Digital transformation, social media platforms, and the reshaping of media policies in Jordan (2020-2025): A Political-Legal approach to governance, legitimacy, and digital security

Hani Mefleh O Hamdon[1*], ESSA LAFI HASSAN AL SMADI[2]

[1]Ajloun National University
[2]Ajloun National University

Abstract

This study undertakes a comprehensive analysis of the Jordanian state's political and legal responses to the challenges brought about by rapid digital transformation and the increasing influence of social media platforms between 2020 and 2025. The research specifically investigates the development and effects of new media policies designed to strike a balance between the imperatives of digital governance and security on the one hand, and the requirements of legitimacy and freedom of expression on the other. Employing a descriptive-analytical methodology, the study examines the legislative framework, governmental strategies, human rights reports, and available data pertaining to Jordan's digital landscape. Through this approach, the research identifies a distinct trend toward what can be characterized as a "digital authoritarian governance" model, which is most notably embodied in the 2023 Cybercrime Law. This legislative and policy orientation has succeeded in strengthening state control over digital spaces; however, it has also resulted in significant drawbacks. The findings of the analysis reveal that while enhanced control may serve security objectives, it simultaneously undermines the legitimacy of media policies and restricts freedom of expression. This shift has created an atmosphere of legal uncertainty, which in turn poses risks to innovation and the overall growth of the digital economy in the long term. Based on these observations, the study concludes that achieving a fair and sustainable balance between security and freedom requires a thorough reassessment of the current approach. It advocates for the adoption of a participatory framework in which the protection of digital rights is central to both governance and security strategies. To this end, the research recommends revising the Cybercrime Law to better align with international standards, fostering constructive dialogue between the state and civil society, and establishing a digital governance model capable of safeguarding security without compromising individual freedoms.

Keywords: Digital transformation, Media policy, Digital governance, Legitimacy, Digital security, Cybercrime law, Jordan

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the world is undergoing profound and unprecedented changes in how humans communicate and how information circulates. These shifts are primarily propelled by the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) revolution, which has fundamentally altered the interactions among the state, society, and the media. Central to this transformation is the phenomenon of digital transformation, a force whose influence extends far beyond technical or economic matters. Its reach now significantly shapes political, legal, and social frameworks. As a result, we are witnessing the rise of networked public spheres, where social media platforms have become essential spaces for the creation of public opinion, the mobilization of political activities, and the practice of digital citizenship. This new reality presents states—especially in the Middle East and North Africa

(MENA) region—with both significant challenges and opportunities. Social media platforms open up innovative channels for civic engagement and greater transparency, yet they also bring with them serious concerns regarding political stability, national sovereignty, and the security of society as a whole.

Jordan as a case study in digital transformation

Within the broader global context of digital transformation, Jordan presents an insightful case for examining how developing nations respond to these technological and societal shifts. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan faces unique challenges due to its sensitive geopolitical position and the complexity of its internal and external

political environment. These factors intensify the difficulties the country encounters in managing its digital space.

Balancing development and security

The Jordanian government is simultaneously focused on harnessing digital technologies to improve public services and stimulate economic growth, while also grappling with concerns over potential risks to national security and stability that could arise from an inadequately regulated digital sphere. This ongoing tension positions Jordan as a significant example for understanding how Arab states navigate the complexities of digital transformation in a period marked by rapid change and uncertainty.

Acceleration and impact of digital transformation (2020–2025)

Between 2020 and 2025, Jordan experienced a pronounced acceleration in its digital transformation, a trend further intensified by the circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. This rapid advancement was accompanied by the increasing prominence of social media platforms, which have emerged as key players in Jordan's media and political spheres. Social media now serves as a major source of information, a venue for public discourse, and a mechanism for exerting political and social pressure.

Re-Evaluating media policies

This dynamic digital environment has prompted the Jordanian state to revisit and reformulate its media policies. The government's efforts reflect a drive to reconcile the principles of good governance, the necessities of national digital security, and the ongoing commitment to uphold essential rights and freedoms. In doing so, Jordan aims to navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by digital transformation, seeking a balanced approach that supports both progress and stability.

The dual approach: modernization and control in Jordan's digital policy response

In this complex and rapidly evolving context, the Jordanian state responded to this new reality through a dual path combining modernization and control. The first path involved the adoption of ambitious policies and strategies, most notably the "National Digital Transformation Strategy and its Executive Plan (2021-2025)" introduced by the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship in 2021. This strategy was designed to modernize government services and foster the growth of the digital economy, reflecting a commitment to innovation and development in the public sector.

Legislative and regulatory measures: the cybercrime law and its implications

The second path pursued by the Jordanian state in its dual approach to digital transformation was legislative and regulatory in nature. This approach was marked by the issuance and revision of several critical laws, with the "Cybercrime Law No. 17 of 2023" representing the most notable development. Issued by the Bureau of Legislation and Opinion in 2023, this law sparked substantial public debate and controversy, primarily due to concerns about its potential impact on freedom of expression and the broader civil sphere.

Analytical framework: governance, legitimacy, and digital security

The study aims to analyze this multifaceted legislative and regulatory response by investigating its underlying political and legal rationale. The analysis will clarify the implications of these measures for three core concepts: Governance, Legitimacy, and Digital Security. By adopting a political-legal approach, the research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how media policies in Jordan are being reshaped in response to the digital revolution. Additionally, the study will assess the extent to which the state has managed to achieve equilibrium between control and regulation on one side, and the preservation of freedom and civic participation on the other.

Strategic importance of the study

A critical juncture in Jordan's digital governance

The current period marks a defining moment for the

future of digital governance in Jordan, as the country is confronted with a fundamental choice between two divergent approaches. The first model is characterized by a primary focus on control and security, which, while aimed at protecting national interests, may come at the expense of freedom and innovation. In contrast, the second model seeks to achieve a genuine equilibrium—one that simultaneously protects individual rights and ensures national security.

The implications of this decision are substantial and far-reaching. The path that Jordan selects will not only determine the design and nature of its emerging digital landscape, but will also shape the nation's position and reputation within the broader global knowledge economy. Additionally, the direction taken will have a direct impact on Jordan's capacity to attract essential investments and highly qualified professionals, both of which are critical for sustained growth and development. Equally important, the outcome will influence the degree of public trust in government institutions, as citizens look to the state to protect their rights while ensuring collective security.

Long-Term national interest and stakeholder engagement

The strategic value of this research lies in its commitment to delivering a comprehensive and impartial analysis. By thoroughly examining the complexities of digital governance in Jordan, the study aims to equip all stakeholders with the insights necessary to make well-informed decisions. Such decisions are crucial for advancing the country's supreme national interest over the long term. The ultimate objective is to support the development of a digital space that is not only free and secure, but also capable of promoting prosperity for future generations.

Research problem and questions

Research Problem

The core research problem centers on a thorough analysis and understanding of how the Jordanian state has politically and legally responded to the considerable challenges posed by digital

transformation and the growing influence of social media platforms during the period from 2020 to 2025. This era has witnessed the introduction of new media policies designed to achieve a careful balance between the demands of effective governance and digital security, and the equally critical requirements of legitimacy and freedom of expression.

As social media platforms have increasingly become the main arena for public discourse, the Jordanian state faces the intricate challenge of managing a digital environment that is fundamentally decentralized and marked by the rapid dissemination of information. This landscape presents unique issues, such as the spread of misinformation, the escalation of hate speech, and heightened threats to cybersecurity.

In addressing these challenges, the state has implemented legislative measures—most notably the Cybercrime Law—which have ignited significant debate regarding their effects on digital rights. These actions raise important questions about the legitimacy of the policies enacted, particularly from the perspective of media professionals and civil society organizations.

Building on this comprehensive understanding of the context and the associated challenges, the present study seeks to answer the following Core Research Question, which serves as the main focus for analysis and inquiry in this research:

How have accelerated digital transformation and social media platforms contributed to the reshaping of digital media policies in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (2020–2025), and what are the implications of this for the concepts of governance, legitimacy, and digital security?

This core question is branched into the following sub-questions:

1. What is the political and legal rationale that governed the Jordanian state's legislative and regulatory response to the digital media space during the specified period?
2. How have the updated media policies, specifically the Cybercrime Law, affected

patterns of digital governance (censorship, regulation, participation) in Jordan?

3. To what extent do these policies enjoy legitimacy among key actors (journalists, civil society activists, and human rights organizations)?

4. What are the most prominent practices of "Securitization" adopted by the state in the digital media sphere to confront new challenges such as fake news and hate speech?

Research objectives and significance

Research Objective

- **To analyze the political and legal framework** governing digital media and social media platforms in Jordan during the period (2020–2025), focusing on key legislation and policies.
- T**o deconstruct the political-legal rationale** governing the updating of digital media regulations, and to reveal the state's stated and implicit objectives.
- **To evaluate the impact of the new media policies** on the state's relationship with the digital public sphere, and to determine their implications for the concepts of Governance, Legitimacy, and Digital Security.
- **To provide practical and applicable recommendations** for policymakers, media actors, civil society organizations, and academic institutions with the aim of developing more balanced, effective, and sustainable digital media policies that respect rights and enhance security.

Research significance

This study derives its significance from two main dimensions:

Theoretical and scientific significance

● Theoretical and Scientific Significance: This study makes a direct contribution to bridging a significant gap in specialized Arabic literature concerning the intricate relationship between digital transformation, media policies, and the political

structures of Arab regimes. In contrast to existing research that often centers on the technical or social aspects of social media platforms, this study provides an in-depth political and legal analysis. It specifically connects media policies to the concepts of Governance, Legitimacy, and Securitization. By focusing on the Jordanian case, the research offers a model that can yield valuable insights applicable to other countries in the region, thereby enhancing comparative understanding of digital media governance in similar political contexts.

Applied significance

● **Direct value for policymakers:** The study provides comprehensive analyses and relevant data that serve as essential resources for policymakers in Jordan. This group includes legislators in Parliament, government officials, and regulatory authorities such as the Media Commission. The findings and insights generated through this research are intended to support the ongoing review and evaluation of media policies and legislation. By supplying an evidence-based perspective, the study facilitates the development of more effective and balanced regulatory practices for the digital media sector.

Guidance for media and civil society stakeholders: Beyond its value for policymakers, the study offers key perspectives and practical insights for media institutions, civil society organizations, researchers, and activists. By clarifying the characteristics and implications of the evolving regulatory environment, these stakeholders are better equipped to understand and navigate the ongoing changes in digital media governance. This greater understanding enables them to engage more constructively with policy developments and to respond proactively to the challenges posed by digital transformation.

Fostering national dialogue: The research also plays a crucial role in encouraging constructive national dialogue about the future of Jordan's digital space. By promoting informed discussion among different stakeholders, the study contributes to building consensus and fostering a collaborative approach toward shaping the country's digital environment.

Enhancing the Arabic knowledge base: Finally, the study makes a significant contribution to the development of Arabic-language resources on digital space governance. By expanding the knowledge base available to Arab researchers and academics, the research strengthens their ability to analyze, interpret, and address digital challenges within local contexts. This, in turn, helps foster a more profound and contextually relevant understanding of digital media issues across the region.

The study acquires direct applied significance for policymakers and actors in the media and digital fields. By providing an in-depth analysis of existing policies and their effects, the study can assist in reformulating legislation in a more balanced and effective manner. It also provides journalists and civil society activists with a deeper understanding of the legal and political environment in which they operate, enabling them to develop more effective strategies for defending digital rights. Moreover, the study offers practical, applicable recommendations that can contribute to improving the digital media working environment and enhancing trust between the state and society. The findings of this study are expected to help open a constructive dialogue among all stakeholders regarding the future of the digital space in Jordan, leading to consensus that achieves the desired balance between freedom, security, and development.

Study delimitations

- **Temporal delimitation:** The study focuses on the period extending between 2020 and 2025. This period was chosen because it represents a pivotal phase that witnessed an acceleration in national digital transformation (driven by the COVID-19 pandemic), an escalation in the use of digital platforms, and culminated in the issuance of crucial legislation such as the 2023 Cybercrime Law and the end of the horizon for the National Digital Transformation Strategy in 2025.
- **Geographical delimitation:** The study is limited to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, focusing on the policies and institutions of the central state and their interaction with media and societal actors within Jordan.

- **Thematic delimitation:** The analysis focuses on the political and legal dimensions of digital media policies and their implications for Governance, Legitimacy, and Digital Security. The study does not expand into purely technical aspects of information technology or detailed economic analyses of the digital market, except to the extent that serves the understanding of the political and legal context.

Operational definitions of terms

- **Digital transformation:** Operationally defined as the process adopted by the Jordanian state, represented by its various institutions, to integrate digital technology into all aspects of government work and public services, as outlined in the "National Digital Transformation Strategy (2021-2025)," and the resulting changes in the relationship with citizens and the public sphere.
- **Social media platforms:** Refers to the electronic spaces that allow users in Jordan to create, share, and interact with content, specifically the most widespread and influential platforms in the Jordanian landscape such as "Facebook," "X" (formerly Twitter), "WhatsApp," "Instagram," and "TikTok."
- **Media policies:** The set of procedures, laws, and regulatory decisions issued or adopted by the Jordanian state aimed at regulating the work of traditional and digital media outlets, and influencing the production, circulation, and consumption of content in the digital space during the period 2020–2025.
- **Digital governance:** Operationally defined as the frameworks, mechanisms, and practices used by the Jordanian government to exercise authority, oversight, and regulation over the digital space, including social media platforms, with the aim of achieving specific political and security objectives.
- **Legitimacy:** Refers to the degree of acceptance and satisfaction with the digital media policies imposed by the state among

key actors in society, including journalists, civil society organizations, and the general public. It is measured through the analysis of public discourse, human rights reports, and reactions to legislation.

- **Digital security:** In the context of this research, it refers to the approach and practices adopted by the Jordanian state to define and address emerging threats in the digital media space, such as misinformation, hate speech, and incitement, by treating them as security issues that require legislative and executive intervention to protect "public order" and "national security."

Theoretical and conceptual framework

To understand the complex dynamics governing the Jordanian state's relationship with digital media, this study is based on a multidimensional theoretical framework that integrates theories from the fields of political science, media studies, and legal sociology. This framework rests on four fundamental pillars:

1. Governance theory: Governance theory extends beyond the traditional understanding of government by emphasizing the importance of processes and the involvement of multiple actors in making decisions and implementing policies (Pierre, 2000). When applied to digital media, this theoretical approach provides a lens to examine how the state attempts to establish order within a decentralized environment. It also considers the state's interactions with a variety of stakeholders, including global technology companies, platform users, and civil society organizations.

Using the governance framework, Jordanian digital media policies are analyzed not simply as instruments of state control, but as broader mechanisms designed to manage the complexities of the digital domain. This analysis pays particular attention to the ways in which authority and responsibility are allocated among different actors, such as government institutions, parliament, the judiciary, technology companies, and civil society. Additionally, it explores the systems of accountability and transparency that are implemented within this governance model,

highlighting how these mechanisms shape the overall management and regulation of the digital space in Jordan.

2. Theories of political legitimacy: Legitimacy is the cornerstone of any political system's stability, defined as "the belief in the right of authority to rule" (Peter, 2017). Max Weber argued that legitimacy may be based on tradition, charisma, or legal-rationality. In the digital age, states face a new challenge in building and maintaining the legitimacy of their regulatory policies for the digital space. This concept will be applied to assess the extent of acceptance of digital media policies in Jordan by relevant actors, and whether these policies enhance state legitimacy or lead to its erosion.

3.

3. Securitization theory: Securitization theory, developed by the Copenhagen School, provides a framework for understanding how certain issues are elevated to the status of "existential threats" that demand extraordinary responses outside normal political processes (Buzan et al., 1998). According to this theory, when an actor such as the state chooses to "securitize" an issue—like the proliferation of fake news—the goal is to convince the public that the situation is so critical it warrants exceptional measures, which may include restrictions on basic freedoms, such as freedom of expression.

In the context of this study, securitization theory will be employed to dissect the official discourse in Jordan regarding perceived risks in the digital environment. By examining how the state frames challenges like hate speech and misinformation as security threats, this approach allows for a deeper analysis of the rationale behind restrictive legislative measures. The theory thus serves as a tool for understanding the process by which the Jordanian government justifies the introduction of exceptional laws and regulations in the name of protecting public order and national security.

4. Networked public sphere theory: Theorists such as Yochai Benkler and Manuel Castells argue that the internet and social media platforms have created a new public sphere distinct from the traditional Habermasian public sphere. This sphere is characterized by its ability to empower

marginalized voices and facilitate decentralized discussions, but it is also susceptible to disinformation and polarization (Benkler, 2006). This concept will be used to understand how social media platforms have changed the nature of the public sphere in Jordan, and how state policies attempt to interact with and influence this new reality.

By integrating these theoretical frameworks, the study will analyze the Jordanian case not as an isolated incident, but as a model reflecting the global tensions between technology and power, and between freedom and security, in the twenty-first century.

The digital context in Jordan: Indicators and statistics

Digital transformation and social media proliferation in Jordan

Understanding the environment in which digital media policies are implemented in Jordan requires an examination of key indicators that demonstrate the extent of digital transformation and the widespread adoption of social media platforms within the country. Recent statistics show that Jordan is undergoing notable advancements in internet connectivity accompanied by an increase in the usage of digital platforms. These developments are pivotal in shaping the broader digital landscape, providing the necessary context for analyzing both the reach and impact of regulatory policies on digital media.

Recent statistics from the "Digital 2025: Jordan" report, as published by Data Reportal, indicate a significant expansion in internet accessibility and usage throughout the country. As of the beginning of 2025, the number of internet users in Jordan reached 10.7 million individuals, which translates to an internet penetration rate of 92.5% of the total population (DataReportal, 2025). This exceptionally high percentage underscores the robust digital infrastructure in place, as well as the broad availability of high-speed internet across most regions of the Kingdom. In terms of social media engagement, the landscape is equally dynamic. As of January 2025, there were 6.45 million social media

users in Jordan, representing 55.7% of the total population. This figure reflects not only the popularity of social media platforms but also a growing trend in digital participation, highlighted by an annual increase of 70,000 users throughout 2024 (Petra News Agency, 2025). The steady growth in both internet and social media usage provides essential context for understanding the environment in which digital media policies and regulations are being developed and implemented in Jordan.

The significance of these statistics becomes evident when considering the political context in which new regulatory legislation has been introduced. With more than half of Jordan's population actively participating on social media platforms, these digital spaces have transformed into the principal arenas for political and social discourse. Social media now serves as the main conduit for information exchange and news dissemination. This widespread engagement underscores why the state is particularly keen to exercise oversight and implement regulations in this sphere.

Examining the breakdown of platform usage reveals that "Facebook" holds a dominant position, capturing over 99% of social media activity in Jordan (StatCounter, 2025; Jam et al., 2025). In comparison, platforms such as "Instagram" and "X" (formerly known as Twitter) account for much smaller shares. This overwhelming prevalence of Facebook positions it as the most influential force in shaping public opinion within the country, making it the primary focus of state regulatory policies.

The continually evolving digital landscape in Jordan has necessitated the introduction of comprehensive regulatory frameworks, such as the Cybercrime Law of 2023. The high volume of users and the persistent growth in platform engagement have turned the digital realm into a critical domain that requires structured management and oversight. Nevertheless, the form and implementation of this governance remain central to the ongoing debate examined in this study.

Literature Review

Overview of relevant academic literature

The academic literature exploring the relationship between digital media, politics, and law forms a dynamic and rapidly developing field. To contextualize this study within the broader scholarly landscape, a thorough review and analysis of both Arabic and foreign research has been conducted. These works were carefully chosen for their close connection to the principal themes of this research, which include digital transformation, media policies, governance, legitimacy, and digital security, with particular focus on the Jordanian and wider Arab environments.

Arabic studies

In their 2021 study, Al-Mashaqbeh focused on the topic of "The Legal Regulation of Digital Media in Jordan and its Impact on Journalistic Work" (Al-Mashaqbeh, 2021). This research offered a significant legal examination of Jordan's legislative landscape prior to the introduction of the Cybercrime Law of 2023. Al-Mashaqbeh's analysis highlighted that the prevailing legal framework was marked by considerable ambiguity and fragmentation, which in turn fostered a pervasive sense of uncertainty among digital journalists operating within the country. While this study aligns with Al-Mashaqbeh's assessment of the earlier period, it extends the analysis by emphasizing the qualitative transformation introduced by the 2023 Law. Specifically, the current research shifts from a solely legal perspective to adopt a political-legal approach, incorporating broader concepts such as governance and legitimacy to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving regulatory environment.

Critical analysis of the cybercrime law No. 17 of 2023

Al-Sarayreh (2024) provides a thorough and timely examination of Jordan's Cybercrime Law No. 17 of 2023, focusing specifically on its dual role in regulating social media platforms and its potential to restrict freedom of expression. The study presents a detailed critique of the law's provisions, identifying several articles that may pose challenges to the protection of digital rights. These problematic aspects are highlighted as areas of concern for both practitioners and observers of digital policy,

marking the study as a key reference for understanding the legal debates surrounding the new legislation.

While Al-Sarayreh's work offers a foundational legal analysis, the current research builds upon this by broadening the scope to include the underlying political rationale of the law. Rather than limiting the discussion solely to legal interpretation, this study also assesses the practical impact of the Cybercrime Law on governance structures and digital security practices in Jordan. This expanded approach enables a more comprehensive evaluation of the law's real-world implications, moving beyond textual analysis to consider its influence on the broader regulatory environment.

Alsswey & El-Qirem's (2023) qualitative research offers valuable insights into how social media users in Jordan perceived government regulations and procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through their in-depth exploration, the study revealed a pronounced sense of distrust between the public and government authorities, particularly concerning the dissemination of information related to the crisis. This pervasive distrust was closely linked to widespread anxiety over government censorship and the belief that official measures were actively curtailing freedom of expression.

The significance of these findings lies in their ability to shed light on the social and psychological context prevailing in Jordan prior to the implementation of the Cybercrime Law. The research demonstrates that apprehensions about censorship and restrictions on civil liberties were already firmly entrenched within Jordanian society. Rather than addressing these concerns, the introduction of the new law appeared to deepen existing fears, intensifying anxieties about the erosion of individual rights and freedoms.

By connecting these observations to the current study, it becomes evident that changes in digital media policy have a direct impact on the broader climate of trust between the state and society. Regulatory measures, such as those enacted during the pandemic and subsequently embodied in new cybercrime legislation, can serve to reinforce longstanding anxieties about the relationship

between government and citizens. This underscores the importance of understanding how evolving digital governance frameworks influence public perceptions and state-society relations in the digital era.

The qualitative research conducted by Alsswey & El-Qirem (2023) on "Social Media Users' Perceptions of Government Regulations During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Jordan" serves as a significant foundation for examining the concept of legitimacy within the context of digital governance. Their study investigated how government actions during the pandemic were perceived by social media users, uncovering a spectrum of responses. On one hand, some participants recognized and supported the health-related motivations behind the government's regulatory measures. On the other hand, a portion of respondents expressed opposition, criticizing these measures for restricting individual freedoms.

The value of Alsswey & El-Qirem's research lies in its assessment of public reactions to state intervention, providing nuanced insights into the complexities of public trust and acceptance. Building on this foundation, the current study extends the analysis beyond the temporary context of health-related regulations. Instead, it focuses on the lasting impact of post-pandemic media policies and legislative changes in Jordan. By directly connecting societal perceptions of legitimacy to the broader themes of governance and security, this research seeks to deepen the understanding of how enduring legal and policy frameworks shape, and are shaped by, public attitudes in the digital era.

Studies

Ayyad & Radwan (2025), in their recent framework study and special issue editorial titled "Digital Transformation and Media Policy in the Middle East and North Africa Region", offer a thorough overview of the region's shifting regulatory landscape. Their analysis highlights a clear trend among countries in the Middle East and North Africa, including Jordan, toward the adoption of increasingly stringent digital regulatory models. According to their findings, this movement is largely driven by two primary factors: escalating security challenges and a persistent drive for greater political control over the digital sphere.

The significance of Ayyad & Radwan's work lies in its ability to establish the broader regional context in which the current research on Jordan is situated. By demonstrating that Jordan's experience aligns with wider regional trends, the study affirms that the case of Jordan is not unique or isolated. However, the present research sets itself apart by delving deeper into the Jordanian context. Unlike the general regional overview provided by Ayyad & Radwan, this study conducts an in-depth, detailed analysis of Jordan's specific legislative and policy mechanisms. Through this focused examination, the research aims to deconstruct the unique features and implications of digital media regulation in Jordan, thus providing a more granular understanding of its evolution and impact.

The study conducted by AlAshry (2023) titled "The Use of Digital Surveillance by Arab Authorities to Control Press Freedom" offers an in-depth exploration of how digital surveillance has become a central instrument for Arab governments in their efforts to suppress dissent and curtail media freedoms. AlAshry's research reveals the systematic deployment of surveillance technologies as a means to monitor, control, and ultimately silence opposition voices, thereby restricting the operational space for independent journalism and press activities. This body of work is particularly relevant to the present study, as it directly intersects with the axes of "Governance" and "Digital Security" by highlighting the mechanisms through which state power is exercised in the digital realm. However, it is important to note the distinction in focus between AlAshry's approach and the current research. While AlAshry centers the analysis on the "tool"—that is, the technological apparatus of surveillance—the present study seeks to expand the scope by examining the broader political and legal "system" that legitimizes and structurally frames the use of such tools. This involves not only identifying the existence of surveillance practices but also analyzing the legislative and policy frameworks that provide justification for their adoption. Furthermore, the current study situates the use of surveillance within the context of securitization discourse and the ongoing pursuit of political legitimacy by state actors, thereby connecting the operational means of digital control to the overarching narratives that shape governance in the region.

Hanisch (2023) offers a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding digital governance in his study entitled "Digital Governance: A Conceptual Framework and Research Trends". According to Hanisch, effective digital governance is characterized by the need to maintain a balance among three core principles: efficiency, accountability, and participation. This framework emphasizes that digital governance should not only streamline processes and improve operational effectiveness (efficiency), but also ensure transparency and responsibility in decision-making (accountability), as well as actively involve stakeholders in governance mechanisms (participation). In this research, Hanisch's theoretical model is adopted as a foundational lens through which digital governance practices in Jordan are analyzed and evaluated. The study goes further by applying Hanisch's framework to a specific real-world context, thereby testing its relevance and robustness in practice. Additionally, the analysis is enriched by integrating Hanisch's concepts with theories of political legitimacy and securitization, allowing for a multidimensional evaluation of how digital governance operates within Jordan's evolving regulatory environment.

The research conducted by Umansky (2024) in the study titled "Who is Allowed to Speak? The Securitization of Discourse on Social Media" provides a detailed examination of how security-related narratives are formed around certain topics within digital platforms. Umansky's work is particularly relevant to the "Securitization" component of this study's theoretical framework, as it explores the mechanisms by which discourse is framed in terms of security concerns on social media.

A key contribution of the current research is its extension of securitization theory beyond the analysis of public discourse. While Umansky centers on the ways security narratives are constructed and circulated online, this study applies securitization theory directly to the *official* policies and legislation enacted by the Jordanian government. The analysis focuses on the transformation of security discourse into concrete legal language and regulatory practices, thereby demonstrating how abstract narratives are institutionalized within the state's legal and policy frameworks. This approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of the processes by which securitization shapes not only public conversation but also the tangible rules and procedures governing digital communication and expression in Jordan.

Research gap

Identifying the research gap

A review of previous studies reveals that existing scholarship has made significant advances in several key areas of the topic. These studies have provided valuable insights by analyzing specific legislative frameworks, monitoring surveillance activities, assessing public perceptions, and establishing broad theoretical models for understanding digital governance and media regulation. Despite these contributions, there remains a notable research gap in the current literature.

Specifically, what is lacking is a comprehensive and integrated study that systematically connects the three core dimensions of digital governance, political legitimacy, and securitization as they relate to recent media policies in Jordan from 2020 to 2025. Previous research often treats these elements in isolation, focusing either on the description of legislation, the observation of governance practices, or the identification of security concerns. In contrast, this study seeks to overcome these limitations by offering a holistic political-legal perspective.

Rather than merely describing new laws, this research analyzes the underlying political rationale that informs legislative development. It moves beyond simply monitoring governance mechanisms to critically evaluate their legitimacy within the Jordanian context. Moreover, the study does not stop at highlighting security risks; instead, it deconstructs the securitization narratives that shape state responses and policies.

By systematically integrating these dimensions, the study makes an original contribution to the field, offering a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the evolving relationship between the state and media in the digital age.

Study methodology and procedures

To achieve the study's objectives and answer its questions, a multi-instrument research methodology will be adopted, appropriate for the complex nature of the phenomenon under investigation.

Research approach

The study adopts the Descriptive-Analytical Approach as its main methodology, which aims to describe the studied phenomenon accurately and systematically, and then analyze its dimensions and relationships to uncover causes and consequences. Within this general approach, two analytical tools will be intensively employed:

1.Policy analysis: This tool will be used to deconstruct digital media policies in Jordan. The analysis will not be limited to studying the official content of policies and legislation but will extend to analyzing their formulation process, the underlying objectives, the influential actors involved, and assessing their actual impact on the ground.

2.Legal analysis: This will be employed to study the relevant legislative texts, regulations, and instructions, specifically the Cybercrime Law and the Press and Publications Law. The analysis will focus on interpreting the legal articles, understanding their logic, and determining their compatibility or conflict with international standards for human rights and freedom of expression.

Data collection sources

The study relies on a variety of primary and secondary sources to ensure the richness and completeness of the data:

1.Primary sources

- **Legislative documents:** The full texts of relevant Jordanian laws, primarily the Cybercrime Law (2023), the Press and Publications Law and its amendments, the Telecommunications Law, and the Cybersecurity Law (2019).
- **Official government documents:** The National Digital Transformation Strategy (2021-2025), government policy papers, and statements issued by concerned ministries

and bodies (Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship, Media Commission, National Cyber Security Center).
- **The official gazette:** To track the publication of laws, regulations, and instructions related to the topic.

2.Secondary sources

- **Human rights reports:** Reports issued by reputable international organizations (such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Freedom House) and local civil society organizations (such as the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists) that monitor the state of media and digital freedoms in Jordan.
- **Academic studies**: Research and articles published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, and academic books that address digital transformation, media policies, and governance in Jordan and the Arab region.
- **Media analyses:** Analytical articles and opinions published in reliable media outlets addressing legislation and practices related to the digital space.

Ethical considerations in research

This study is conducted in strict accordance with the highest standards of scientific research ethics. Every source utilized throughout the research process is thoroughly documented, following widely recognized academic citation practices. Objectivity and neutrality are consistently upheld in both the presentation and analysis of data, ensuring that the findings are reliable and unbiased.

The privacy of individuals referenced in case studies is protected by exclusively relying on publicly available information sourced from reputable human rights and media organizations. This approach safeguards personal confidentiality while maintaining the integrity of the research.

Critiques presented in the study are intentionally constructive and objective, focusing on evaluating policies and practices rather than targeting individuals. This method aims to foster informed dialogue and contributes to the advancement of

democratic practices and good governance in Jordan.

Analysis procedures

Data processing and analysis will be conducted through the following steps:

- **Collection and classification of documents:** All relevant legal, political, and reports will be collected and classified according to their nature (legislation, policies, reports) and their chronological order.
- **Qualitative content analysis:** An in-depth content analysis of legislative texts, official speeches, and human rights reports will be conducted. The analysis will focus on extracting key themes, recurring keywords (such as: national security, public order, fake news, hate speech), and identifying the interpretive frameworks used by each party.
- **Linking and comparison:** The results of the content analysis will be linked to the study's theoretical framework. For example, official discourse will be analyzed using the theory of "securitization," societal reactions will be evaluated using the concept of "legitimacy," and mechanisms of control and regulation will be analyzed using the framework of "digital governance."
- **Drawing conclusions:** Based on the analysis, key findings that answer the study's questions will be extracted, and the central argument of the research will be clearly formulated and supported by evidence.

Presentation and analysis of findings

Based on the methodology employed, this section provides an analytical presentation of the findings derived from the examination of relevant legal and political documents and reports. The presentation will be structured according to the analytical axes stemming from the study's research questions, which include the evolution of the legislative framework, digital governance practices, the crisis of legitimacy, and the logic of securitization.

Axis I: Evolution of the legislative framework: from traditional regulation to digital space governance

Over the period from 2020 to 2025, a distinct transformation has occurred in Jordan's legislative approach to media regulation. Initially, the state's regulatory focus was anchored in the Press and Publications Law No. 8 of 1998 and its subsequent amendments. This legal framework principally targeted traditional media but was later extended to encompass electronic news sites, subjecting them to licensing and registration procedures. This approach sought to bring emerging digital news platforms under the same regulatory umbrella as print and broadcast media, attempting to adapt longstanding oversight tools to fit the digital era.

In recent years, there has been a marked shift in the legislative approach toward regulating digital communication in Jordan. Rather than continuing the practice of modifying existing laws originally designed for traditional media, the state has taken deliberate steps to construct a distinct legal framework that addresses the specific challenges posed by digital spaces and social media platforms. This strategic move culminated in the enactment of the Cybercrime Law No. 17 of 2023 (Bureau of Legislation and Opinion, 2023), which represents a pivotal moment in the legislative evolution. Unlike previous efforts that sought to extend legacy regulations to new technologies, this law establishes a comprehensive legal system specifically tailored for the online environment. The introduction of this legislation marks a clear departure from incremental adaptation, signaling a proactive and systematic approach to shaping the rules and boundaries that govern communication and social interaction in the digital age.

The enactment of the new law brings with it the introduction of broad and ambiguous definitions for essential legal concepts, thereby affording the executive and judicial authorities a high degree of discretionary power in their interpretation and application.

For example, Article 15 provides a definition of "Fake News" that encompasses any information that "incites sedition or sectarian strife or targets social peace." These terms lack precise legal clarity and are susceptible to a wide range of interpretations

depending on the perspective of those enforcing the law. In addition to these provisions, the law imposes criminal penalties—including imprisonment and fines—for actions such as "character assassination" (Article 16), "contempt of religions" (Article 17), and "publishing what is likely to incite sedition or strife."

Collectively, these offenses occupy a grey area that blurs the line between protected free expression and unlawful conduct, raising concerns about the potential for overreach and the restriction of legitimate speech.

The most significant feature of this law is the expansion of its scope of criminalization to include ordinary users on social media platforms, not just journalists or media institutions. The following table summarizes the most problematic articles in the 2023 law compared to the previous situation:

Article (2023 Law)	Subject	Penalty/Measure	Comparison with Previous Status
Article 15	Fake News (Vague definition)	Imprisonment from 3 months to 3 years and heavy fines	Criminalization was less explicit and subject to the general Penal Code.
Article 16	Character Assassination (Online)	Imprisonment from 3 months to 3 years	A new concept not criminalized in this direct manner previously.
Article 17	Contempt of Religions and Undermining National Unity	Imprisonment from 1 to 3 years	Intensification of penalties existing in other laws and expansion of their scope to include the digital space.
Article 37	Obligation of Major Platforms to Cooperate	Obliging social media platforms with offices in Jordan to remove infringing content within specified periods	Partially shifting the burden of censorship to global corporations, a new trend.

This analysis reveals that the legal logic has shifted from "media regulation" to the "governance of the entire digital public sphere," with a focus on User-Generated Content (UGC) as the primary source of risk.

Axis II: Digital governance practices: towards a model of proactive intervention

The findings indicate that the new digital media policies have inaugurated a new pattern of digital governance in Jordan, characterized by a shift from *ex post* censorship (after publication) to an attempt at proactive control and direct intervention. These governance practices are evident in several aspects:

1. **Expansion of administrative enforcement powers:** The new law grants the Public Prosecutor the authority to issue direct orders to service providers and social media platforms to block or remove content even before a final judicial ruling is issued. This constitutes a rapid and effective intervention tool in the hands of the executive authority.

2. **Transferring the burden of responsibility to platforms:** Article 37 of the law obliges global social media platforms with offices in the Kingdom to comply with requests for content removal. This reflects a governmental strategy to involve technology giants in the governance process, transforming them from mere neutral infrastructure into partners in local law enforcement.

3. **Deterrent discourse:** The intensified penalties, particularly the mandatory imprisonment for many expression-related

offenses, aim to create a "Chilling Effect" that prompts users to practice self-censorship and avoid engaging in sensitive topics. Reports from organizations such as Human Rights Watch (2023) confirm that this effect has already begun to manifest among journalists and activists.

Collectively, these practices suggest that the adopted governance model leans toward "authoritarian centralism," where the state seeks to impose its Digital Sovereignty and assert its ability to control the flow of information within its borders, even at the expense of universal principles of internet freedom.

- **Expansion of administrative enforcement powers:** The new law grants the Public Prosecutor the authority to issue direct orders to service providers and social media platforms to block or remove content even before a final judicial ruling is issued. This constitutes a rapid and effective intervention tool in the hands of the executive authority.
- **Transferring the burden of responsibility to platforms:** Article 37 of the law obliges global social media platforms with offices in the Kingdom to comply with requests for content removal. This reflects a governmental strategy to involve technology giants in the governance process, transforming them from mere neutral infrastructure into partners in local law enforcement.
- **Deterrent discourse:** The intensified penalties, particularly the mandatory imprisonment for many expression-related offenses, aim to create a "Chilling Effect" that prompts users to practice self-censorship and avoid engaging in sensitive topics. Reports from organizations such as Human Rights Watch (2023) confirm that this effect has already begun to manifest among journalists and activists.

Collectively, these practices suggest that the adopted governance model leans toward "authoritarian centralism," where the state seeks to impose its Digital Sovereignty and assert its ability to control the flow of information within its borders, even at

the expense of universal principles of internet freedom.

Axis III: The crisis of legitimacy: between official justifications and societal rejection

The crisis of legitimacy: Official justifications versus societal rejection

An examination of discourses and reports uncovers a pronounced legitimacy gap between the government's official rationale for the new digital media policies and the widespread opposition expressed by civil society and the media. This divide is evident in the contrasting positions adopted by each side.

Official Discourse: Justifications for Legitimacy

The Jordanian government defends the Cybercrime Law by emphasizing its role in protecting society against real threats. Officials consistently argue that the legislation is necessary to "protect the social fabric," "combat hate speech and fake news," and "safeguard individuals' privacy from electronic extortion." Through these statements, the state seeks to legitimize its policies by positioning itself as the guardian of public order, morality, and social values.

Counter-Discourse: Crisis of Legitimacy

In stark contrast, the law has encountered strong resistance from more than fourteen local and international civil society organizations, the Jordanian Journalists Syndicate, and leading human rights groups. Amnesty International (2024) has labeled the law as "stifling freedom of expression" and described it as a "terrible setback for human rights" in Jordan. Critics contend that the law's vague terminology enables arbitrary enforcement against political opponents, investigative journalists, and activists, thereby threatening the integrity of the public sphere rather than protecting it. Supporting this view, Freedom House reports indicate that the new law was the principal factor behind Jordan's drop in the 2023 Internet Freedom Index.

This profound divergence signals an authentic crisis of legitimacy. While the government regards its policies as justified and essential, a significant

portion of stakeholders considers them excessive and illegitimate, citing their detrimental impact on fundamental rights guaranteed by both the Jordanian Constitution and international treaties ratified by the Kingdom.

Axis IV: The Logic of securitization: transforming issues of opinion into security threats

The Logic of Securitization in Jordan's Digital Media Policies

Redefining Freedom of Expression as a Security Threat

The analysis reveals that the underlying logic governing the new digital media policies in Jordan is rooted in the concept of "Securitization." Through these policies, the state has largely succeeded in shifting the public perception of certain issues—such as criticism of officials or the dissemination of unverified information—from matters of freedom of opinion and expression to concerns of national security. Actions and statements that were once considered part of legitimate public discourse are now framed as potential threats to the stability of the state and the preservation of social peace. This transformation serves to justify stricter controls and interventions, positioning the state as the protector against perceived dangers to the public order.

Manifestations of the logic of securitization

The logic of securitization in Jordan's digital media policies is evident through several interrelated mechanisms that collectively reframe free expression as a security concern.

1. Official Discourse: Framing Digital Content as a Threat

Official statements repeatedly associate digital content with notions such as "sedition," "undermining national security," and "subverting state institutions." By consistently using this language, authorities construct a narrative where the sharing of opinions online is not seen as legitimate discourse but as a potential danger to societal order and state stability. This discursive strategy helps to legitimize the adoption of

restrictive measures under the guise of protecting national interests.

2. Legal texts: Broad and ambiguous legislation

The articles of the Cybercrime Law are drafted in such a way that a wide range of expressive acts can be prosecuted as security-related offenses, rather than being limited to personal defamation or libel. This broad scope enables authorities to subsume various forms of digital speech under the label of security violations, thus expanding the reach of state control over online expression.

3. Judicial practice: Prosecution of online speech as security offenses

Human rights reports highlight an increasing tendency by the Public Prosecutor to apply articles related to undermining the regime or disturbing foreign relations in cases concerning social media posts. This trend demonstrates how the legal and judicial apparatus is mobilized to treat online opinion as a threat to state security, rather than as protected speech.

Through this process of securitization, the state is able to justify the use of exceptional measures—such as pre-trial detention and custodial sentences—in cases involving expression of opinion. As a result, it becomes increasingly challenging for dissenters and opposition figures to defend freedom of expression without being accused of undermining national security.

Axis V: Securitization practices and the practical erosion of legitimacy: case studies

The most prominent repercussions of the Cybercrime Law have been the intensification of "Securitization" practices in the digital space, where the law has been employed as a tool to enforce order and confront what the state deems "existential threats" to public order. A recent report by Amnesty International, issued one year after the law's implementation, documents a worrying pattern in its use to target journalists, activists, and opponents (Freedom House, 2023). The report documents 15 cases of individuals prosecuted for expressing opinions critical of government policies, particularly

concerning the Palestinian issue and relations with Israel.

Prominent case studies illustrating securitization trends

In order to better understand the practical implications of securitization within Jordan's digital media policies, several notable cases serve as clear illustrations of how the logic of security is applied to online expression. These cases reflect the broader pattern discussed above, where individuals are prosecuted and penalized for speech perceived as threatening by the authorities, often under broadly defined legal provisions.

1. The case of journalist Hiba Abu Taha

Journalist Hiba Abu Taha was sentenced to one year in prison following the publication of an article in which she criticized Jordan's interception of Iranian missiles aimed at Israel. Her prosecution was based on ambiguous charges such as "publishing fake news" and "inciting sedition," as stipulated by the new law. This case exemplifies how imprecise legal terminology can be used to criminalize forms of legitimate expression, transforming critical journalistic work into a prosecutable offense.

2. The case of lawyer and activist Mu'taz Awad

Lawyer and activist Mu'taz Awad faced a substantial financial penalty for his posts on the "X" platform, where he criticized the policies of Arab states regarding Israel. Awad's conviction under Article 17 of the law for "inciting strife or sedition" demonstrates how online political commentary is interpreted as a security threat. The broad scope of the law enables authorities to penalize dissenting voices, particularly when their views challenge prevailing political narratives.

3. The case of activist Fatima Shbeikat

Activist Fatima Shbeikat was arrested and charged under both the Cybercrime Law and the Penal Code after she circulated a video of herself participating in a sit-in near the Israeli Embassy. The use of multiple legal instruments to prosecute her highlights the intersection of various laws in restricting digital activism and further underscores the expansion of

state control over online and offline forms of expression.

Collectively, these cases illustrate the practical application of securitization in Jordan's digital landscape. They show how authorities leverage broad and vague legal provisions to suppress dissent and reframe public criticism as security offenses, reinforcing the trend toward the erosion of free expression and the legitimacy crisis described in the wider analysis.

These cases, and many others, reveal the logic of "Securitization" in practice. Legitimate political criticism is transformed into a security threat, and the law is used as an exceptional tool to punish individuals outside the traditional frameworks of free expression. This trend directly leads to the erosion of the legitimacy of these policies in the eyes of broad sectors of civil society and media actors, who view the law as a tool for "muzzling mouths" rather than fairly regulating the digital space.

Furthermore, the report points to the use of "administrative detention" under the Crime Prevention Law as an additional layer of repression, where activists are detained by order of the governor without charge or trial, thereby emptying judicial guarantees of their substance. This overlap between the Cybercrime Law and other laws creates a complex and highly restrictive legal environment, reinforcing a sense of fear and self-censorship, which poses a serious threat to the dynamism of the networked public sphere in Jordan.

Discussion

The presented findings offer a complex picture of the Jordanian state's response to the challenges of the digital age, a response that can be discussed in light of the theoretical framework previously introduced.

Governance and legitimacy in Jordan's digital policies

1. Digital authoritarian governance

The analysis clearly indicates that Jordan is moving toward a model of "Digital Authoritarian Governance." Rather than establishing participatory mechanisms that would allow civil society

organizations and technology companies to contribute to an open dialogue on digital regulation, the state has opted for a centralized, top-down approach. By leveraging legislative and executive authority, the government imposes rules and exerts control over the digital sphere. This model provides the state with enhanced capacity to enforce its will and maintain order in the short term. However, it fundamentally neglects the inherently networked and decentralized nature of the digital environment. Such an approach may ultimately undermine the relationship between citizens and state institutions, eroding trust over time as people perceive a lack of openness and inclusion in the regulatory process.

2. Crisis of legitimacy

In addition, the findings point to a deep-seated legitimacy crisis, reflecting the core ideas of political legitimacy theory, which holds that the endurance of any policy depends on public acceptance. There is a marked disconnect between the government's narrative—centered on protection and security—and the perspective of civil society, which emphasizes rights and freedoms. This divergence highlights the state's inability to persuade significant portions of both the elite and the broader civil society that its policies are necessary and proportionate. The legitimacy issue extends beyond the Cybercrime Law itself, calling into question the credibility of state institutions in administering laws impartially and without bias. The resulting skepticism further deepens the divide between the state and its citizens, threatening the long-term sustainability of these digital governance policies.

Analysis and argumentation

Theoretical Reflections: Securitization, Public Sphere, and Digital Sovereignty in Jordan

Securitization of digital space

The Jordanian case vividly illustrates the application of Securitization Theory in the digital realm. Social media platforms, once spaces for public debate, have been reframed as "sources of threat." As a result, critical content is no longer seen as a "democratic practice," but is instead classified as a "security crime." This redefinition provides the state with a strong rationale for intervention, allowing it to bypass established norms that protect freedom of expression. In this environment, digital rights defenders find themselves on the defensive, facing significant hurdles in advocating for open dialogue and free speech. While this strategy has proven effective for extending control, it comes at a substantial cost: the diminishing vitality and diversity of the public sphere.

Networked public sphere and hierarchical control

When viewed through the lens of Networked Public Sphere Theory, Jordan's evolving digital media policies can be understood as an effort to reimpose the hierarchical logic of traditional "Broadcast" media onto the more interactive and participatory environment of "Networked" media. The state attempts to exercise control over messaging and restrict dissenting voices, mirroring its approach to traditional newspapers and television. However, the inherently cross-border, decentralized, and control-resistant nature of digital platforms challenges the effectiveness of such centralized surveillance. Users have the capacity to migrate to alternative platforms, utilize VPNs, and communicate via encrypted applications, thereby circumventing state monitoring. This resilience raises questions about the long-term sustainability of authoritarian models in the digital domain.

Regional trends and mechanisms of control

Compared to earlier studies, this research aligns with the observed regional trend toward tighter internet control, as documented by Ayyad and Radwan (2025) and AlAshry (2023). However, it contributes an additional perspective by closely examining the political-legal mechanisms employed by a state like Jordan, especially the interplay between governance, legitimacy, and securitization as a cohesive system. This approach shifts the discussion from a general overview to a targeted analysis of how these dynamics manifest within Jordan's specific national context.

Practical impacts of legal mechanisms

Through the analysis of real-life cases documented

by human rights organizations, the research demonstrates how ambiguous legal provisions are translated into repressive practices. The examination of specific cases, such as those involving journalist Heba Abu Taha and activist Moataz Awad, grounds the legal discussion in lived experience, shedding light on the profound personal and societal costs of "securitization" policies. This connection between legal text and practical application is a key contribution of this research to the existing literature.

Digital sovereignty: competing models

The importance of this study is further underscored by the growing global debate on Digital Sovereignty. As developing countries strive to assert control over their digital landscapes in response to the influence of global tech giants, two contrasting models of digital sovereignty come into focus: one prioritizes rights and privacy (as seen in the European GDPR framework), while the other emphasizes control and security (as exemplified by China's "Great Firewall" approach).

Jordan occupies a middle ground between these paradigms, adopting the language of rights in official discourse while enacting authoritarian practices in reality.

Comparative perspectives: Jordan and regional peers

The Jordanian experience also invites comparison with the digital governance approaches of neighboring countries. While the cybercrime legislation in Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia shares common features with Jordan's law, the Jordanian context is shaped by its particular political and social circumstances. Egypt has used its Cybercrime Law (2018) for extensive prosecution of political opponents and activists within a stricter authoritarian framework. The UAE has invested in advanced technical surveillance and partnerships with tech companies to enforce control. Jordan, by contrast, navigates a middle path—seeking to maintain an image of relative openness in the public sphere while asserting significant control over digital activity. This balancing act makes Jordan a distinctive case, as it attempts to manage digital challenges without the vast technical resources of

the Gulf states or the comprehensive repression seen elsewhere in the region.

The chilling effect of restrictive legislation

Finally, this research highlights the chilling effect produced by restrictive laws. While official statistics may capture the number of cases and verdicts, the deeper and more pervasive consequences are often hidden: the self-censorship practiced by journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens; the topics avoided; and the ideas left unspoken. This chilling effect impoverishes public discourse and narrows the diversity of viewpoints, depriving society of necessary debates on critical issues. Though difficult to quantify, this impact is evident in the testimonies collected by human rights organizations, where individuals articulate their fear of prosecution and describe how it shapes their work and expression.

Conclusion

This study provided a comprehensive political-legal analysis of digital media policies in Jordan during the critical period from 2020 to 2025. This era was marked by rapid digital transformation and the increasing influence of social media as major players in the public sphere. The research found that the Jordanian state's response to these changes was far more than a routine technical update or minor legal reform. Instead, it represented a deliberate and strategic reconfiguration of the state's approach to digital governance, rooted in the logic of "securitization" and the adoption of what can be termed a model of "digital authoritarian governance."

The analysis established that the 2023 Cybercrime Law was the cornerstone of this new strategy, endowing the state with broad authority to control digital content and penalize users. The law's use of ambiguous language and harsh penalties created a climate that fostered self-censorship, producing a pronounced "chilling effect." At the same time, these measures sparked a crisis of legitimacy, as large segments of civil society and the media viewed them as assaults on fundamental rights and freedoms. The guiding rationale behind these policies is the concept of "securitization," which frames issues of opinion and expression as security threats, thereby justifying extraordinary state action.

Ultimately, the Jordanian experience highlights a fundamental dilemma confronting many nations in the digital age: striking a balance between the demands of security and public order in an increasingly chaotic digital environment, and the imperative to safeguard the rights and freedoms that underpin the modern social contract. The findings indicate that, in Jordan, this balance has shifted markedly toward security and control, often at the expense of freedom and participation. While this approach may yield short-term gains in terms of state control, it risks eroding public trust, stifling creativity, and diminishing the vitality of the public sphere—an essential component for genuine political and economic reform. The path to a robust and dynamic digital public sphere lies in moving away from the logic of control and securitization, and embracing the principles of dialogue and partnership. This shift represents the most significant challenge facing Jordan and likeminded countries in the coming years.

In conclusion, it is crucial to emphasize that the ongoing digital transformation is not just a technological necessity, but also a pivotal historical opportunity for Jordan to redefine its relationship with its citizens based on greater transparency and participation. When wisely and equitably regulated, the digital sphere can become a catalyst for innovation, economic advancement, and civic engagement. Conversely, if it is treated solely as a threat to be controlled, the digital space may become characterized by fear and self-censorship, ultimately depriving society of its vast potential.

Jordan's experience in digital governance offers valuable lessons for other countries in the region facing similar challenges. The pursuit of a balance between security and freedom is not exclusive to Jordan, but is a common regional and global issue that demands innovative, sustainable solutions—solutions that respect the unique cultural and political contexts of each society and draw upon successful international models for creating free and secure digital spaces. This research aims to foster awareness of these crucial choices and to encourage a constructive national dialogue, paving the way for a brighter digital future for Jordan and the broader Arab region—a future grounded in respect for rights, enhanced security, and the promotion of innovation and sustainable development.

Recommendations

Recommendations for balanced and sustainable digital media policies

Policy Guidance for Jordan's digital future

This section presents a comprehensive set of recommendations aimed at guiding the development of balanced and sustainable digital media policies in Jordan. Drawing on the findings of the study, the recommendations are directed toward policymakers, researchers, civil society, and technology stakeholders. The objective is to foster a digital environment that upholds security while safeguarding freedom of expression, encourages civic participation, and promotes innovation.

Recommendations to policymakers (Government and Parliament)

1. **Review the cybercrime law:** Policymakers should undertake a thorough review of the Cybercrime Law, focusing particularly on articles related to freedom of expression, such as Articles 15, 16, and 17. The review should aim to clarify ambiguous terminology, abolish custodial sentences for opinion-related offenses, and replace them with proportionate civil penalties.
2. **Enhance judicial guarantees:** All measures restricting digital content, including blocking and removal, must occur strictly under clear and reasoned judicial orders. It is recommended to curtail the executive authority's current powers to intervene directly without prior judicial oversight, thereby strengthening the rule of law and due process.
3. **Launch a comprehensive national dialogue:** Policymakers should initiate an inclusive and sustained national dialogue on digital governance. This process must involve civil society representatives, the Journalists Syndicate, technology companies, and academic experts, with the goal of achieving broad societal consensus on the guiding principles for digital space

regulation.

Recommendations to civil society organizations and media actors

1. **Digital capacity building:** Civil society organizations and media actors are encouraged to prioritize capacity-building initiatives for journalists, activists, and citizens. These programs should address digital safety, information verification, and legal risk management in the evolving digital environment.

2. **Systematic monitoring and documentation:** Continuous, professional monitoring and documentation of digital rights violations are essential. Regular reports should be prepared, providing concrete data and evidence to support advocacy efforts at both the local and international levels.

3. **Encourage alternative and professional media**: Support should be directed toward nurturing independent, professional digital media platforms that adhere to high standards of accuracy and objectivity. These platforms can offer reliable alternatives, counter misinformation, and set examples of responsible media practice.

Recommendations to academic and research institutions

- **Intensify scientific research:** Academic and research institutions should conduct in-depth studies on the societal and political effects of digital transformation in Jordan. Such research should include impact assessments to evaluate the real-world consequences of new legislation on user behavior and the media landscape.

- **Develop specialized educational programs:** Institutions are urged to introduce specialized courses in media, law, and political science faculties, focusing on internet governance, digital policy, and digital rights. This will help prepare a new generation of experts capable of addressing the challenges of the digital age.

Recommendations to technology companies and digital platforms

- **Enhance transparency:** Technology companies and digital platforms should publish regular, transparent reports on government requests for content removal or access to user data, detailing compliance rates in line with international best practices.

- **Cooperate with civil society:** Platforms should form partnerships with local civil society organizations to establish fair review and appeal mechanisms for removed content. This cooperation will help ensure that platform policies are not misused to suppress dissenting voices.

- **Promote digital literacy:** Companies should contribute to digital literacy and media education programs for Jordanian users, enabling them to distinguish between reliable and misleading content and fostering a healthier digital public sphere.

Implementation strategies

To ensure the effective implementation of the outlined recommendations, a gradual and phased approach is essential. An important initial step involves forming a joint committee that includes representatives from the government, parliament, civil society, and the private sector. This committee would be tasked with reviewing the Cybercrime Law and proposing targeted amendments within a specified timeframe. Additionally, it is crucial for parliament to organize public hearings with stakeholders directly affected by the legislation, such as journalists and activists. These hearings would provide a platform to assess the real-world impact of the laws and ensure that diverse perspectives are considered in the legislative process.

Oversight and accountability

Establishing independent oversight mechanisms is critical for promoting accountability in digital regulation. Jordan can draw on international best practices by creating an autonomous body dedicated to digital governance. This body should involve participation from all relevant stakeholders and be

responsible for key functions such as policy review, handling complaints, and issuing binding recommendations to the government. The formation of such a body would help bridge the gap between the state and society, fostering greater trust in the processes governing digital regulation.

On the international level, it is important for Jordan to enhance cooperation with organizations committed to human rights and freedom of expression. By leveraging global expertise in internet governance, Jordan can adopt a balanced approach that upholds both rights and security. In doing so, Jordan has the potential to become a pioneering example for digital governance throughout the Arab region.

Conclusion

The digital space extends far beyond a technical domain; it forms a vital part of the democratic public sphere. In this environment, safeguarding citizens' fundamental rights to freedom of expression and access to information is essential. The choices Jordan makes in shaping a balanced digital governance model will have far-reaching consequences—not just for individual freedoms and rights, but also for economic growth, innovation, and the strength of social cohesion. Countries that nurture a digital landscape that is both open and secure stand to benefit from increased investment, attract talented individuals, and build a robust knowledge economy. On the other hand, excessive censorship and repression can lead to digital and economic isolation, causing the nation to miss out on crucial opportunities for advancement and prosperity. The direction Jordan takes at this pivotal moment will determine its trajectory in the rapidly changing digital era, and the hope lies in a steadfast commitment to governance that respects both rights and balance.

Concluding summary

In summary, this study provides an original academic perspective on the profound changes taking place in Jordan's digital media environment, utilizing a comprehensive political-legal framework that links legislative processes, governance practices, and their socio-economic impacts. The

analysis demonstrates that Jordan's response to digital challenges has been more than just a technical or bureaucratic adjustment—it reflects a strategic vision that defines the relationship between governmental authority and society in the digital era. The adoption of a "Digital Authoritarian Governance" model, most notably embodied in the 2023 Cybercrime Law, illustrates the state's attempt to reassert its influence over the public sphere amidst growing internal and external pressures. However, as explored in this study, such efforts pose significant risks to fundamental freedoms, economic progress, social unity, and even the political legitimacy of the state. The future of Jordan's digital landscape hinges on the political leadership's awareness of these dangers, the willingness to implement necessary reforms, and the ability to foster a national consensus around a vision that balances rights with security. The decisions made today will shape not only Jordan's digital environment but also the broader prospects for democracy and development within the Kingdom for years to come. Ultimately, building a sustainable digital future requires a holistic strategic outlook—one that places individuals and their rights at the center and regards technology as a means of empowering citizens rather than restricting them.

References

AlAshry, M. S. (2023). Arab authorities use digital surveillance to control press freedom: Journalists' perceptions. *Digital Policy, Regulation and Governance, 25*(3), 250–266. https://doi.org/10.1108/DPRG-05-2021-0071

Al-Mashaqbeh, A. (2021). Legal regulation of digital media in Jordan. *Egyptian Journal of Media Research, 74*(2), 1–29. https://doi.org/10.21608/ejsc.2021.226421

Al-Sarayreh, R. M. (2024). Jordanian cybercrime law No. (17) of 2023 between regulating social media sites and restricting freedom of opinion. *Scholars International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice, 7*(9), 339–351. https://doi.org/10.36348/sijlcj.2024.v07i09.002

Alsswey, A., & El-Qirem, I. (2023). Social media users' perceptions of government regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic

in Jordan. *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia, 29*(2), 73–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/13614568.2023.2246423

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/

Ayyad, K., & Radwan, A. F. (2025). Editorial to the special issue on "Digital transformation and media policy in the MENA region". *Journal of Digital Media & Policy, 16*(2), 121–129. https://doi.org/10.1386/jdmp_00170_2

Benkler, Y. (2006). *The wealth of networks: How social production transforms markets and freedom.* Yale University Press.

Buzan, B., Wæver, O., & de Wilde, J. (1998). *Security: A new framework for analysis.* Lynne Rienner Publishers.

DataReportal. (2025). *Digital 2025: Jordan.* https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-jordan

Freedom House. (2023). *Freedom on the Net 2023: Jordan.* https://freedomhouse.org/country/jordan/freedom-net/2023

Hanisch, M., Goldsby, C. M., Fabian, N. E., & Oehmichen, J. (2023). Digital governance: A conceptual framework and research agenda. *Journal of Business Research, 162*, 113777. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113777

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

Jam, F. A., Ali, I., Albishri, N., Mammadov, A., & Mohapatra, A. K. (2025). How does the adoption of digital technologies in supply chain management enhance supply chain performance? A mediated and moderated model. Technological Forecasting and Social Change, 219, 124225.Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship. (2021). *National Digital Transformation Strategy & Implementation Plan 2021–2025.* https://www.modee.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root_storage/en/eb_list_page/dts-2021-eng.pdf

Peter, F. (2010). Political legitimacy. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 ed.). https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/legitimacy/

Pierre, J. (Ed.). (2000). *Debating governance: Authority, steering, and democracy.* Oxford University Press.

StatCounter. (2025). *Social media stats in Jordan.* https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/jordan

The Legislation and Opinion Bureau (Diwan of Legislation & Opinion). (2023). *Cybercrime Law No. 17 of 2023* [Cybercrime Law No. 17 of 2023]. https://www.lob.gov.jo/?lang=ar&v=1