

Bahrain

	2013	2014		
Internet Freedom Status	Not Free	Not Free	Population:	1.1 million
Obstacles to Access (0-25)	11	12	Internet Penetration 2013:	90 percent
Limits on Content (0-35)	26	27	Social Media/ICT Apps Blocked:	Yes
Violations of User Rights (0-40)	35	35	Political/Social Content Blocked:	Yes
TOTAL* (0-100)	72	74	Bloggers/ICT Users Arrested:	Yes
			Press Freedom 2014 Status:	Not Free

* 0=most free, 100=least free

Key Developments: May 2013 – May 2014

- ISPs restricted access to Whatsapp, Viber, and Skype in advance of the August 14, 2013 ‘Tamarod’ demonstrations, disrupting online mobilization. Internet speeds were also throttled ahead of the three-year anniversary of country-wide protests on February 14, 2014 (see **Obstacles to Access**).
- A government initiative to censor “terrorist materials” resulted in the blocking of at least 70 websites, including many that feature content from political opposition or Shiite religious groups. Orders were also issued to monitor and filter text messages coming from abroad (see **Limits on Content**).
- At least 23 online users were arrested for offenses such as calling for protests or insulting the king on social media. Twelve have been found guilty thus far, with courts sentencing users to longer jail sentences in comparison to last year. A 10-year sentence was given to Abdali Khair for forwarding a Whatsapp message containing a statement of the opposition February 14th Coalition, now branded a terrorist group (see **Violations of User Rights**).
- A Cyber Safety Directorate was established, consisting of employees from government ministries and telecom companies, to monitor websites and social media for content that instigates violence or terrorism or disseminates lies and fallacies that pose a threat to the kingdom. Authorities sent links to opposition social media accounts which traced the user’s IP address when clicked (see **Violations of User Rights**).

Introduction

Over the past year, renewed calls for protest and a *tamarod* (“rebellion”) led to the throttling of internet speeds around key events, the temporary blocking of social media and communication apps, and the blocking of websites linked to the political opposition and Shiite groups. New regulations that would restrict online freedom are underway, including a cybercrimes law that would criminalize establishing a website to promote “the disruption of public order”. A combined total of 360 months (30 years) of prison sentences have been passed down on twelve Bahraini citizens as a result of their ICT activities, of which the longest was ten years. Users were handed one-year jail terms; similar cases the year before resulted in six-month sentences.

Surveillance of online activity and phone calls, combined with the continued crackdown on users, is pushing more Bahrainis toward self-censorship. Numerous users arrested for social media posts, particularly on Twitter, reported being subject to physical or psychological torture while held by authorities. Blogger Mahamed Hasan fled the country and applied for political asylum after his arrest and torture. Finally, online activists are subject to consistent cyberattacks, including targeting with spy links to expose their identity using fake accounts operated by the government.

In the absence of a representative government, many Bahrainis look to the internet as an outlet for expressing political, economic, and social frustrations in the country. Unfortunately, as the importance of online tools has grown, so too has the desire of the Bahraini authorities to extend censorship and government repression practices from the real world into the online domain. In 1997, only two years after the internet was introduced in the country, a Bahraini internet user was arrested for the first time after sending information to a political opposition group outside of the country.¹

Crackdowns on Bahraini internet users escalated in 2011, following widespread protests against the ruling family of King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa. The authorities engaged in mass arrests, military trials, torture, and widespread intimidation tactics in an attempt to silence popular demands for greater political rights and democratic freedoms, including a new constitution and an elected government.² One online activist died from torture while in police custody in April 2011, and the court failed to hold anyone accountable for it, amid a culture of impunity.³ The Ministry of Information made its first official attempt to block websites containing content critical of the government in 2002, and as of 2009 at least 1,000 websites were blocked, including individual pages on certain social-networking sites.⁴

1 Initiative For an Open Arab Internet, “Bahrain,” *Implacable Adversaries: Arab Governments and the Internet*, December 2006, <http://old.openarab.net/en/node/350>.

2 “Document – Bahrain: Two die as protests are violently repressed: ‘Ali ‘Abdulhadi Mushaima’, Fadhel ‘Ali Matrook,” Bahrain Center for Human Rights, February 15, 2011, <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/3731>.

3 “Journalists Killed in Bahrain,” Committee to Protect Journalists, April 9, 2011, <http://cpj.org/killed/2011/zakariya-rashid-hassan-al-ashiri.php>.

4 “Bahrain: Government orders over 1,000 websites blocked,” Index on Censorship, September 25, 2009, <http://www.indexoncensorship.org/2009/09/bahrain-government-orders-over-1000-websites-blocked/>.

Obstacles to Access

From a technological perspective, Bahrain is one of the most highly connected countries in the world. In 2013, Bahrain ranked third in the Arab region on the Information and Communications Technology Development Index.⁵ Internet access is widely available at schools, universities, shopping malls, and coffee shops, where Bahrainis often gather for work and study. Language is not an issue, with many applications available in Arabic, and a high level of English language knowledge. The number of internet users has risen rapidly, from a penetration rate of 33 percent in 2007 to 90 percent in 2013.⁶ As of the first quarter of 2014, there are approximately 1.7 million broadband subscriptions in the country, of which 90 percent were mobile broadband.⁷ Dial-up connections disappeared in 2010 and ADSL use has declined with the growth of mobile broadband. Broadband prices fell by nearly 53 percent between 2011 and 2012,⁸ and are among the lowest in the region for low usage mobile broadband.⁹ However, prices are high for residential broadband in comparison to countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).¹⁰

Bahrain also has one of the highest mobile phone penetration rates in the region at 166 percent as of the end of 2013, representing over 2.2 million subscribers.¹¹ BlackBerry phones are popular among young people and the business community and account for around 13 percent of mobile subscribers,¹² even though authorities banned BlackBerry users from sending news bulletins through text messages in 2010.¹³ In June 2013, the Minister of State for Communications announced that Bahrain would introduce new regulations for Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) applications, such as Skype, WhatsApp, Viber and Tango, currently popular in Bahrain. Authorities stated the move was made for “security considerations” and to preserve moral values.¹⁴

On August 14, 2013, the day when Bahrain’s *Tamarod* (“rebellion”) protests were planned to take

5 International Telecommunication Union (ITU), “Measuring The Information Society”, 2013 http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/mis2013/MIS2013_without_Annex_4.pdf.

6 International Telecommunication Union (ITU), “Percentage of individuals using the Internet, fixed (wired) Internet subscriptions, fixed (wired)-broadband subscriptions,” 2006 & 2012, accessed June 24, 2013, <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx#>.

7 Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), *Telecommunications Market Indicators in the Kingdom of Bahrain* (Manama: TRA, Q1 2014), slide 5, <http://www.tra.org.bh/media/document/Quarterly%20Market%20indicators%20-%20Q1%202014%20vF.pdf>.

8 Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), *Telecommunications Market Indicators in the Kingdom of Bahrain* (Manama: TRA, September 2013), slide 33, http://tra.org.bh/media/document/Telecommunicationsmarketsindicatorsreport2013PublicversionvF_en1.pdf

9 Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), *2012 Telecommunications Retail Price Benchmarking Report for Arab Countries*, (Manama: TRA, March 2013), slide 122, <http://tra.org.bh/media/document/2012PriceBenchmarkingofTelecommunicationsServiceintheArabCountriesvF.pdf>.

10 Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), *2012 Telecommunications Retail Price Benchmarking Report for Arab Countries*, (Manama: TRA, March 2013), slide 88, <http://tra.org.bh/media/document/2012PriceBenchmarkingofTelecommunicationsServiceintheArabCountriesvF.pdf>

11 International Telecommunication Union (ITU), “Mobile-cellular subscriptions” 2013, accessed September 30, 2014, <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx#>.

12 TRA, *Telecommunications Market Indicators in the Kingdom of Bahrain*, September 2013, slide 3, http://tra.org.bh/media/document/Telecommunicationsmarketsindicatorsreport2013PublicversionvF_en1.pdf

13 “Authorities Ban Blackberry Users from Sending News Bulletins,” IFEX, April 15, 2010, http://ifex.org/bahrain/2010/04/15/blackberry_ban/.

14 “Bahrain mulls new rules for VoIP applications”, Gulf News, June 25, 2013 <http://m.gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-mulls-new-rules-for-voip-applications-1.1201599> and “New Regulations for Skype and Viber in Bahrain”, Global Voices, June 25, 2013 <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2013/06/25/new-regulations-for-skype-and-viber-in-bahrain/>

place, reports indicated that Whatsapp, Viber and Skype were temporarily blocked on multiple internet service providers (ISPs) for several hours. Users also reported abnormally slow internet speeds.¹⁵ Authorities also throttled internet speeds on February 13, 2014,¹⁶ in conjunction the anniversary of the February 14 protests, as well as a Twitter campaign calling on U.S. President Barack Obama and the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for support.¹⁷

Mobile phone services and ISPs are regulated by the Telecommunications Regulation Authority (TRA) under the 2002 Telecommunications Law. The TRA is responsible for licensing telecommunication providers and for developing “a competition led market for the provision of innovative communications services, available to all.”¹⁸ The TRA fined a main operator VIVA in August 2013 for exceeding the bandwidth limitations set out in its frequency license.¹⁹ The TRA has also issued several regulations that have not been welcomed by consumers, including measures that violate individual privacy.²⁰ (See “Violations of User Rights”)

Although the TRA is theoretically an independent organization, in practice its members are appointed by the government and its chairman reports to the Minister of State for Telecommunications. Until June 2013, this minister also occupied the post of President of the Information Affairs Authority (IAA).²¹ The IAA, which replaced the Ministry of Information in 2010, oversees both traditional and online media outlets in Bahrain and is responsible for decisions to block websites, which are then enforced by internet service providers (ISPs).

There have been no reported instances of ISPs being denied registration permits. Indeed, over 31 licenses have been granted since 2003, with 14 providers currently in business. Two marginal ISPs stopped providing internet services in 2013; the reason is unclear.²² In March 2013, the TRA limited a tender for additional frequency bands to support the launch of 4G LTE to major ISPs Batelco, Zain and VIVA that also act as the only mobile operators in Bahrain.²³ In April, a court accepted an appeal

15 “On #Bahrain Tamrrod day: Internet slow, Chatting apps blocked”, Bahrain Index, August 2014 <http://bahrainindex.tumblr.com/post/58264073435/on-bahrain-tamrrod-day-internet-slow-chatting-apps>

16 “Slow internet reported on the eve of the revolution anniversary”, Bahrain Index, February 2014 <http://bahrainindex.tumblr.com/post/77604642724/slow-internet-reported-on-the-eve-of-the-revolution>

17 “Campaign in Bahrain calls on Obama to intervene in favor of the opposition” [in Arabic], Radio Sawa, February 14, 2014 <http://www.radiosawa.com/content/%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-/243612.html>

18 TRA Mission, accessed March 30, 2014, <http://tra.org.bh/en/about-us/vision-mission.html>

19 “Bahrain TRA fines Viva on non-compliance”, Gulf News, August 6, 2013 http://www.tradearabia.com/news/IT_240672.html

20 Geoffrey Bew, “‘Big Brother’ Move Rapped,” Gulf Daily News, March 25, 2009, <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/Print.aspx?storyid=246587>.

21 In June 2013, Mohamed al-Rumaihi was named President of the IAA, replacing Fawaz al-Khalifa who remained Minister of State for Telecom.

22 Ascentech telecoms and Kulacom Communications S.P.C, compare TRA, *Telecommunications Market Indicators in the Kingdom of Bahrain*, December 2012, slide 10, <http://tra.org.bh/media/document/2012Telecommunicationsmarketsindicatorsvfforpublic1.pdf>
With TRA, *Telecommunications Market Indicators in the Kingdom of Bahrain*, September 2013, slide 8, http://tra.org.bh/media/document/Telecommunicationsmarketsindicatorsreport2013PublicversionF_en1.pdf

23 “Bahrain’s 4G auction further delayed by dispute”, CommsMEA, April 7, 2013 <http://www.commsmea.com/13166-bahrains-4g-auction-further-delayed-by-dispute/>

from Menatelecom, a major ISP, to be included in the tender,²⁴ forcing the TRA to cancel it in June.²⁵ Subsequently, in September, the TRA started providing LTE frequencies to all requestor operators. Two ISPs, VIVA and Menatelecom are also licensed to provide the increasingly popular WiMax technology for accessing wireless broadband from one's computer through a USB device.

The government has a controlling stake in Bahrain's largest telecommunications company, Batelco, while other ISPs are owned by investors from the private sector, including non-Bahraini investors. Although there is no centralized internet backbone in Bahrain, all ISPs are indirectly controlled by the government through orders from the TRA. This tight control over the country's ICT sector has allowed the Bahraini authorities to enforce strict limits on online content.

Limits on Content

Over the past year, the scale of censorship increased, while the level of sophistication remained stable. At least 70 websites were blocked and new orders were given to service providers to filter text messages. Increased self-censorship caused a notable drop in the number of Bahraini social media users.

Multiple state organizations, including the IAA, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of State for Telecommunication can order the blocking of a website without referring the case to a court. The IAA blocks websites that violate Articles 19 and 20 of the country's Press Rules and Regulations. This includes material judged as "instigating hatred of the political regime, encroaching on the state's official religion, breaching ethics, encroaching on religions and jeopardizing public peace or raising issues whose publication is prohibited by the provisions of this law."²⁶ Any site that criticizes the government, the ruling family, and the country's status quo is subject to blocking by the IAA. According to an online community-based survey, 39 percent of all sites reported blocked in 2014 were related to politics, while 23 percent were related to the use of various internet tools, such as anonymizers and web proxies.²⁷

Websites are filtered based on keyword density, the manual entry of URLs, and certain website categories. An updated list of blocked websites is regularly sent to ISPs, which are instructed to "prohibit any means that allow access to sites blocked by the ministry."²⁸ Through IAA notification, the TRA can revoke the license of any operator that does not cooperate with IAA blocking orders.²⁹ Batelco, Bahrain's main ISP, filters the web using McAfee SmartFilter software and Blue

24 "«Mena Telecom» wins a court order to stop an auction procedures of the fourth generation until the company is allowed to enter", alwasat news, April 17, 2013 <http://www.alwasatnews.com/3875/news/read/764831/1.html>

25 "Bahrain's TRA cancels LTE auction", ITP.net, July 1, 2013 <http://www.itp.net/593929-bahrains-tra-cancels-lte-auction>

26 Please see "Decree-by-Law No. (47) for the year 2002 regarding organizing the press, printing and publishing," available at: <http://www.iaa.bh/policiesPressrules.aspx>.

27 "Herdict: At a Glance - Bahrain" Herdict, accessed on January 03, 2014, <http://www.herdict.org/explore/indepth?fc=BH>.

28 Reporters Without Borders, "Authorities Step Up Offensive Against Journalists and Websites," news release, May 14, 2009, http://en.rsf.org/spip.php?page=article&id_article=33042.

29 Reporters Without Borders, "Authorities Step Up Offensive Against Journalists and Websites," news release, May 14, 2009, http://en.rsf.org/spip.php?page=article&id_article=33042. A copy of the law can be seen on [Arabic] <http://www.legalaffairs.gov.bh/viewpdf.aspx?ID=RCLIF0109>

Coat technology.³⁰ In March 2011, plans were announced to switch to technology from Palo Alto Networks that can block certain elements and activities within websites, such as video or photo uploading, and make it more difficult for users to circumvent censorship. It is unclear whether or not the tools have been implemented, but in December 2013 the company signed a deal with a distributor that covers Bahrain's market.³¹

According to estimates dating from 2009, the IAA had blocked or shut down at least 1,000 websites, including human rights websites, blogs, online forums, and individual pages from social media networks.³² Many more websites were blocked after the 2011 protests, which was called for and heavily covered by online channels, resulting in a significant rise of blocking and filtering measures by the Bahraini authorities.³³ The websites of the Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) have been blocked since 2006. In November 2013, following a campaign by the BCHR to expose officials and royal family members involved in violations, an alternative link to the center's website was blocked as well.³⁴

Although there are a number of news websites providing a plurality of viewpoints distinct from the narrative of Bahraini state media, most of these are blocked by the government and require circumvention tools to access. Bahrain Online, a prominent online forum, has been blocked since its launch in 1998.³⁵ The Arabic web portal and blog-hosting service Al-Bawaba has also been blocked since 2006. Online newspapers have been banned from using audio and video reports on their websites since 2010, apart from the state-owned Bna.bh, which broadcasts video from state television.³⁶

In August 2013, the communications minister ordered ISPs to block 70 websites,³⁷ supposedly those "affiliated with internationally recognized organizations that fund and promote terrorism."³⁸ The minister also ordered telecom companies to take measures against text messages sent from abroad that promote violence.³⁹ A hotline and an email account were established to receive reports

30 Paul Sonne and Steve Stecklow, "U.S. Products Help Block Mideast Web," Wall Street Journal, March 27, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704438104576219190417124226.html>.

31 "Westcon ME signs distie deal with Palo Alto", ITP.net, December 2, 2013 <http://www.itp.net/595856-westcon-me-signs-distie-deal-with-palo-alto>

32 "Countries Under Surveillance: Bahrain," 2011, Reporters Without Borders, accessed July 16, 2012, <http://en.rsf.org/surveillance-bahrain,39748.html>.

33 "Bahrain: 'Internet' the biggest victim of the war launched by the authorities on the general freedom ANHRI condemns blocking Al-Quds Al-Arabi newspaper website following its publishing of an editorial article criticizing the Saudi intervention in Bahrain," The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, May 24, 2011, <http://www.anhri.net/en/?p=2544>.

34 "Bahrain Center for Human Rights website 2nd link blocked", Bahrain Index, November 2013 <http://bahrainindex.tumblr.com/post/67966573723/bahrain-center-for-human-rights-website-2nd-link>

35 Ben Birnbaum, "Bahrain continues crackdown on Shi'ite opposition," The Washington Times, September 14, 2010, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/sep/14/bahrain-shiites-fear-arrests-detention-torture/?page=2> and "WebStatsDomain - Mail.bahrainonline.org," WebStatsDomain, accessed March 19, 2013, <http://www.webstatsdomain.com/domains/mail.bahrainonline.org/>.

36 "Ban on audio programs on daily newspaper Al-Wasat's website," Bahrain Center for Human Rights, September 9, 2010, <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/3327>.

37 "Blocking a number of websites that promote terrorism, as per the recommendations of the National assembly", Bahrain News Agency, August 3, 2013 <http://www.bna.bh/portal/news/573943>

38 "Ministry of State for Communications To Regulate Websites Linked to Internationally Recognized Terrorist Organizations", Bahrain News Agency, August 3, 2013 <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/573944>

39 "Bahrain telcos told to block online terror forums", Trade Arabia, August 14, 2013 http://www.tradearabia.com/news/MEDIA_240968.html

on abusive and terrorist social media pages.⁴⁰ While some sites affiliated with Hezbollah, al-Qaeda, and other groups were blocked, others remained accessible, giving a sense that the fight against terrorism is being used as an excuse to censor online content from dissidents.⁴¹ Although the full list of blocked websites was not made available, news sites affiliated with Bahrain's popular February 14th Coalition protest movement, and online forums linked to the political opposition and the main religious group "Olamaa Islamic Council," were also affected.⁴²

YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and international blog-hosting services are freely available. However, certain applications are permanently blocked and specific content on social networks can be inaccessible. For example, since the 2011 protests, most live-broadcasting websites that were popular among protesters have been blocked.⁴³ PalTalk, a chatting service that was used to conduct political seminars for wide online audiences, has been blocked since June 2011.⁴⁴ This intensified in November 2013. Matam.tv, a website that broadcasts live religious events and sermons from Shi'a religious centers across Bahrain, was reported blocked prior to religious commemorations surrounding the predominantly Shi'a anniversary of Ashura.⁴⁵ Following the circulation of photos online showing Bahraini schoolyards filled with water after heavy rainfall, the Ministry of Education banned all school directors from publishing any photos online without permission.⁴⁶ Separately, a website that broadcasts public events of political opposition groups was blocked on November 23, 2013, during a conference on the implementation of recommendations from the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry.⁴⁷

Authorities also use extralegal measures to forcibly remove online content. Through the use of arrests,⁴⁸ detentions, and torture,⁴⁹ security forces coerced many online forum moderators into

40 "Ministry of State for Communications To Regulate Websites Linked to Internationally Recognized Terrorist Organizations", Bahrain News Agency, August 3, 2013 <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/573944>

41 The websites of Al-Qaeda and Al Nusrah Front remain accessible as of 10 Jan 2014, <http://bahrainindex.tumblr.com/post/57447600168/ministry-of-state-for-communications-to-block-70>

42 In September 2013, one month after the blocking order, a court ruled that the February 14th Coalition is a terrorist group. The Olamaa Islamic Council was dissolved by a court in January 2014 for allegedly inciting violence.

43 These sites include livestream.com, bambuser.com, ustream.tv, justin.tv, and other websites that stream directly to Twitter like twitcasting.tv and twitcam.livestream.com. See, "Attacks on media continue across Middle East," Committee to Protect Journalists, February 16, 2011, <http://cpj.org/2011/02/attacks-on-media-continue-across-middle-east.php>; "Despotic regimes continue to obstruct coverage of revolutions," Reporters Without Borders, September 1, 2011, <http://en.rsf.org/bahrain-despotic-regimes-continue-to-01-09-2011.40886.html>.

44 "Crackdown continues in Bahrain, Bloggers go on trial in Emirates," Reporters Without Borders, June 16, 2011, <http://en.rsf.org/bahrain-crackdown-continues-in-bahrain-16-06-2011.40467.html>.

45 "Bahrain: The "Cyber Safety Directorate" Monitors Internet Activity In Style Similar to Big Brother ", Bahrain Center for Human Rights, November 25, 2013 <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/6624>

46 "Bahrain: Schools 'need ministry approval' to publish news", BBC, November 25, 2013 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-25088333>

47 "Bahrain: The "Cyber Safety Directorate" Monitors Internet Activity In Style Similar to Big Brother ", Bahrain Center for Human Rights, November 25, 2013 <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/6624>

48 Non exhaustive list of forum moderators who were subject to arrest found at: <https://spreadsheets.google.com/pub?hl=en&hl=en&key=0ApabTTYHrcWDdEk0Q0pWYnlSa3JmbS1RbThtUkZrNkE&output=html>; accessed via: "Bahrain: After destruction of the actual protesting site at "the Pearl," the government shifts to eliminate virtual protests," Bahrain Center for Human Rights, May 17, 2011, <http://bahrainrights.hopto.org/en/node/4101>.

49 "Bahrain: Twitter User Jailed for 66 Days for Tweeting ", Global voices, December 5, 2011 <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2011/12/05/bahrain-twitter-user-jailed-for-66-days-for-tweeting/>

permanently shutting down their sites following the 2011 crackdown.⁵⁰ This resulted in the loss of a large amount of information on Bahrain's history that had been documented by online users and made available only through local forums and websites. Website administrators face the same libel laws that apply to print journalists and are held jointly responsible for all content posted on their sites or chat rooms.

In May 2013, progovernment users led a mass campaign to compel Instagram to close the page run by al-Wefaq by submitting complaints to the photo-sharing app and website. Al-Wefaq is the largest political group in Bahrain and uses its account page to publish photos of attacks on protestors by security forces.⁵¹ According to Google, Bahrain requested the removal of one YouTube video for "security and privacy" reasons in the period between January and June 2013, but the company did not comply.⁵² Twitter's Transparency Report reveals no requests from Bahraini authorities.⁵³

The decision-making process and government policies behind the blocking of websites are not transparent. The list of all blocked websites is not available to the public. In addition, webmasters do not receive notifications or explanations when their websites are banned. When trying to access a blocked site, users are presented with the message, "This web site has been blocked for violating regulations and laws of Kingdom of Bahrain," with no particular laws specified. Although the law does technically allow affected individuals to appeal a block within 15 days, no such case has yet been adjudicated.

Authorities also manipulate online content in order to fabricate greater public support. The independent group Bahrain Watch lists 18 PR firms known to have been hired by the government for promotional campaigns since February 2011, representing at least \$32 million in contracts.⁵⁴ Hoax journalists⁵⁵ spread propaganda on Twitter and progovernment blogs such as *Bahrain Views* and *Bahrain Independent*.⁵⁶ At least one PR agency was contracted to provide "web optimization and blogging" services,⁵⁷ while others were hired for online reputation management.⁵⁸ Multiple Wikipedia entries linked to Bahrain were changed in favor of the government.⁵⁹ Similarly, an "army

50 Moderator of the AlDair Forum talks about his detention, saying he was forced to show the interrogation officer how to close the website: "Ahmed al-Dairi Moderator of AlDair Forums in the first episode of his testimony: thus eased voice of Zakaria AlAsheeri forever" [in Arabic], Bahrain Mirror, January 4, 2012, <http://bhmirror.no-ip.org/article.php?id=2678&cid=117>.

51 "Citizens slapped 'Alwefaq' electronically by shutting down its Instagram page" [in Arabic], Alwatan News, May 17, 2013 <http://alwatannews.net/NewsViewer.aspx?ID=TTDNTYfg272GBOanCypgSg933339933339>

52 Google Transparency Report, "Government requests to remove content: Bahrain", accessed March 31, 2014 <http://www.google.com/transparencyreport/removals/government/BH/>.

53 See <https://transparency.twitter.com/>.

54 "PR Watch – keeping an eye on the Kingdom's PR," Bahrain Watch, <http://bahrainwatch.org/pr/>.

55 Marc Owen Jones, "Hoax Journalist Liliane Khalil Returns, This Time as Habiba Dalal," MarcOwenJones, (blog), January 29, 2012, <http://marcownjones.wordpress.com/2012/01/29/the-return-of-liliane-khalil/>.

56 Marc Owen Jones, "Busted! Journalist Liliane Khalil Exposed," MarcOwenJones, (blog), August 2, 2011 <http://www.marcownjones.hostbyet2.com/?p=364> and Justin Gengler, "Media Jihad: If Ya Can't Beat 'Em, Sue 'Em!", Religion and Politics in Bahrain, June 15, 2011 <http://bahrainipolitics.blogspot.com/2011/06/media-jihad-if-you-cant-beat-em-sue-em.html#> Dr Majeed AL Alawi, Twitter post, January 2, 2012, 2:51am, <https://twitter.com/#!/DrMajeedAlalawi/status/153790396231716865>.

57 "Trippi & Associates Manipulate Internet Content on Behalf of Bahrain Government," Bahrain Freedom Index (blog), July 20, 2011, <http://bahrainindex.tumblr.com/post/15188201300/trippi-associates-manipulate-internet-content-on>.

58 Marcus Baram, "Lobbyists Jump Ship in Wake of Mideast Unrest," Huffington Post, March 25, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/24/lobbyist-mideast-unrest-departures_n_840231.html;

59 Marc Owen Jones, "Truth Massages & the Intelligence Unknown," MarcOwenJones, (blog), December 7, 2011 <http://www.marcownjones.hostbyet2.com/?p=401>.

of trolls” has been active on Twitter⁶⁰ since February 2011, when hundreds of accounts suddenly emerged to collectively harass and intimidate online activists,⁶¹ commentators, and journalists who voiced support for protests and human rights.⁶² The government trolls have been moderately effective in silencing or reducing the activity of opposition voices inside Bahrain⁶³ and abroad.⁶⁴ The trolls have also played a vital role in spreading information that is controversial, offensive, or false,⁶⁵ in order to distort the image of protesters, spread hate and conflict, or discredit information posted on social networks.⁶⁶ These troll accounts usually have few followers (or sometimes none at all) and tend to appear and disappear in coordination with one another.

In August 2013, Bahrain Watch revealed evidence of connections between the Bahraini government and “extremist” accounts on Twitter and Facebook that advocated violence against both the government and protesters.⁶⁷ It was also revealed that the government impersonates opposition figures on social media in order to send malicious links, such as IP trackers, to anonymous government critics that can be used to identify and prosecute them.⁶⁸ (See “Violations of User Rights.”) In September 2013, a fake WikiLeaks cable was published on a Bahraini progovernment forum with the objective of defaming a Bahrain member of parliament (MP) who had spoken out against the crackdown on protests.⁶⁹ The Chamber of Deputies (*Majlis an-nuwab*) was prepared to take action against the MP for violating his parliamentary duties, until it was revealed that the cable was fake.⁷⁰ In January 2014, the prime minister and the minister of telecommunications held several public meetings with progovernment users to encourage them to “defend Bahrain’s ruling system.”⁷¹

Despite these numerous attempts to manipulate the online information landscape, government restrictions on online advertising have not forced the closure of any opposition websites. While it

60 “Bahrain’s Troll Army,” Web 3.0 Lab (blog), February 17, 2011, <http://web3lab.blogspot.com/2011/02/bahrain-troll-army.html>.

61 Brian Dooley, “‘Troll’ Attacks on #Bahrain Tweets Show Depth of Government Attempts to Silence Dissent,” Huffington Post (blog), November 17, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brian-dooley/troll-attacks-on-bahrain_b_1099642.html.

62 J. David Goodman, “‘Twitter Trolls’ Haunt Discussions of Bahrain Online,” The Lede (blog), *New York Times*, October 11, 2011, <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/11/twitter-trolls-haunt-discussions-of-bahrain-online/>.

63 iManamaa, Twitter post, May 13, 2011, 7:39am, <http://twitter.com/imanamaa/status/69049206215684097>; Sultan Al-Qassemi, “Pioneer Bloggers in the Gulf Arab States,” *Jadaliyya*, December 20, 2011, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/3643/pioneer-bloggers-in-the-gulf-arab-states>; “Disturbing Drop in Tweeting in Bahrain,” Web 3.0 Lab (blog), March 22, 2011, <http://web3lab.blogspot.com/2011/03/disturbing-drop-in-tweeting-in-bahrain.html>.

64 Jillian York, “Twitter Trolling as Propaganda Tactic: Bahrain and Syria,” *JillianCYork.com* (blog), December 10, 2011, <http://jilliancyork.com/2011/10/12/twitter-trolling-as-propaganda-tactic-bahrain-and-syria/>.

65 Marc Owen Jones, “So Many Trolls but so Few Leaders: The Information War in Bahrain,” *MarcOwenJones* (blog), March 14, 2011 <http://www.marcowenjones.hostbyet2.com/?p=176>.

66 David Wheeler, “In the Arab Spring’s Wake, Twitter Trolls and Facebook Spies,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 29, 2011, <http://chronicle.com/blogs/planet/2011/11/29/in-the-arab-springs-wake-twitter-trolls-and-facebook-spies/>.

67 “Is Bahrain’s Government running extremist accounts?,” *Bahrain Watch*, August 5, 2013 <https://bahrainwatch.org/blog/2013/08/05/is-bahrain-govt-running-extremist-accounts/>

68 “Bahrain Govt using fake Twitter accounts to track online critics,” *Bahrain Watch*, July 31, 2013 <https://bahrainwatch.org/blog/2013/07/31/bahrain-govt-using-fake-twitter-accounts-to-track-online-critics/>

69 Bill Marczak, “The ‘Trivially Fake’ Wikileaks Cable that Fooled Bahrain’s Press and Parliament,” *Bahrain Watch*, September 12, 2013 <https://bahrainwatch.org/blog/2013/09/12/the-trivially-fake-wikileaks-cable-that-fooled-bahrain-press-and-parliament/>

70 “«House of Representatives»: legal action against a MP based on the Wikileaks files”, September 11, 2013 <http://www.alwasatnews.com/4022/news/read/808912/1.html>

71 “HRH Premier calls for the need to use social networks to defend the nation”, *Bahrain News Agency*, January 14, 2014 <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/597534>

is difficult for blocked websites to secure advertising, popular sites such as Bahrain Online have not faced significant financial pressures. This is due to the fact that most Bahraini opposition websites are run with limited and sometimes personal resources. Furthermore, the websites continue to receive large amounts of traffic from users within Bahrain through the use of proxy services, dynamic IP addresses, and virtual private network (VPN) applications. However, the government does regularly block access to circumvention tools, including techniques such as using Google Page Translate, Google cached pages, and online mobile emulators. Adaptive and internet savvy Bahrainis tend to find ways around these restrictions.

The government crackdown in March 2011 led many regular internet users to exercise a higher degree of self-censorship, particularly after investigations of users' online activities were launched at work places and universities.⁷² Twitter and online forum users, and even those who leave comments on online editions of newspapers, use pseudonyms due to fear of being targeted by the authorities.⁷³ Many have modified their privacy settings on social media or 'protected' their Twitter pages. Some temporarily stopped tweeting after receiving threats to their personal safety.⁷⁴ The number of Bahraini users on Facebook dropped 16 percent to 345,520 as of May 2013,⁷⁵ representing a penetration rate of 25 percent.⁷⁶ The number of active Bahraini Twitter users also continued to drop,⁷⁷ from 72,468 reported in June 2012,⁷⁸ to 64,300 in March 2013,⁷⁹ and 62,200 in March 2014.⁸⁰ Following the prosecution of four internet users in 2012,⁸¹ use of the #Bahrain hashtag also dropped.⁸² Despite this, the hashtag remains one of the most popular topics on Twitter across the Arab region, with around 710,000 tweets on the English hashtag and 1,000,000 tweets on the Arabic hashtag of Bahrain (#نيجربال) in March 2014 alone.⁸³

Indeed, the internet is also the main source of information and news for many Bahrainis, particularly those active on Twitter. Given restrictions on press freedom, the lack of international media coverage,

72 Simeon Kerr, "Manama fights back in cyberspace," *Financial Times*, May 23, 2011, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/7bce94b8-8560-11e0-ae32-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1lLZwkuOF>.

73 Nancy Messieh, "Online anonymity: A gateway to freedom or abuse?" *The Next Web*, August 14, 2011, <http://thenextweb.com/me/2011/08/14/online-anonymity-a-gateway-to-freedom-or-abuse/>.

74 See <http://bahrainindex.tumblr.com/post/35897159633/bahraini-doctor-bahraindoctor-threatened-with-arrest>

75 Dubai School of Government, "Transforming Education in the Arab World: Breaking Barriers in the Age of Social Learning," *Arab Social Media Report*, Issue 5, June 2013, Figure 20 http://www.dsg.ae/cms/News/ASMR_5_Report_Final.pdf

76 Dubai School of Government, "Facebook in the Arab Region" *Arab Social Media Report*, accessed March 31, 2014 <http://www.arabsocialmediareport.com/Facebook/LineChart.aspx?&PriMenuID=18&CatID=24&mnu=Cat>

77 As officially defined by Twitter, an "active user" is someone who logs in (but does not necessarily tweet) once a month.

78 Dubai School of Government, "Mapping Twitter: Twitter Users," *Arab Social Media Report*, Issue 4, July 2012, <http://www.dsg.ae/en/Publication/Pdf/En/82620121122209347849.pdf>

79 Dubai School of Government, "Transforming Education in the Arab World: Breaking Barriers in the Age of Social Learning," *Arab Social Media Report*, Issue 5, June 2013 http://www.dsg.ae/cms/News/ASMR_5_Report_Final.pdf

80 Dubai School of Government, "Citizen Engagement and Public Services in the Arab World: The Potential of Social Media," *Arab Social Media Report*, Issue 6, June 2014, Figure 32 <http://www.mbrsg.ae/getattachment/e9ea2ac8-13dd-4cd7-9104-b8f1f405cab3/Citizen-Engagement-and-Public-Services-in-the-Arab.aspx>

81 See <http://bahrainindex.tumblr.com/post/41025930298/a-drop-in-level-of-tweets-on-bahrain-hashtag>

82 "Arab Social Media Report: Twitter in the Arab Region", Dubai School of Government, accessed March 31, 2014 <http://www.arabsocialmediareport.com/Twitter/LineChart.aspx?&PriMenuID=18&CatID=25&mnu=Cat>

83 Dubai School of Government, "Citizen Engagement and Public Services in the Arab World: The Potential of Social Media," *Arab Social Media Report*, Issue 6, June 2014, Figure 40 <http://www.mbrsg.ae/getattachment/e9ea2ac8-13dd-4cd7-9104-b8f1f405cab3/Citizen-Engagement-and-Public-Services-in-the-Arab.aspx>.

and the inability of many prominent journalists to enter the country,⁸⁴ activists use digital tools to bring attention to protests and human rights violations.⁸⁵ The resilient social protest movement titled the “Coalition of February 14 Youth” continues to use social networks,⁸⁶ both to organize protests and bring international mainstream media attention to local causes.⁸⁷ For example, on February 17, 2014 the BBC reported 13,000 followers for an Arabic hashtag “bloody_Thursday,” referring to the violent attack on protestors at Bahrain’s Pearl Roundabout on February 17, 2011.⁸⁸ YouTube videos are also uploaded to document police attacks on civilians and torture testimonies,⁸⁹ though some are promptly blocked.⁹⁰ Relatives or friends of detainees regularly use Twitter to campaign for their release and provide updates about prison conditions.⁹¹ Overall, by uploading videos and sharing images on social media, protesters have maintained the spotlight on their struggle.

Violations of User Rights

The past year has witnessed an increase in violations of user rights. Authorities stepped up arrests of Twitter users for expressing criticism of the government or calling for protests online. Also increasing is the practice of targeting activists with surveillance malware in order to monitor their online activities and collect personal information. The legal environment remains an impediment to freedom online, although authorities also make use of extralegal measures such as arbitrary detention and torture to intimidate and prosecute users. Bahraini authorities have continuously called for more restrictions on internet freedom in recent years.

Bahrain’s legal environment presents many obstacles to internet freedom in its current form. According to Article 23 of the Bahraini constitution, freedom of expression is guaranteed, “provided that the fundamental beliefs of Islamic doctrine are not infringed, the unity of the people is not prejudiced, and discord or sectarianism is not aroused.”⁹² Article 26 states that all written, telephonic, and electronic communications “shall not be censored or their confidentiality be breached except in exigencies specified by law and in accordance with procedures and under guarantees prescribed by the law.”⁹³ The Press and Publications Law of 2002 promises free access to information “without prejudice to the requirements of national security and defending the homeland.” Bahraini journalists have argued that these qualifying statements and loosely-worded clauses allow for arbitrary

84 “Access Denied,” a project of the independent research and advocacy organization Bahrain Watch, chronicles the many journalists, researchers, academics, and NGO workers that were expelled from or denied access to Bahrain from the 2011 uprising until now. Available at: <http://bahrainwatch.org/access/>.

85 Amira al Hussaini, “Bahrain: Tweeting Appalling Conditions at Jaw Prison,” Global Voices, July 19, 2013, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2012/07/19/bahrain-tweeting-appalling-conditions-at-jaw-prison/>.

86 See <https://twitter.com/COALITION14>

87 Toby C. Jones and Ala’a Shehabi, “Bahrain’s revolutionaries,” Foreign Policy, January 2, 2012, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/01/02/bahrain_s_revolutionaries and “Demonstration Notice 3 – January 17, 2013,” U.S. Embassy Bahrain, January 17, 2013, <http://photos.state.gov/libraries/adana/5/2013PDFfiles/CONS-DemonstrationNotice3-13.pdf>.

88 “«BBC»: 13 thousand followers for «Hashtag» «Bloody Thursday» in Bahrain”, [in Arabic], Alwasat News, February 24, 2014 <http://www.alwasatnews.com/4188/news/read/860167/1.html>

89 “Blocking the Documentary ‘Systematic Torture in Bahrain’ on YouTube,” Bahrain Center for Human Rights, February 8, 2011, <http://bahrainrights.hopto.org/en/node/3710>.

90 Jillian York, “Bahrain Blocks YouTube Pages and More,” Global Voices, February 14, 2011, <http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/2011/02/14/bahrain-blocks-youtube-pages-and-more/>.

91 See: <https://twitter.com/FreedomPrayers/lists/bahraindetainees>

92 Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain, available at <http://www.shura.bh/en/InformationCenter/Pages/Documents.aspx>.

93 Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain, available at <http://www.shura.bh/en/InformationCenter/Pages/Documents.aspx>.

interpretation and, in practice, the negation of the many rights they seek to uphold.⁹⁴ In addition, there is no law that defines clear penalties for violating the privacy of internet users, a concern for many bloggers who believe this allows for abuse.⁹⁵

Numerous regulations related to the internet proposed since 2011 signal a negative trend in the country's legal environment. Official announcements in 2012 signaled preparations to introduce tough new laws to combat the "misuse" of social media,⁹⁶ after information spread online about the identities of security officers involved in human rights violations.⁹⁷ In July 2013, a special national assembly of the House of Representatives recommended toughening penalties for social media users who "disseminate false information to foreign actors."⁹⁸ Fulfilling a commitment for a unified GCC system to combat cyber-crimes,⁹⁹ in September 2013 the cabinet green-lighted new legislation that would criminalize anyone who establishes a website, publishes information online, or uses any information technology tool to assist or aid communications with terror cells or to promote the disruption of public order or morale.¹⁰⁰ The Ministry of Interior is currently drafting the law.¹⁰¹ A proposed computer crimes law has been under review since 2005 and is currently going through final review by a Shura Council committee, before releasing it for votes at lower house of parliament.¹⁰²

Online censorship and criminal penalties for online speech are currently enforced under the 2002 Press and Publications Law,¹⁰³ which does not specifically mention online activities but was extended to mobile telephones in 2010.¹⁰⁴ The law allows for prison sentences of six months up to five years for repeat offenders, for publishing material that criticizes Islam, its followers, or the king, as well as content that instigates violent crimes or the overthrow of the government.¹⁰⁵ In addition, the 2002 Telecommunications Law contains penalties for several online practices such as the transmission of

94 "Bahrain," in *Media Sustainability Index 2008* (Washington, DC: IREX, 2009), http://irex.org/programs/MSI_MENA/2008/MSIMENA_bahrain.asp.

95 "Ali al-Moussawi, "On the occasion of the World Day to combat electronic surveillance," [in Arabic], Al Wasat, March 12, 2012, <http://www.alwasatnews.com/3474/news/read/642338/1.html>.

96 Matt J. Duffy, "Bahrain shouldn't pass new laws to regulate social media," Gulf News, June 26, 2012, <http://gulfnews.com/opinions/editorials/bahrain-shouldn-t-pass-new-laws-to-regulate-social-media-1.1040382>.

97 "Minister of Justice Uses Coercive Force against Preachers and Looms Further Procedures that Affect Freedom of Expression," Bahrain Center for Human Rights, October 17, 2012, <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/5476>.

98 "Recommendations of the Extraordinary Session of the National Assembly", Bahrain news Agency, July 28, 2013 <http://bna.bh/portal/en/news/573207>

99 A unified system to combat cyber-terrorism and enhance cyber-security in the GCC was approved by the GCC Supreme Council in its 33rd session in Bahrain in December 2012.

100 "HRH the Prime Minister Chairs the Weekly Cabinet Meeting", Bahrain News Agency, September 15, 2013 <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/579650>

101 "Cybercrime law amendment set", Gulf Daily News, September 16, 2013 <http://gulf-daily-news.com/NewsDetails.aspx?storyid=361137>

102 "Shura committee discusses computer-related crimes", Bahrain News Agency, January 12, 2014 <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/597268>

103 For cases where the authorities have used the 2002 press law to censor online websites, see "Website accused of violating press code, BCHR concerned that move is aimed at silencing critical voices," Bahrain Center for Human Rights, October 1, 2008, <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/2446> and "Closing a blow to freedom of opinion and expression," [Arabic] Al Wasat, April 25, 2010, <http://www.alwasatnews.com/2920/news/read/472942/1.html> and "Blocking users 'Twitter' caused by a violation of the Copyright Act," [in Arabic] Al Wasat, January 3, 2010, <http://www.alwasatnews.com/2676/news/read/358169/1.html>.

104 Habib Toumi, "Bahrain imposes blackout on BlackBerry news sharing," habibtoumi.com (blog), April 8, 2010, <http://www.habibtoumi.com/2010/04/08/bahrain-imposes-blackout-on-blackberry-news-sharing/>.

105 Press and Publications Law of 2002 of the Kingdom of Bahrain (No.47 of 2002). A copy can be found at: <http://www.legalaffairs.gov.bh/viewhtm.aspx?ID=L4702> or <http://www.iaa.bh/policiesPressrules.aspx>.

messages that are offensive to public policy or morals.¹⁰⁶ However, sentences can be longer if users are tried under the penal code or terrorism laws. For instance, under the penal code, any user who “deliberately disseminates a false statement” that may be damaging to national security or public order can be imprisoned for up to two years.¹⁰⁷ The government has used these vague clauses to question and prosecute several bloggers and online commentators.

After the March 2011 crackdown, the government conducted a mass arrest campaign of online activists and bloggers. Arrests and prosecutions continued throughout 2012 and 2013. Between May 2013 and April 2014, at least 23 online users were arrested, detained and prosecuted for their ICT activities.¹⁰⁸ Collectively, 360 months (30 years) of prison sentences were passed down to twelve Bahraini users in cases directly related to online posts between May 2013 and April 2014. As photos and videos of police brutality continue to emerge online, more measures are being taken against citizens who are seen holding cameras, including smartphones, in protest areas. Bloggers, moderators, and online activists are systematically detained and prosecuted by authorities for expressing views the government regards as controversial.

Many prosecutions during the coverage period involved Twitter. In March 2013, six Twitter users were arrested, in nighttime raids,¹⁰⁹ for using terms such as “dictator” or “fallen one” when referring to the king in anonymous posts.¹¹⁰ None of the users had a large base of followers. Instead, it seemed that the authorities selected them in order to instill fear locally, without provoking criticism from the international community. In May, five were sentenced to one year imprisonment under article 214 of the penal code, which relates to defaming the king and symbols of the kingdom.¹¹¹ One, Ammar Makki, said he was threatened with torture in order to force a confession.¹¹² On June 25, 2013, the sixth user, 17-year-old Ali al-Shofa, received the same sentence on the same charge.¹¹³ Al-Shofa said he had only retweeted others’ messages. He appealed the verdict, but was arrested on October 4, 2013; his sentence was upheld in December.¹¹⁴ Sentences passed in 2012 for the same

106 Telecommunications Law of the Kingdom of Bahrain, <http://www.tra.org.bh/en/legal-instruments/telecommunications-law/>

107 Bahrain Penal code, 1976, article 168, <http://bahrainrights.org/BCHR/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Bahrain-Penal-Code.doc>.

108 List of prosecuted online users: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/ccc?key=0ApabTTYHrcWDdGxXUXhya19DbnNLNmxaNDE2czVXN0E&usp=sharing> , accessed via bahrainrights.org.

109 “Prosecution: the imprisonment of 5 for a year for misuse of the right to freedom of expression against His Majesty the King through “Twitter” and acquittal of the sixth” [in Arabic], Alwasat News, May 15, 2013 <http://www.alwasatnews.com/3903/news/read/772574/1.html>

110 The detainees include 33-year-old Hassan Abdali Isa, 26-year-old Mohsen Abdali Isa, 36-year-old Ammar Makki Mohammed Al-Aali, 34-year-old Mahmood Abdul-Majeed Abdulla Al-Jamri, and 25-year-old Mahdi Ebrahim Al-Basri. See “Bahrain: The Authorities Celebrate the World Day against Cyber-censorship by Arresting 6 Twitter Users,” Bahrain Youth Society For Human Rights, March 12, 2013, <http://byshr.org/?p=1324>.

111 Bahrain Penal Code, Article 214 “A prison sentence shall be the penalty for any person who offends the emir of the country [the King], the national flag or emblem” <http://www.bahrainrights.org/sites/default/files/Bahrain-Penal-Code.doc>

112 “The IP Spy Files: How Bahrain’s Government Silences Anonymous Online Dissent”, Bahrain Watch, accessed March 31, 2014 <https://bahrainwatch.org/ipsy/viewreport.php#arrests>

113 “Bahrain: High School Student Sentenced to One Year Imprisonment for a Tweet”, Bahrain Center for Human Rights, June 28, 2013 <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/6198>

114 “Bahrain: Children in a maze of injustice”, Amnesty International, December 2013 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE11/057/2013/en/80b7e23b-1296-4620-b66c-a1ee5fec94d8/mde110572013en.pdf>

charge did not exceed six months.¹¹⁵ Worryingly, in April 2013, the parliament introduced legislation to increase penalties related to insulting the king to a maximum of five years.¹¹⁶

The six users ran their social media accounts anonymously. Their identities were discovered using malicious spy links which tracked the users' IP address when clicked and were sent from Twitter and Facebook accounts that impersonated well-known opposition figures or other friendly individuals.¹¹⁷ However, IP tracking is unreliable, as it targets the owner of an internet connection, rather than the operator of a specific social media account. In 2014, after the anonymous operator of the @karrannah14 Twitter account clicked a malicious link, authorities raided the home of Mahdi al-Basri. The operator told Bahrain Watch he had used al-Basri's connection. Al-Basri was not associated with the account, but served a one year prison sentence nonetheless.¹¹⁸

At end of July 2013, two weeks before the planned *tamarod* protests, the security forces carried out a campaign of arrests to intimidate online and offline activists. Blogger Mohamed Hasan (@safybh) had his house raided at 3am on July 31, 2013 by masked security agents. With no warrant, he was arrested, had his electronic devices confiscated, and was held incommunicado for over three days.¹¹⁹ During that period he was subjected to torture at the criminal investigation department in a bid to force his confession. He was reportedly "beaten with fists and a plastic hose, kicked, threatened with electric shocks, forced to strip naked and had his clothes taken away." The agents threatened to rape his sisters and prevented him from sitting down, sleeping or eating.¹²⁰ His lawyer, Abdul Aziz Moussa, was unable to see him until August 7, 2013, during interrogation by the public prosecutor. Moussa was detained that same day, shortly after he had tweeted of seeing signs of torture on Hasan's arms.¹²¹ He was released on bail and, as of May 2014, was awaiting trial on charge of publishing a "defendant's names without permission and the disclosing of investigation secrets."¹²²

Mohamed Hasan was released on bail on October 3, 2013. His charges include "calling for illegal gatherings, inciting hatred against the regime, inciting people to ignore the law, and misuse of social media."¹²³ This was the second time Mohamed was interrogated for his online activity; in 2012 he was interrogated for "writing for websites and newspapers without a license, protesting, and

115 "Bahrain: Twitter users sentenced to prison as authorities seek to extend their crack-down on social media websites," Bahrain Center for Human Rights, November 8, 2012, <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/5507>.

116 "Bahrain must release Twitter users jailed for allegedly insulting the King," Amnesty International, May 16, 2013, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/news-item/bahrain-must-release-twitter-users-jailed-for-allegedly-insulting-the-king>.

117 "The IP Spy Files: How Bahrain's Government Silences Anonymous Online Dissent", Bahrain Watch, accessed March 31, 2014, <https://bahrainwatch.org/ipspy/viewreport.php>

118 "The IP Spy Files: How Bahrain's Government Silences Anonymous Online Dissent", Bahrain Watch, accessed March 31, 2014, <https://bahrainwatch.org/ipspy/viewreport.php#arrests>

119 "Bahrain: Arrest of Lawyer after Tweeting about Torture of Detained Blogger", Bahrain Center for Human Rights, August 9, 2013 <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6296>

120 "NGOs Submit Letter of Allegation Concerning The Detention Of Journalist Mohammed Hassan, Photographer Hussain Hubail And Cameraman Qassim Zain Aldeen", Bahrain Center for Human Rights, December 16, 2013 <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6657>

121 "Bahrain: Arrest of Lawyer after Tweeting about Torture of Detained Blogger", Bahrain Center for Human Rights, August 9, 2013 <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6296>

122 "Bahrain: Arrest of Lawyer after Tweeting about Torture of Detained Blogger", Bahrain Center for Human Rights, August 9, 2013 <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6296>

123 "NGOs Submit Letter of Allegation Concerning The Detention Of Journalist Mohammed Hassan, Photographer Hussain Hubail And Cameraman Qassim Zain Aldeen", Bahrain Center for Human Rights, December 16, 2013 <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6657>

tweeting,¹²⁴ although there is no law in Bahrain that requires a license for blogging. He suspended his blogging activity in April 2013. In February 2014, it was revealed that he has left Bahrain and sought political asylum in the UK.¹²⁵

On May 27, 2014, the public prosecutor announced an investigation into two individuals suspected of involvement with the Twitter account @mнарfezhom, a progovernment account with 97,000 followers, on charges of “instigating hatred against the regime, threatening public peace and security, insulting state institutions, disseminating confidential security reports, and defamation of several persons.” The prosecutor said that the two users were arrested from an office preparing videos to post online. The main operator of the account is a royal family member, Mohamed Salman Saqer al-Khalifa.¹²⁶ The account began by reporting on protestors and defaming opposition figures, but eventually evolved, attacking other progovernment groups of differing opinions. It consistently published important news before any official source, including the move to revoke 31 Bahrainis’ citizenship and the death of an Emirati citizen working with the Bahraini riot police.¹²⁷ Although many have lodged complaints with the public prosecution against the account, no action had been taking during the past three years. Things appear to have changed when @mнарfezhom posted that the Ministry of Interior had tried to hack the account, and threatened to publish a list of Twitter accounts operated by the ministry and the national security apparatus, as well as the names of ministry staff who participated in the 2011 online campaign against the protests.¹²⁸ The users were released the same day,¹²⁹ and the account disappeared from Twitter one day later.

One of Bahrain’s most prominent human rights defenders, Nabeel Rajab,¹³⁰ was released in May 2014 after completing a two-year sentence for “calling for illegal gatherings over social networks.” Rajab is the president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, a non-governmental organization that remains active despite a 2004 government order to close it.¹³¹ On December 2, 2013, the Court

124 See <https://twitter.com/safybh/status/210005542406598657> (@safybh)

125 “Detention of High Profile Bahraini Activists Upon Arrival in the UK Sets a Worrying Precedent”, Bahrain Watch, February 27, 2014 <https://bahrainwatch.org/blog/2014/02/27/detention-of-high-profile-bahraini-activists-upon-arrival-in-the-uk-sets-a-worrying-precedent/>

126 “Mohammed AlKhalifa, from an army officer to an arms dealer and eventually insulter of chaste women” [in Arabic], Alfateh news blog, October 26, 2012 <https://alfatehnews.wordpress.com/2012/10/26/%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B1/>

127 “Twitter user of the ruling family in front of the judiciary in Bahrain” [in Arabic], Raseef22, June 2014 <http://raseef22.com/News-Detail/1320/%D9%85%D8%BA%D8%B1%D9%91%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86>

128 “The release of the owner of “@mнарfezhom” account Mohammed bin Saqer Al Khalifa with travel ban” [in Arabic], Bahrain Mirror, May 27, 2014 <http://bahrainmirror.com/news/16249.html>

129 “«Prosecutor»: Accusation against «Mnrvzhm» publish topics incite regime and threaten security” [in Arabic], Alwasat news, May 28, 2014 <http://www.alwasatnews.com/4281/news/read/889613/1.html>

130 Nabeel Rajab was first arrested on May 5, 2012 and held for over three weeks for “insulting a statutory body” in relation to a criticism directed at the Ministry of Interior over Twitter. On June 9, 2012, he was arrested again after tweeting about the unpopularity of the Prime Minister (also a member of the royal family) in the city of Al-Muharraq, following the sheikh’s visit there. A group of citizens from the city promptly sued Rajab for libel in a show of obedience to the royal family. On June 28, 2012, he was convicted of charges related to his first arrest and ordered to pay a fine of BHD 300 (\$800). Shortly after he was released on bail, he was re-arrested on July 9, 2012 after a court sentenced him to three months imprisonment for the Al-Muharraq incident. The court of appeals later acquitted Rajab, although he had already served most of his sentence. However, he is currently serving a two-year sentence for “calling for illegal gatherings over social networks.”

131 “About BCHR,” Bahrain Center for Human Rights, <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/about>.

of Appeals rejected a request for his early release without providing any grounds. His lawyers had argued that, in accordance with Bahraini law, he should be free to leave for good conduct after completing three quarters of his sentence.¹³² The Court of Cassation took over a year to set a date to look into his appeal, which it rejected in March 2014. Rajab, who tweets under the name '@NabeelRajab,' was ranked the "most connected" Twitter user in Bahrain according to a survey, with over 150,000 followers at the time of his arrest in May 2012.¹³³ He continued to issue calls to protest over Twitter, even from prison.¹³⁴ By May 2014, Rajab's followers had reached 231,000 and the tweet that originally led to his arrest had been retweeted at least 2,333 times.¹³⁵

Bahraini photographers who are active in documenting protests online have also faced reprisals. Award-winning photographer Ahmed Humaidan, who published photos over Flickr and Instagram, was jailed on December 29, 2012.¹³⁶ He was placed in solitary confinement for a week and subjected to ill-treatment and psychological torture.¹³⁷ In March 2014, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison for allegedly participating in an attack on a police station in the district of Sitra,¹³⁸ though it is believed that his arrest is in fact due to him photographing protests.¹³⁹

Photographer Hussain Hubail and blogger Jassim al-Noaimi were arrested on July 31, 2013. Hubail was held incommunicado for over four days and was subject to torture at the criminal investigation department, where he was reportedly beaten with a plastic hose, kicked, deprived of sleep and food, and forced to listen while the blogger Mohamed Hasan, his friend, was tortured.¹⁴⁰ Hubail suffers from a heart condition and has been denied adequate medical care in detention.¹⁴¹ On April 28, 2014, Hubail and al-Noaimi each received a five-year prison sentence on charges of "inciting hatred against the regime through social media, and calling for illegal protests" after a trial that lasted around five months.

On December 4, 2013, a Bahraini court held a hearing over the case of a defendant who was

132 "The Observatory: Bahrain: The court's decision not to grant Nabeel Rajab an early release is flawed", The Observatory, December 4, 2013, <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/6635>

133 "How the Middle East Tweets: Bahrain's Most Connected," Wamda, December 3, 2012, <http://www.wamda.com/2012/12/how-the-middle-east-tweets-bahrain-s-most-connected-report>.

134 "Bitter protests in Bahrain," Movements.org, January 28, 2013, <http://www.movements.org/blog/entry/bitter-protests-in-bahrain/>.

135 "Khalifa: Leave the al-Muharraq alley ways, their shaikhs and their elderly, everyone knows that you have no popularity there; and if it was not for their need for money they would not have come out to welcome you - When will you bow out?" <https://twitter.com/nabeelrajab/status/208853736494350336>.

136 See: <http://instagram.com/ahmedhumaidan/>, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/86494560@N05>, and <http://500px.com/AhmedHumaidan>.

137 See <https://twitter.com/BHRS2001/status/287932501744304128>; "Fake bomb in the hands of photographer Humaidan in order to extract confessions" [in Arabic], Bahrain Mirror, January 12, 2013, <http://www.bahrainmirror.com/article.php?id=7363&cid=73>.

138 "Public Prosecution / Statement," Bahrain News Agency, January 5, 2013, <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/540555>.

139 "Bahrain arrests photographer who documented dissent," Committee to Project Journalists, January 9, 2013, <http://www.cpj.org/2013/01/bahrain-arrest-photographer-who-documented-dissent.php>.

140 "NGOs Submit Letter of Allegation Concerning The Detention Of Journalist Mohammed Hassan, Photographer Hussain Hubail And Cameraman Qassim Zain Aldeen", Bahrain Center for Human Rights, December 16, 2013 <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6657>

141 "Bahrain: Detained Photographer Hussein Hubail Brought To Court Amid Deliberate Neglect To His Health Condition", Bahrain Center for Human Rights, December 7, 2013 <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6638>

arrested for holding illegal gatherings and “insulting the king using photos over Instagram.” The public prosecution claimed that the defendant “confessed” the latter crime during interrogation.¹⁴²

Photographer Ahmed Al-Fardan, who uses photo-sharing platforms like Instagram and Demotix, was briefly arrested at a cafe on August 8, 2013, by plainclothes police. He was subsequently beaten and threatened with death unless he cooperated in providing photos of demonstrators.¹⁴³ In the early hours of December 26, 2013 he was again arrested without a warrant and disappeared for over a week. He was subject to torture that resulted in two broken ribs,¹⁴⁴ and interrogated without a lawyer present on charge of “intending to participate in illegal gatherings.”¹⁴⁵ On January 9, 2014 he was released, following pressure from international media watchdogs.¹⁴⁶ His trial began in May 2014.

Other users were prosecuted for text messages over mobile chatting applications like Whatsapp. On March 2014, a man was sentenced to one year in prison for insulting the prophet’s companion over a Whatsapp message, a form of sectarian hate speech against Sunni Muslims’ who honor these religious figures. He was reported to the police by the receiver of the message.¹⁴⁷ Online hate speech against religious figures dignified by Shia Muslims often takes place with impunity.¹⁴⁸ On a different case, the political opposition society al-Wefaq was ordered to pay a compensation of BHD 1,500 (US\$ 3,980) in March 2014 to a lawyer who claimed that he was “psychologically hurt” after receiving a text message from al-Wefaq calling him to join the protests at the pearl roundabout in February 2011.¹⁴⁹

One of the harshest sentence during the reporting period was passed on September 29, 2013, when a Bahraini court sentenced Abdali Khair to 10 years in prison under the terrorism law for forwarding a message on Whatsapp that contained a statement from the opposition youth movement, the February 14th Coalition.¹⁵⁰ He was put on trial along with a group of 50 people on charges related to their involvement in the Coalition, including terrorism, without having interrogated or even notified

142 “The court orders «prosecution» to offload the Instagram account of a defendant accused of «insulting the king»” [in Arabic], December 4, 2013 <http://www.alwasatnews.com/4106/news/read/834657/1.html>

143 “Use of arrest and torture in bid to stifle protests in Bahrain”, Reports Without Borders, August 13, 2013 <http://en.rsf.org/bahrain-use-of-arrest-and-torture-in-bid-13-08-2013.45045.html>

144 “Photographer Al-Fardan: I was tortured and beaten at «Criminal Investigation Department»” [in Arabic], AlWasat News, January 11, 2014 <http://www.alwasatnews.com/4144/news/read/846318/1.html>

145 “Bahrain: Photojournalist arrested and tortured: Ahmad Fardan”, Amnesty International, January 7, 2014 <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/002/2014/en>

146 “Bahrain arrests photographer Ahmed Al-Fardan”, Committee to Protect Journalists, December 27, 2013, <http://cpj.org/2013/12/bahrain-arrests-photographer-ahmed-al-fardan.php> and “Photographer freed but still facing prosecution”, Reporters Without Borders, January 10, 2014 <http://en.rsf.org/bahrain-well-known-photographer-held-for-02-01-2014.45689.html> and “Bahrain: Photojournalist arrested and tortured: Ahmad Fardan”, Amnesty International, January 7, 2014 <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/002/2014/en>

147 “Man sentenced to prison for insulting prophet’s companion over whatsapp”, March 5, 2014 <http://bahrainindex.tumblr.com/post/78659749504/man-sentenced-to-prison-for-insulting-prophets>

148 See: a snapshot of a tweet by pro-government account (@Mnarfezhom) referring to Imam Hussain grandson of Prophet Mohamed as “pig” [in Arabic] <https://twitter.com/BuHSN/status/158147589609504768>

149 “Court ordered “Alwefaq” to pay compensation to a lawyer who have received a phone message calling for participation in «the roundabout»”, AlWasat News, March 31, 2014 <http://www.alwasatnews.com/4223/news/read/871407/1.html>

150 “Abdali Khair” receives 10 years prison sentence for forwarding a statement on the Whatsapp” [in Arabic], AlWefaq, October 2, 2013, <http://alwefaq.net/cms/2013/10/02/23233/>

Khair of the charges.¹⁵¹ According to local and international human rights observers, the trial fell far short of international standards.¹⁵²

Bloggers also faced prosecution. In April 2014, blogger Ali Miaraj was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for insulting the king and an additional six months for misusing telecommunication tools.¹⁵³ He was detained in January 2014 for writing and posting articles on the antigovernment website luluawal.no-ip.org, which has been blocked since its launch in 2012. The trial took only three hearings and no defense witnesses were allowed to testify.

The two harshest sentences ever passed on Bahraini bloggers remain in place, after the Higher Court of Cassation upheld a 2011 ruling by a military court in January 2013. Two bloggers, Abduljalil al-Singace and Ali Abdulemam, were charged with possessing links to a terrorist organization aiming to overthrow the government,¹⁵⁴ disseminating false news, and inciting protests against the government. Al-Singace, a prominent human rights defender and blogger, has been serving a life sentence since March 2011,¹⁵⁵ and his blog has been blocked since 2009.¹⁵⁶ Abdulemam, the owner of Bahrain's popular blocked online forum, Bahrain Online, received a 15-year sentence in absentia and is currently a political refugee in the UK. He had previously spent two years in hiding in Bahrain.¹⁵⁷ Both have been subject to torture.¹⁵⁸

In other cases, the government has used extra-legal methods to punish users for their online posts. On August 10, 2013, Bahrain deported Erin Kilbride, a U.S. citizen working as a teacher, because of her online activity. Two days earlier, an article written by Kilbride under a penname had been published on Voice of America.¹⁵⁹ The Bahraini authorities claimed that Kilbride's multiple posts "incite[d] hatred against the government and members of the Royal family" and that she was spreading misinformation and encouraging divisions in Bahraini society based on religious sect."¹⁶⁰

The Bahraini authorities are remarkably responsive when enforcing the country's tight online restrictions. At around 3am on June 20, 2013, Twitter user Jafar Al-Demstani (@alidemstani) was subject to arbitrary arrest during a house raid performed by armed and masked security forces in

151 Abdali Khair went to the hearing on July 25, 2013 only after seeing his name published in a wanted list by the Ministry of Interior. He was quickly arrested.

152 "Bahrain Court Sentences 50 Defendants, Including Human Rights Defenders, Under Terrorism Law, and Reduces Sentence For Two Police Officers Convicted of Torturing Detainee to Death", September 29, 2013, <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6418>

153 "Blogger gets jail time for misusing information technology", Reports without borders, April 11, 2014 <http://en.rsf.org/bahrain-blogger-gets-jail-time-for-11-04-2014.46132.html>

154 "Detained blogger Abduljalil Al-Singace on hunger strike," Reporters Without Borders, September 6, 2011, <http://en.rsf.org/bahrain-one-blogger-sentenced-to-life-22-06-2011.40507.html>.

155 "Detained blogger Abduljalil Al-Singace on hunger strike," Reporters Without Borders, September 6, 2011, <http://en.rsf.org/bahrain-one-blogger-sentenced-to-life-22-06-2011.40507.html>.

156 "Activist Abduljalil Alsingace's blog blocked by authorities", Bahrain Center for Human Rights, February 13, 2009 <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/2752>. Alsingace's blog is <http://alsingace.katib.org>.

157 Peter Beaumont, "Bahrain Online founder Ali Abdulemam breaks silence after escape to UK," The Guardian, May 10, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/may/10/bahrain-online-ali-abdulemam-escape>.

158 Ali Abdulemam describes the way he was tortured (minute 09:37), "People & Power – Bahrain: Fighting for change," Al Jazeera English, March 9, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZdyiK-Z5DQ>.

159 Erin Kilbride, "VOICES: Bahrain's Lost Boys", August 8, 2013, <http://middleeastvoices.voanews.com/2013/08/voices-bahrains-lost-boys-86865/>

160 "Teacher With Links to Extremists Deported for Social Media Activities and Violation of Labor Laws", Bahrain news Agency, August 10, 2013 http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/574672#_UgaitCLnRbQtwitter

plain clothes. Twelve hours earlier, he had tweeted that his imprisoned father suffers from a back injury due to the torture he received at the hands of Colonel Mubarak ben Huwail,¹⁶¹ an officer known for being protected by the prime minister.¹⁶² Al-Demstani was kept in detention until July 15, 2013, initially without anyone's knowledge, and was released without charge.¹⁶³

Since 2011, students and employees have received disciplinary action for comments they have communicated via private text messages and social media.¹⁶⁴ On November 23, 2013, a court fined a user BHD 100 (US\$ 265) for "insulting his work manager" over Twitter. He had posted anonymous tweets accusing his manager of corruption and calling him a thief. The manager filed a complaint with the police who traced his IP address.¹⁶⁵

Given that the authorities have been quick to identify social media users who operate under a pseudonym, many users are concerned about restrictions on using ICT tools anonymously. The TRA requires users to obtain licenses to use Wi-Fi and WiMax connections, and the government prohibits the sale or use of unregistered prepaid mobile phones.¹⁶⁶ Cybercafes are also subject to increasing surveillance. Oversight of their operations is coordinated by a commission consisting of members from four ministries, who work to ensure strict compliance with rules that prohibit access for minors and require that all computer terminals are fully visible to observers.¹⁶⁷ In May 2014, the government announced that it is considering new restrictions on cybercafes, including the enforcement of surveillance cameras as well as storage of user's personal identification and activity.¹⁶⁸

Since March 2009, the TRA has mandated that all telecommunications companies must keep a record of customers' phone calls, emails, and website visits for up to three years. The companies are also obliged to provide the security services access to subscriber data upon request.¹⁶⁹ After the application of the National Safety Status emergency law in March 2011, security personnel began searching mobile phones at checkpoints, behavior that was documented on YouTube.¹⁷⁰ On December 19, 2013, Mohamed Mushaima was interrogated over "banned pictures and videos of the revolution" that were found on his mobile phone. He was released but was informed his case would be taken to the public prosecutor.¹⁷¹ According to Facebook's Transparency Report, the Bahraini

161 "Bahrain: Twitter User Kidnapped by Secret Police 12 Hours After Posting Tweets on Torture", Bahrain Center for Human Rights, June 23, 2013 <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6188>.

162 "Bahrain: Prime Minister to Officer Acquitted on Torture Charges: "Thank you for your work"", Bahrain Center for Human Rights, July 10, 2013, <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6219>

163 "Bahrain: Twitter User Kidnapped by Secret Police 12 Hours After Posting Tweets on Torture", Bahrain Center for Human Rights, June 23, 2013 <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6188>

164 "The IP Spy Files: How Bahrain's Government Silences Anonymous Online Dissent", Bahrain Watch, Case 8 is the latest incident in April 2013 <https://bahrainwatch.org/ipspy/viewreport.php#case8>

165 "100 Bahraini dinars fine for an employee for insulting his manager on Twitter" [in Arabic], Manama Voice, November 23, 2013 http://manamavoice.com/news-news_read-16399-0.html

166 Geoffrey Bew, "Technology Bill Rapped," Gulf Daily News, July 20, 2006, <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/NewsDetails.aspx?storyid=149891>.

167 Reporters Without Borders, "Countries Under Surveillance: Bahrain.," <http://en.rsf.org/surveillance-bahrain.39748.html>

168 "The government plans to install cameras in Internet cafes and record identity «for security reasons»" [in Arabic], May 24, 2014 <http://bahrainmirror.com/news/16145.html>

169 "'Big Brother' Move Rapped," Geoffrey Bew, *Gulf Daily News*, March 25, 2009, <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/NewsDetails.aspx?storyid=246587>.

170 See video: <http://bahrainindex.tumblr.com/post/39738010314/policeman-checking-the-private-mobile-content-of-a>.

171 "Mushaima family: prosecuting our son Mohammed aims to blackout news spread of denial of visits and treatment of our father" [In Arabic], Manama Voice, December 19, 2013 http://manamavoice.com/news-news_read-16996-0.html

government requested data about one user account in the last six months of 2013, but no data was produced.¹⁷²

In November 2013, a new Cyber Safety Directorate at the Ministry of State for Telecommunications Affairs was launched to monitor websites and social media networks, in order to “ensure they are not used to instigate violence or terrorism and disseminate lies and fallacies that pose a threat to the kingdom’s security and stability.”¹⁷³ The monitoring of Instagram resulted in the arrest of four users accused of running an account that defamed religion in February 2014. They were charged with misusing telecommunication and defaming Prophet Mohammed’s comrades through “the use of abusive images of the caliphs of Islam and by posting immoral photos.”¹⁷⁴ The IAA also created a unit to monitor social media and foreign news websites to “respond to false information that some channels broadcast” in 2011, when it was run by the telecommunications ministry.¹⁷⁵

Although Bahraini cyberspace is highly monitored, less action is taken against the dozens of progovernment users who make threats online against activists, and even the U.S. ambassador to Bahrain.¹⁷⁶ Some identify protestors and circulate lists of “traitors” on social media.¹⁷⁷ No action has taken against them by the public prosecution, though their targets have accused them of defamation.¹⁷⁸ It is common for users tied to the opposition movement to receive this type of harassment in a bid to disrupt their activities. Activist Said Yousif al-Muhafdhah chose exile after receiving death threats over Twitter.¹⁷⁹

In July 2012, researchers discovered malicious software concealed in seemingly innocent emails sent to Bahraini activists in April and May. The surveillance software, FinFisher, is developed by the Munich-based Gamma International and distributed by its U.K. affiliate, Gamma Group. One aspect of the software, FinSpy, can remotely take control of a computer, taking screen shots, intercepting VoIP calls, and transmitting a record of every keystroke.¹⁸⁰ The company denied selling to the Bahraini government, saying that the version of FinSpy deployed on activists was “old” and for

172 “Government Requests Report”, Facebook, <https://govtrequests.facebook.com/country/Bahrain/2013-H2/>

173 “Shaikh Fawaz praises Cyber Safety Directorate”, Bahrain News Agency, November 18, 2013 <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/588716>

174 “Cyber crime police arrest 4 for defaming Prophet Mohammed’s comrades”, Ministry of Interior, February 27, 2014, http://www.policemc.gov.bh/en/news_details.aspx?type=1&articleId=21945

175 Andy Sambridge, “Bahrain sets up new units to monitor media output,” Arabian Business, May 18, 2011, <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/bahrain-sets-up-new-units-monitor-media-output-400867.html?parentID=401071>.

176 “Former Bahraini colonel threatens the U.S. ambassador to apply «religious duty» on him” [In Arabic], Bahrain Mirror, October 3, 2013 http://bahrainmirror.com/news/11449.html?utm_medium=twitter&utm_medium=twitter

177 See https://twitter.com/Jalad_Almajoos/status/292638655217020929. For a well-documented account of the defamation of opposition activists, please refer to Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni et al., “Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry,” Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), November 23, 2011, paragraph 1597, <http://files.bici.org.bh/BICireportEN.pdf>.

178 “Majeed al-Alawi accuses prosecutors with holding off complaints raised against bloggers and journalists in two newspapers”, [In Arabic], Manama Voice, December 16, 2013 http://manamavoice.com/news-news_read-16957-0.html and “Leaders of the «AlFateh coalition» complain to the «secretariat grievances» on the failure of prosecution in disclosing identities of users of fake twitter accounts” [in Arabic], AlWasat News, January 2, 2014 <http://www.alwasatnews.com/4135/news/read/843567/1.html>

179 Video: “Bahraini activist Said Yousif al-Muhafdhah: “I have chosen exile after death threats” [in Arabic] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LwLUPn8niPw> at (01:37)

180 Vernon Silver, “Cyber Attacks on Activists Traced to FinFisher Spyware of Gamma,” Bloomberg, July 25, 2012, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-07-25/cyber-attacks-on-activists-traced-to-finfisher-spyware-of-gamma.html> and “From Bahrain With Love: FinFisher’s Spy Kit Exposed,” CitizenLab, July 25, 2012, <http://citizenlab.org/2012/07/from-bahrain-with-love-finfishers-spy-kit-exposed/>.

demonstration purposes only. However, research published in 2013 shows that a newer version of the FinSpy software is also in use in Bahrain, suggesting the government is receiving paid updates from the company.¹⁸¹ Evidence has also been documented about the use of spy gear maintained by Nokia Siemens Networks and its divested unit Trovicor, to monitor and record phone calls and text messages.¹⁸² In July 2013, links to a website apparently soliciting signatures in support of the rebellion were distributed over social media. In reality, the website was collecting identification user data, including IP addresses.¹⁸³

Cyberattacks against both opposition and progovernment pages, as well as other websites, are common in Bahrain. For example, in July 2013, multiple Twitter accounts affiliated with the opposition were hacked.¹⁸⁴ According to official statistics, there were 208 daily cyberattacks during January 2014 on government websites in attempt to take over the sites or manipulate content. Additionally, at least 40 sources of malicious email were identified inside Bahrain by McAfee.¹⁸⁵ Government-associated websites are frequently targeted with distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks, with the most recent instance occurring on August 14, 2013 the day of planned rebellion protest in Bahrain.¹⁸⁶ The main perpetrator of such attacks has been the group "Anonymous," which launched "Operation Bahrain" through a press release published on February 17, 2011.¹⁸⁷

181 "You Only Click Twice: FinFisher's Global Proliferation," CitizenLab, May 13, 2013, <https://citizenlab.org/2013/03/you-only-click-twice-finfishers-global-proliferation-2/>.

182 Vernon Silver and Ben Elgin, "Torture in Bahrain Becomes Routine With Help From Nokia Siemens," Bloomberg, August 22, 2011, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-08-22/torture-in-bahrain-becomes-routine-with-help-from-nokia-siemens-networking.html>.

183 "Suspicious website collects data on supporters of "Tamarrod" protests in 14 Aug", Bahrain Index, August 2013, <http://bahrainindex.tumblr.com/post/55893422412/suspicious-website-collect-data-on-supporters-of>

184 "Bahrain: Increasing hacking activities on twitter", Bahrain Index, July 2013 <http://bahrainindex.tumblr.com/post/56711413017/bahrain-increasing-hacking-activities-on-twitter>

185 "208 Attacks per day on electronic devices of the Bahraini government in 2014" [in Arabic], Alwasat News, January 31, 2014, <http://www.alwasatnews.com/4164/news/read/852511/1.html>

186 "Anonymous #OpBahrain starts, will attack various websites of the regime", Hackers News Bulletin, August 14, 2013 <http://hackersnewsbulletin.com/2013/08/anonymous-opbahrain-starts-will-attack-various-websites-of-the-regime.html>

187 "Anonymous hits Bahrain after arrest of human rights activist Nabeel Rajab," Examiner, May 5, 2012, <http://www.examiner.com/article/anonymous-hits-bahrain-after-arrest-of-human-rights-activist-nabeel-rajab>.