employed as a rhetorical strategy to maintain regime stability, rather than to democratize governance. While committees, electoral reforms, and constitutional amendments create the impression of progress, they coexist with mechanisms of authoritarian consolidation that limit political participation, civil liberties, and institutional accountability. Without addressing the deeper structural and legal barriers to Reform, Jordan's democratization process will likely remain stalled.

8.1. The Way Forward: Recommendations for Reform

In light of the far-reaching implications of Jordan's 2023 Cybercrime Law, urgent and substantive reforms are essential to reverse the shrinking of civic space and restore public confidence in legal and political institutions. The Law's vague provisions and punitive structure highlight the pressing need to address legislative content and the broader authoritarian logic embedded in Jordan's legal system. The following recommendations focus on mitigating the repressive impact of cybercrime law and strengthening protections for digital rights and public freedoms.

.1-Repeal or Substantially Revise the 2023 Cybercrime Law

The most immediate and critical step is repealing or comprehensively revising the Cybercrime Law. The Law's use of

ambiguous language—such as "spreading false news," "undermining national unity," and "offending religious values"—violates the principle of legal clarity and enables arbitrary enforcement (Human Rights Watch, 2023; Amnesty International, 2024). As Freedom House (2024) notes, such vague phrasing has been weaponized to silence dissent and prosecute journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens. Reforms must include clearly defined offenses, proportional penalties, and judicial safeguards to prevent abuse and ensure compliance with constitutional protections and international legal standards.

2. Ensure Independent Judicial Oversight.

Judicial Reform is essential to safeguarding civil liberties and ensuring the fair application of the Law. The current structure of judicial appointments allows for excessive executive influence, which undermines impartiality and facilitates politically motivated prosecutions, particularly under broadly worded laws such as the Cybercrime Law. To address this, the process of judicial appointments should be restructured to promote transparency and independence. Additionally, judicial tenure must be secured to protect judges from political pressure, and courts must be empowered to review legislation for its compatibility with constitutional provisions and international human rights standards. Strengthening these safeguards is vital for maintaining the rule of Law and public trust in the justice system.

.3. Reinforce Constitutional Protections for Digital Rights

The Cybercrime Law directly undermines the constitutional guarantees outlined in Articles 15 and 128 of the Jordanian Constitution. Legislative reforms must affirm the supremacy of these provisions by incorporating them into any future digital legislation. Article 15 guarantees Freedom of opinion and expression, while Article 128 prohibits laws that infringe on essential rights. Future legislation must reflect these principles, ensuring that digital regulations are narrowly tailored, transparent, and subject to judicial review (Library of Congress, n.d.).

.4. Cease Criminalizing Online Privacy and Digital Security Tools

The criminalization of technologies such as Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) in the Cybercrime Law erodes digital privacy and undermines cybersecurity. Many users rely on such tools to ensure secure communication, especially in environments of political repression. Rather than outlawing these technologies, the government should develop privacy-protective legal frameworks that align with international norms for data protection and digital Freedom (Access Now, 2023).

.5. Establish a National Commission on Digital Rights

Jordan should establish an independent National Commission on Digital Rights to address systemic issues related to online expression and surveillance. This body should include representatives from civil society, legal academia, digital rights experts, and journalists. Its mandate would include reviewing digital legislation, monitoring government surveillance practices, and providing advisory opinions on potential violations of constitutional and international obligations. This would institutionalize accountability and provide a necessary check on the broad enforcement powers granted under current Law.

.6. Promote Inclusive Legal Reform Processes

Future legislative reforms must not replicate the rushed, non-transparent process through which the 2023 Cybercrime Law was passed. As the Center for Strategic Studies (2022) notes, legal initiatives that fail to include youth, civil society, and marginalized communities in the drafting process lack legitimacy and effectiveness. Participatory approaches that involve meaningful public consultation can help ensure that laws reflect societal needs while adhering to democratic values.

.7. Develop and Implement a Human Rights-Based National Strategy

Symbolic reforms are inadequate in addressing the systemic challenges facing public freedoms. A comprehensive national strategy grounded in international human rights standards should be developed and implemented. This strategy must include clear benchmarks for reviewing legislation, strengthening judicial accountability, and enhancing civic participation. Such an approach is essential for bridging the gap between reform discourse and actual practice, restoring public confidence and reinforcing institutional legitimacy.

9. Conclusion

The 2023 Cybercrime Law in Jordan starkly illustrates the growing dissonance between the state's official discourse on political Reform and its enduring authoritarian practices. While the Jordanian Constitution affirms core democratic rights—including Freedom of expression, opinion, peaceful assembly, and association—this Law undermines those guarantees through its ambiguous and overly broad provisions. Instead of safeguarding against genuine cyber threats, the Law has functioned primarily as a tool of state control over digital spaces. It has facilitated increased surveillance, arbitrary arrests, and the prosecution of individuals, particularly journalists, political activists, and opposition figures, merely for expressing dissenting views online.

This legal development is not an anomaly but part of a larger trend of restrictive legislative measures that have shaped Jordan's political trajectory in recent years. Laws governing press freedom, public gatherings, and cyber activity have diminished the avenues available for civic participation and political expression. These measures have fostered a climate of fear and self-censorship, constraining the operational space of civil society, independent media, and public discourse more broadly.

Despite widespread criticism from domestic actors and international bodies such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the United Nations, and democratic states, the Jordanian government frames the Cybercrime Law as necessary to preserve national security and social harmony. However, evidence indicates that the Law functions more as an instrument for reinforcing executive authority and suppressing political pluralism than as a legitimate response to cybercrime.

Addressing these challenges necessitates more than superficial or symbolic reforms. It requires a substantive reconfiguration of the relationship between the state and its citizens, grounded in the principles of legal clarity, accountability, and democratic participation. This includes repealing or significantly amending the Cybercrime Law to align with international human rights standards, ensuring judicial independence, and creating institutional channels for civil society engagement in governance. Without such structural changes, the Law will remain emblematic of political repression, further eroding public freedoms and undermining Jordan's credibility as a state committed to democratic Reform. The path forward must be defined by actionable protections for civil liberties—both offline and online—rather than rhetorical commitments.

REFERENCES

Access Now. (2023). *Jordan's cybercrime law threatens digital rights and privacy*. https://www.accessnow.org

Alakayleh, M., Bani Salameh, M. T., & Emambocus, W. (2024). Reform bills in Jordan: A dawn of a new era or continuous missed opportunities? *World Affairs, 187*(4), 462–475. https://doi.org/10.1002/waf2.12040

Al-Rousan, R., & Al-Kharabsheh, R. (2023). Cybersecurity, digital rights, and Freedom of expression in Jordan: A public opinion analysis. *Middle East Journal of Communication Studies, 5*(2), 45–66. https://doi.org/10.1080/27531320.2023.2210578

Amnesty International. (2024). *Jordan: New Cybercrimes Law stifling Freedom of expression one year on*. https://www.amnesty.org

Amnesty International. (2024, August 13). Jordan: New Cybercrimes Law stifling Freedom of expression one year on. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/08/jordan-new-cybercrimes-law-stifling-freedom-of-expression-one-year-on /

Arab News. (2023). *Controversy over the cybercrimes bill before the Jordan parliament*. https://www.arabnews.com/node/2338982/middle-east

Bani Salameh, M. (2017). Political Reform in Jordan: Reality and Aspirations. *World Affairs Journal*, 180(Winter). https://doi.org/10.1177/0043820018765373

Bani Salameh, M. T., Alakayleh, M., & Emambocus, W. (2024). The Endless Reform Process: The Realities Behind Jordan's

Political Modernization Efforts. *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 33(4). https://doi.org/10.1111/dome.12335

Bani Salameh, M. T. (2024). *Jordan: The New Constitutional Amendments After the Arab Spring and the Myth of Parliamentary Government*. In *Advances in Sociology Research*, 42, Nova Science Publishers. https://novapublishers.com/shop/advances-in-sociology-research-volume-42

Bani Salameh, M. T. (2021). Muslim Brotherhood and the Jordanian state: Containment or fragmentation bets (1999–2018)? *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, *6*(1), 62–80. https://doi.org/10.1177/2057891119891035

Bani Salameh, M. T. (2023). Electoral districts in Jordan: An analytical study. In *Routledge Handbook on Elections in the Middle East and North Africa* (p. 54).

Bani Salameh, M. T., & Ananzah, A. (2015). Constitutional reforms in Jordan: A critical analysis. *Digest of Middle East Studies, 24*(2), 139–160. https://doi.org/10.1111/dome.12068

Bani Salameh, M. T., & Darawsheh, S. A. (2018). Human rights in the Jordanian Constitution: Between theoretical texts and practical application. *International Journal of Human Rights and Constitutional Studies*, 6(1), 70–88.

Bani Salameh, M. T., Alakayleh, M., & Emambocus, W. (2024). *The endless reform process: Realities behind Jordan's political modernization efforts—Digest of Middle East Studies*, 33(4).
https://doi.org/10.1111/dome.12335

Bani Salameh, M. (2020). Corruption in Jordan: The Roots, Evolution, Causes, Effects, and Solutions. *Mutah Journal of Law and Political Science*, 15(4). https://doi.org/10.35682/jjlps.v15i4.593

Bani Salameh, M. (2007). Towards the Birth of a New Democratic Constitution in Jordan (Arabic). *Future Studies Journal, Assiut University*, 13.

Bani Salameh, M. T., Al-Rfouh, F. O., & Bani Hamad, A. H. (2023). The relationship between the deep state and democratic transformation: The case study of Jordan. *Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University*, 58(2). https://doi.org/10.35741/issn.0258-2724.58.2.35

Cavatorta, F., & Haugbølle, R. H. (2021). *Authoritarian resilience and the management of Reform in the Arab world*. Edinburgh University Press.

Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists. (2020). *Media Freedom Status in Jordan During COVID-19*. https://cdfj.org

Center for Strategic Studies. (2022). *Poll: The Outputs of the Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System*. https://jcss.org

CIVICUS Monitor. (2023). *Jordan Country Profile*. https://monitor.civicus.org/country/jordan

Clark, J. (2018). *Local Politics in Jordan and Morocco: Strategies of Centralization and Decentralization*. Columbia University Press.

CPED. (2021). Report on Civic Space in Jordan Before and After COVID-19—Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies.

Daly, T., & Jones, B. C. (2020). Parties versus democracy: Addressing today's political-party threats to democratic rule. SSRN. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3370836

Davis, H. (2022). Jordan: Critics denounce reforms 'enlarging King's authority'. Al Jazeera.
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/31/jordan-critics-denounce-reforms-enlarging-kings-authority

DAWN. (2024). Jordan: End closure, harassment of opposition political parties. https://dawnmena.org/jordan-end-closure-harassment-of-opposition-political-parties

Day, R. (2015). New governance laws a step backwards for Jordan's democracy? Democracy Speaks.
https://www.ndi.org/democracy_speaks/new-governance-laws-step-backwards-jordan

Day, S. W. (2015). *Political liberalization and democratization in Jordan: The double-bind*. In S. W. Day & M. C. Murphy (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook on the Arab Spring* (pp. 160–174). Routledge.

Deibert, R. (2022). *Reset: Reclaiming the Internet for Civil Society*. House of Anansi Press.

Endless Reform. (2024). Attrition of Freedoms: The Impact of Jordan's New Cybercrime Law [Internal Report].

Farag, M., & Abudalu, M. (2022). Electoral Reform in authoritarian regimes: Veto player uncertainty in Jordan. *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*, 16(3), 463–481. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12286-022-00534-8

Freedom House. (2023). Freedom in the World 2023: Jordan. https://freedomhouse.org/country/jordan/freedom-world/2023

Freedom House. (2024). Freedom on the Net 2024: Jordan. https://freedomhouse.org

Human Rights Watch. (2023). *Jordan: Scrap Draconian Cybercrimes Bill*. https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/24/jordan-scrap-draconian-cybercrimes-bill

Human Rights Watch. (2024). World Report 2024: Jordan. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/jordan

International Crisis Group. (2018). The Challenge of Political Reform: Jordanian Democratisation and Regional Instability. https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/jordan

International Federation of Journalists. (2023). One-year prison sentence for Jordanian journalist. https://www.ifj.org

Jordan adopts a cybercrime law, which is seen as a threat to free speech. (2023). Middle East Monitor. https://www.middleeastmonitor.com

Jordan. (2023). UN Experts: Jordan's Cybercrime Law violates free expression standards. United Nations Human Rights Office.

Jordan_ Freedom on the Net 2024 Country Report _ Freedom House. (2024). [PDF document].

Jordan_ Scrap Draconian Cybercrimes Bill _ Human Rights Watch. (2023). [PDF document].

Jordan's new Cybercrimes Law stifling Freedom of expression, one year on. (2024). [PDF document].

Khalil, A., & Fabbri, M. (2022). Cyber laws and authoritarianism in the MENA region: The paradox of modernization. *Journal of North African Studies, 27*(6), 897–917. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2022.2032143

Library of Congress. (n.d.). The Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. https://www.loc.gov/item/guide-to-law-online/jordan

Middle East Eye. (2022). How the King is consolidating his powers.

Middle East Eyehttps://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/jordan-king-consolidating-powers-how

Middle East Monitor. (2023). Jordan adopts a cybercrime law, which is seen as a threat to free speech. https://middleeastmonitor.com

Muasher, M. (2011). *A decade of stalemated reform efforts in Jordan: The rigid regime*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

National Center for Human Rights. (2018). The Fifth Annual Report on the Status of Human Rights in Jordan. https://2017-2021.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/JORDAN-2018.pdf

Petra. (2021). Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System. Jordan News Agency.

Phenix Center. (2021). *Shrinking Civic Space in Jordan: Concerning Developments Before and After COVID-19*. https://phenixcenter.net

Rahman, K. A. (2023). State control and the civic ecosystem in hybrid regimes: Case studies from Jordan and Morocco. *Democratization, 30*(4), 601–618. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2023.2187639

Reporters Without Borders. (2020). World Press Freedom Index. https://rsf.org/en/index

Reuters. (2023, August 13). Jordan's new cybercrime law criticized as a blow to free speech. https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/jordans-new-cybercrime-law-criticized-blow-free-speech-2023-08-13 /

Royanews. (2023). US expresses concern over Jordan's new cybercrime law. https://royanews.tv

Salameh, M. T. B., Al-Rfouh, F. O., & Hamad, A. H. B. (2023). The relationship between the deep state and democratic transformation: The case study of Jordan. *Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University*, 58(2), 172–191.

Satloff, R., & Schenker, D. (2013). Political instability in Jordan: Contingency planning memorandum No. 19. Council on Foreign Relations.

Shteiwi, M. (2012). *The role of civil society organizations in political Reform in Jordan*. Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan.

Simpson, J. A., & Weiner, E. S. C. (1989). *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press.

Teller Report. (2023). Debate over the new cybercrime law in Jordan. https://www.tellerreport.com

Teller Report. (2023). Severe penalties: What you need to know about Jordan's new Cybercrime Law.

https://www.tellerreport.com/news/2023-07-20-severe-penalties--what-you-need-to-know-about-jordan-s-new-cybercrime-law.rkgFhtI92.html

The Fifth Annual Report on the Status of Human Rights in Jordan. (2018). National Center for Human Rights.

Yom, S. (2020). "Bread, Fear, and Coalitional Politics in Jordan". *Economic Shocks and Authoritarian Stability: Duration, Financial Control, and Institutions*, p.210.

Yom, S., & Al-Khatib, W. (2022). *Democratic Reform in Jordan: Breaking the impasse*. Project on Middle East Democracy. https://pomed.org/publication/democratic-reform-in-jordan-breaking-the-impasse