



### [The Danger of Jordan's New Cyber Crime Law](#)

After a lengthy six-hour debate and despite public criticism, Jordan's lower house of parliament recently passed a new law allowing for more government control of online content and limiting online speech with penalties for violating the legislation increasing in severity. Aimed to prohibit content "promoting, instigating, aiding, or inciting immorality," the law punishes those who violate with up to three months in prison and/or upwards of 25,000 dinars (\$35,000 USD) in fines. The cybercrime law consists of 41 articles intended to replace and update a similar law from 2015. With the legislation set to be passed by the Senate and approved by Jordan's King Abdullah II, it will likely be enacted within the upcoming days.

Before the law's approval, 14 human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, released a joint public statement condemning the law and its limitations on civil rights. Citing the amendments as "draconian," they expanded that the wording of the legislation consisted of "vague provisions which open the door for Jordan's executive branch to punish individuals for exercising their right to freedom of expression, forcing the judges to convict citizens in most cases." These vague provisions include posts seen as "promoting, instigating, aiding, or inciting immorality," demonstrating "contempt for religion" or "undermining national unity". The law also threatens citizens' privacy, as methods to identify offenders have become more invasive. One of the offenses added punishes individuals who publish names or pictures of police officers online. In the letter, the 14 human rights groups also urge legislators to consult with civil society. This is unlikely to happen.

The cybercrime law follows a series of previous crackdowns by the Jordanian government on social media and online content, including the blocking of TikTok this past December. This was to stop the spread of videos showing anti-government protests. Additionally, spyware technology has been implemented to allow authorities to track down those violating social media use rules and limitations. There have been over 22,759 violations recorded between 2019 and 2023. The Jordanian government claims the laws are to decrease the number of violations. The vagueness of this law coupled with the increased severity of punishments points to more devious intentions. This law can and will likely be used to subvert dissent and silence critics of the government. It can also be used to silence political opponents and prevent them from participating in elections. It also gives the government the ability to classify what is "fake news" and what isn't, giving them versatile tools to destroy the freedom of the press.

The Jordanian government is using the age-old guise of improving security to justify the new restriction. Jordanian citizens continue to fear what the next steps look like from their government moving forward. Their freedom of expression is in danger. The final vote of approval by the Senate and the King is yet to occur, with online journalists aiming to meet with members of parliament to help create discourse to discourage the decision. With denouncement from human rights groups and journalists alike, this should serve as an alarm for all of those who hold the ideal of free speech dear.