Libya

	2014	2015
Internet Freedom Status	Partly Free	Partly Free
Obstacles to Access (0-25)	18	20
Limits on Content (0-35)	9	12
Violations of User Rights (0-40)	21	22
TOTAL* (0-100)	**48**	**54**

* 0=most free, 100=least free

Population:	6.5 million
Internet Penetration 2014:	18 percent
Social Media/ICT Apps Blocked:	No
Political/Social Content Blocked:	Yes
Bloggers/ICT Users Arrested:	No
Press Freedom 2015 Status:	Not Free

Key Developments: June 2014 – May 2015

- Amid political chaos and heightened insecurity, prices for internet connections and SIM cards have increased dramatically (see **Availability and Ease of Access**).

- Telecommunications services have been regularly disrupted, particularly in the eastern region of the country, since the beginning of fighting between rival militias. Benghazi was cut off from all telecommunications networks for almost two months (see **Restrictions on Connectivity**).

- Marking one of the first instances of political censorship since the revolution, news website *al-Wasat* was blocked in February as a result of its frequent anti-government views (see **Blocking and Filtering**).

- The country's polarized political scene has created an atmosphere of verbal harassment and threats, resulting in self-censorship, particularly among social media users (see **Media, Diversity, and Content Manipulation**).

- Rule of law has eroded over the past year, resulting in an absence of legal protections for online users and widespread impunity for militias and vigilante groups (see **Legal Environment**).

- Threats and attacks on activists and journalists increased, with some brutally murdered or kidnapped and others forced to flee Libya. At least six bloggers and activists were assassinated during the coverage period (see **Intimidation and Violence**).

Introduction

The situation in Libya was tenuous over the coverage period, with an ongoing political crisis and fighting between armed militias. A constitutional crisis has been in the making since November 2013, when the General National Congress (GNC), elected in July 2012, unilaterally extended its term until December 2014.[1] Elections were held in February 2014 for a Constitutional Assembly to draft a new constitution, and again in June 2014 to select candidates for Libya's House of Representatives (HOR), which was set to replace the outgoing GNC.[2] However, after the elections, an Islamist-dominated faction of parliamentarians from the GNC boycotted the new HOR and instead launched a challenge with the Supreme Court for the HOR's dissolution. Violence had been steadily increasing in the country after retired general Khalifa Haftar, who later aligned with the HOR, announced an armed campaign known as an "Operation Dignity" to rid the country of Islamist militias. Militias in Tripoli, tied to the GNC, reacted by launching their own offensive operation entitled "Libya Dawn," which resulted in the destruction of vital infrastructure in Tripoli. A constitutional crisis ensued, in which the internationally recognized HOR met in Tobruk—due to continued fighting in Benghazi, its regular seat—and the GNC continued its activities in Tripoli, where most state institutions are located. The Libyan Supreme Court, based in Tripoli, deemed the HOR illegitimate in November 2014. Since then, the two sides have been in talks sponsored by the United Nations to formulate a national unity government.[3]

The national crisis has had a devastating effect on internet freedom in the country. Prices for internet connections and SIM cards have soared due to limited availability and difficulties transporting goods within the country. Telecommunications services have been regularly disrupted due to attacks on power stations and the destruction of infrastructure; the telecommunications network was cut in Benghazi for almost two months and the telecom provider Almadar's mobile network has been offline in the eastern part of Libya since October 2014. Marking the most significant instance of online censorship since the revolution, the news site *al-Wasat* was blocked in February 2014 in response to its articles against the GNC and GNC-affiliated militias. The overall lack of rule of law has contributed to an environment in which militias have violated basic human rights with impunity. At least six bloggers and activists—Tawfik Ben Saud, Sami Elkawafi, Mohamed Bettou, Mohamed el Messmari, Siraj Ghatess, and Intisar al-Hasiri were murdered during the coverage period, mainly by Islamist militias and extremists. The polarized, fraught environment has led many activists and social media users to self-censor.

Historically, access to the internet was limited to the elite. Thousands of cybercafes sprang up after 2000, however, eventually offering cheap internet to both urban and rural users.[4] Over the following decade, the state telecom operator reduced prices, invested in a fiber-optic network backbone, and expanded ADSL, WiMax, and other wireless technologies throughout the country.[5] In its initial stages, there were few instances of online censorship in Libya.[6] However, it was not long until the regime of

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1   Middle East Institute, "Libya congress extends its mandate until end-2014," 2013, http://bit.ly/1NUcUdW.

2   See Alaa Bayoumi and Alia Chughtai, "Infographic: Explaining Libya's Election," *Al Jazeera*, June 24, 2014, http://bit.ly/TwWhea.

3   "Libya profile – Timeline," *BBC*, June 16, 2015, http://bbc.in/1jTJ1xc. For a full overview of events in Libya, see Freedom House, "Libya," *Freedom in the World 2015,* January 2015, http://bit.ly/1OSvNg4.

4   The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, "Libya: The Internet in a conflict zone," 2004, http://bit.ly/1GpLE4l.

5   Henry Lancaster, *Libya – Telecoms, Mobile and Broadband*, Budde Comm,July 10, 2015, accessed August 21, 2013, http://bit.ly/1Owy3Lq.

6   Doug Saunders, "Arab social capital is there – it's young and connected," *The Globe and Mail*, March 5, 2011, http://bit.ly/1GdIIro.

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Muammar Qadhafi began to target opposition news websites, particularly after the lifting of United Nations sanctions in 2003 led to increased access to surveillance and filtering equipment.[7] Since the overthrow and death of Qadhafi in 2011, the country has witnessed a flurry of self-expression, resulting in an increase in news sites and massive growth in Facebook use.[8] However, the 2011 civil war and subsequent fighting has taken a heavy toll on the country's information and communications technology (ICT) sector, damaging infrastructure and sidelining an earlier US$10 billion development plan that had been set to be complete by 2020.[9] Laws that once prohibited criticism of the revolution that brought Qadhafi to power have been changed to outlaw criticism of the 2011 revolution that removed him. In short, significant obstacles to access remain in the country and numerous violations against user rights were witnessed over the coverage period.

Obstacles to Access

Internet access has been badly affected by the ongoing conflict. Electricity outages and physical damage to infrastructure have limited connectivity. Despite that, there has been an increase in the number of internet users, particularly among youth. Quality of service remains poor and the ICT sector remains monopolized by state-owned entities.

Availability and Ease of Access

Internet penetration has traditionally been very low in Libya. According to figures from the International Telecommunication Union, internet penetration was at 17.8 percent at the end of 2014, up from 10.8 percent five years earlier.[10] Some 350 telecommunications towers in 19 different locations provide WiMax and other internet services. WiMax subscribers make up the majority of total subscriptions in the country according to the latest data published by the government, with some 448,135 subscribers compared to 149,963 subscribers for ADSL and 76,885 for LibyaPhone.[11] Broadband was introduced in 2007, although the number of fixed broadband subscriptions was relatively low at just over 1 subscription per every 100 inhabitants in 2013, the last year in which data was available.[12] Since July 2014, WiMax service has been unstable in many parts of the country, especially in Benghazi and other cities in the east, due to the destruction of WiMax towers during fighting.[13]

Mobile phone use is ubiquitous, with over 10 million mobile subscriptions in Libya, representing a penetration rate of 161 percent.[14] Prices have dropped precipitously since the introduction of a second mobile provider in 2003, resulting in greater affordability and opening the market to competition, although both operators are owned by the state-owned Libyan Post Telecommunications and Information Technology Company (LPTIC). By 2013, the price of a prepaid SIM card from the main provider, Libyana, was LYD 5 (US$ 4), compared to LYD 1,200 (US$889) in 2003. Smartphones and

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7   OpenNet Initiative, "Libya," August 6, 2009, http://opennet.net/research/profiles/libya.

8   Intelligent Positioning. "Libya is World's fastest growing country on Facebook,"November 21, 2011, accessed May 13, 2015, http://bit.ly/1lCyJuP.

9   Lancaster, *Libya – Telecoms, Mobile and Broadband.*

10   International Telecommunication Union, "Percentage of Individuals Using the Internet," 2000-2014, http://bit.ly/1cblxxY.

11   Data about internet users in Libya on: LPTIC, Facebook page, accessed May 10, 2015, http://on.fb.me/1LnX6MM.

12   International Telecommunications Union, "Fixed (wired-) broadband subscriptions," 2013, accessed August 19, 2014, http://bit.ly/1cblxxY.

13   "The disruptions of the Internet services in Libya," [in Arabic] *Alwasat News,* accessed May 13, 2015, http://bit.ly/1PGIJGq.

14   International Telecommunications Union, "Mobile-cellular subscriptions," 2011, http://bit.ly/1cblxxY.

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3G connectivity have been available since 2006, though the prohibitive cost of compatible handsets impedes their wider dissemination.[15] The service from Almadar, another mobile company, has been unreliable in the eastern part of the country since the 2011 revolution, and since October 2014, has been permanently down. In turn, prices for a Libyana SIM rose to LYD 25 (US$ 18) due to vandal attacks on Libyana offices throughout the country and a limited number of Libyana offices in Benghazi, resulting in limited access to SIM cards in the city.

Similarly, the cost of a home internet connection remains beyond the reach of a large proportion of Libyans, particularly those living outside major urban areas. A dial-up internet subscription cost LYD 10 (US$8) per month, an ADSL subscription was LYD 20 (US$ 16) for a 20 GB data plan, and WiMax service was LYD 40 (US$ 31) for a 15 GB data plan, after initial connection fees. By comparison, gross national income per capita was US$ 1,078 per month, pushed up by relatively high salaries in oil and gas firms.[16] Libya Telecom and Technology (LTT) has decreased WiMax connection fees for individual users from LYD 160 (US$ 124) to LYD 120 (US$ 93) and from LYD 260 (US$ 202) to LYD 220 (US$ 171) for households.[17] WiMax modems are in short supply, resulting in high prices for second-hand devices sold on the site Open Souk, Libya's online marketplace.[18]

Many foreign and Libyan organizations and individuals in need of reliable internet service have been driven towards two-way satellite internet technology. As two-way technology has become more popular, connection fees and equipment costs have lowered. Prices were recently at LYD 800 (US$ 630) for the hardware, while a monthly subscription costs LYD 255 (US$ 210) for a fast connection, depending on the number of users.[19]

Most people access the internet from computers in their homes and workplaces, with mobile phones being the next most common point of access. The cybercafe industry was decimated in many parts of Libya; instead, cafes and restaurants partner with local internet businesses to offer Wi-Fi hotspots with different data plans. The adult literacy rate was last recorded at 90 percent and a wide range of websites and computer software is available in Arabic.[20] However, limited computer literacy, particularly among women, has been an obstacle to universal access.

The Libyan civil war significantly disrupted the country's telecommunications sector, with the damage estimated at over $1 billion.[21] There have been few improvements to ICT equipment since the Qadhafi era, prompting frustrated Libyans to create the Facebook page titled, "I hate Libyan Telecom and Technology," which attracted over 23,000 followers.[22] Upgrades have been proposed in an effort to respond to demands for increased capacity, such as the laying of the European Indian Gateway and Silphium submarine cables,[23] the construction of additional WiMax towers,[24] the creation of

15   "Libyana Introduces 3G Services for First Time in Libya," *The Tripoli Post*, September 26, 2006, http://bit.ly/1GHB7ME.
16   The World Bank, "World Development Indicators," in "Libya," accessed August 21, 2013, http://data.worldbank.org/country/libya#cp_wdi.
17   Libya Telecom & Technology, "Now, Libya Max service from Libya Telecom and Technology worth 120 dinars for personal rather than 160," [in Arabic] accessed July 23, 2013, http://www.ltt.ly/news/d.php?i=188.
18   See Open Sooq, http://ly.opensooq.com/; or Opensooq, Facebook Company Page, http://on.fb.me/1PtWjgm.
19   See Giga, http://www.giga.ly/; or Giga, Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/Giga.ltd.
20   The World Bank, "Literacy rate, adult total (% of people ages 15 and above)," accessed August 21, 2014, http://bit.ly/1X4HzqA.
21   Lancaster, *Libya – Telecoms, Mobile and Broadband.*
22   See I hate Libya Telecom and Technology (LTT), Facebook Business Page, https://www.facebook.com/ihateltt.
23   "The Activation of The New Upgraded Submarine Cable System between Libya and Italy," *The Tripoli Post*, December 25, 2011, http://bit.ly/1jACXK6.
24   "ZTE suggest Libya will boast nationwide WiMax network by Aug-13," *TeleGeography*, January 24, 2013, http://bit.ly/1G6o1hd.

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Wi-Fi hotspots, the installation of a long distance fiber-optic cable within the country,[25] and the development of next-generation broadband.[26] Although there have been many announcements of partnerships between Libyan telecommunication companies and foreign companies, such as Alcatel Lucent[27] and Samsung,[28] the status of these contracts are unknown, reflecting the lack of transparency in the Libyan ICT sector.

According to Akamai, Libya has the world's slowest internet speeds at 0.5 Mbps.[29] ICT experts say this is due to poor infrastructure, a lack of quality of service (QoS), technology constraints, and a continued lack of regulations. Furthermore, broadband is not widely available, bandwidth limitations exist for fixed-line connections, wireless users face slower speeds due to heavy congestion during peak hours, and there is a general lack of resources and personnel to perform maintenance and repairs.

Restrictions on Connectivity

Since February 2011, Libya has seen repeated shutdowns to internet service due to vandalism and technical disruptions. Violent clashes in Benghazi caused the telecommunications network in the area to stop working for almost two months during the coverage period.[30] The Almadar mobile network has not been working in the eastern part of Libya since October 2014.[31] Although phone services have been restored in some areas,[32] power and telecommunication services remain unstable with frequent cuts.[33] Internet users in Tripoli also noticed slow speeds on Wimax and ADSL services in April 2015, a month which also saw disruptions in access. Some users stated on Twitter[34] that the LTT had deliberately cut off access to restrict the spread of information surrounding events in Tripoli,[35] while the LTT stated that the blackout was due to an organized attack.[36] WiMax service was cut for two months in the city of Sirte because of fighting.[37] The LTT has not compensated those affected by the long service disruptions, creating a sense of dissatisfaction among LTT users in the affected cities.

25   "Italian Company to Install Fiber-Optic Network," *Libya Business News*, September 29, 2012, http://bit.ly/RbnhMm.

26   Tom Westcott, "Improving Libya's Internet Access," *Business Eye*, *Libya Herald,* February 2013, 18, http://bit.ly/1LOQhHm.

27   Callum Paton, "Alcatel Lucent to install high-speed internet link between Benghazi and Tripoli," *Libya Herald*, January 28, 2014, http://bit.ly/1MBHnMc.

28   Jamel Adel, "Internet services to get a boost with Al-Madar/Samsung agreement," *Libya Herald*, April, 16, 2015, http://bit.ly/1LbiB3o.

29   Douglas A. McIntyre, "Libya Leads the World in Slowest Internet Connection Speeds," *Yahoo Finance*, June 30, 2014, http://yhoo.it/1A08MMR.

30   "Telecommunication services in Benghazi," [in Arabic] *Press Solidarity*, January, 17, 2015, http://goo.gl/oCsV3I.

31   See "The status of Almadar mobile services in Benghazi," [in Arabic] *Alwasat News*, November, 11, 2014, http://bit.ly/1LEWsZg.

32   "Phone services restored after shutdown," *Libya Monitor*, May 6, 2015, http://bit.ly/1OCO5lc; LPTIC, Facebook Post, June 16, 2015, "announcement of Almadar's service restoration in Benghazi," [in Arabic] https://goo.gl/xvXjHA.

33   Jamel Adel, "Mobile internet services briefly cut across eastern and southern Libya," *Libya Herald*, May 5, 2015, http://bit.ly/1VT4kv1.

34   Tweets from Libyans reported blockage of Facebook: Ali Tweel, Twitter Post, April 18, 2015, 6:41 PM, http://bit.ly/1NdsLBn; James Wheeler, Twitter Post, April 18, 2015, 11:28 AM, http://bit.ly/1k5FLiI; Osama Libyano, Twitter Post, April 18, 2015, 4:40 PM, http://bit.ly/1MrcUw3; Rawad, Twitter Post, April 18, 2015, 5:20 PM, http://bit.ly/1PtZapx.

35   "Why Facebook blocked in Libya," [in Arabic] *Alhadath News*, April 18, 2015, accessed July 12, 2015, http://goo.gl/tvFHxs.

36   "LTT claims internet was halted due to attack by 13 international pirates," *Libya Herald*, April 28, 2015, http://bit.ly/1PtZgNY.

37   Jason Pack and Haley Cook, "The July 2012 Libyan Election and the Origin of Post-Qadhafi Appeasement," *The Middle East Journal* 69, no. 2, (Spring 2015): 171-198, http://bit.ly/1LOV1Nl.

ICT Market

The state-run Libyan Post Telecommunications and Information Technology Company (LIPTC), for-merly the General Post and Telecommunications Company (GPTC), is the main telecommunications operator and is fully owned by the government. In 1999, the GPTC awarded the first internet service provider (ISP) license to Libya Telecom and Technology (LTT), a subsidiary of the state-owned firm. Since the fall of the regime, 25 ISPs have been licensed to compete with state-owned ISPs and 23 VSAT operators have also been established. Many are based in Tripoli and have strong ownership ties to the government.[38] LIPTC owns two mobile phone providers, Almadar and Libyana, while a third provider, Libya Phone, is owned by LTT.

There has been a noticeable increase in the number of companies and agencies working to provide alternative methods to connect to the internet, such as through satellites (VSAT). [39] On the other hand, there have been few developments within the mobile market. Although there were plans to put Almadar on the stock exchange and to issue the country's first tender for a private mobile li-cense, the country has yet to witness any significant liberalization in the sector.[40]

Regulatory Bodies

The post-conflict regulatory environment remains very unclear. There are disputes over the country's governance, which have led to conflicts. During the Qadhafi era, decisions on licensing were made by the government-controlled GPTC (now LPTIC).[41] After the revolution, the transitional government established the Ministry of Communications and Informatics to oversee the country's telecommu-nications sector. The ministry runs the sector through two main bodies: the General Authority of Telecommunications and Informatics (GATI), formerly the General Telecom Authority, and Libyan Post Telecommunications and Information Technology Company (LPTIC), formerly GPTC. GATI is respon-sible for policymaking and regulations, whereas LPTIC is a holding company for all telecommunica-tions service providers in the country. Libya's top-level domain, ".ly," falls under the responsibility of LTT. Registrations are handled by Register.ly[42] on behalf of NIC.ly.[43]

In 2014, the Ministry of Communications and Informatics appointed a committee to draft a new Tel-ecommunication Act, to set standards for the sector and replace the existing legislation surrounding ICT regulations. The act will include also create an independent Telecommunication Regulatory Au-thority (TRA).[44]

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38   United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, "The Status of Information for Development Activities in North Africa," (paper presented at the twentieth meeting of the Intergovernmental committee of experts, Tangier, Morocco, April 13-15, 2005) http://bit.ly/1X4OiAG; OpenNet Initiative, "Internet Filtering in Libya - 2006/2007," http://bit.ly/1LbkQDM; "Telecoms in Libya, "[in Arabic] Marefa, accessed August 30, 2012, http://bit.ly/1jAL3Cu.

39   Satellite Providers, "Internet Providers in Libya," accessed July 12, 2015, http://www.satproviders.com/en/list-of-all-services/LIBYA.

40   Reuters, "Mobile operators Libyana to be floated," *Libya Business News*, September 18, 2013, http://bit.ly/1VT5nuV.

41   Ministry of Justice, "the establishment of the GPTC," [in Arabic] accessed July, 9, 2015, http://bit.ly/1OSyXk3.

42   Register.ly, http://register.ly.

43   NIC, http://nic.ly/ar/index.php.

44   The Ministry of Communication and Informatics, *Libyan National Frequency Plan,* accessed July, 10, 2015, http://bit.ly/1Llbcwk.

Limits on Content

*Limits on content have been rare in Libya since the overthrow of the Qadhafi regime in 2011. The lift-
ing of restrictions has resulted in a diverse online media landscape and an improved market for online
advertising. Facebook, in particular, has become an important news source for many Libyans; many
government bodies post official statements directly to the social network. Nonetheless, the quality of
the content published on these platforms remains poor and highly polarized. Decades of oppressive
rule and the continued threat posed by militias has contributed to some degree of self-censorship
among users, particularly on sensitive subjects.*

Blocking and Filtering

After several years of openness, the first instance of politically motivated blocking since the Qad-
hafi era was seen this year with the blocking of *Alwasat*.[45] The news site, which has published views
against the GNC and Libya Dawn, was blocked on February 10, 2015 by the LTT, apparently due to
a legal order from a court in Tripoli. An announcement revealing the blocking order was not made
until April, when the LTT posted a statement to its Facebook page.[46] Human rights activists and so-
cial media users protested the decision using the hashtag "#No2FajrCensorship" on the occasion of
World Press Freedom Day on May 3, 2015.

YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and international blog-hosting services are freely available. Some por-
nographic websites have been blocked since the end of the civil war based on a decision made by an
ad hoc Temporary Steering Committee formed after the fall of Qadhafi and the liberation of Tripoli.[47]
Prior to the war, "indecency" was prohibited but sexually explicit sites were never blocked. The LTT
has not unblocked the content, perhaps due to the conservative outlook of some political factions
vying for influence in the future of Libya. A 2006 law mandates that websites registered under the
".ly" domain must not contain content that is "obscene, scandalous, indecent or contrary to Libyan
law or Islamic morality."[48]

In February 2014, LTT blocked an additional set of pornographic sites and mistakenly blocked the
Wordpress.com domain for a few days. It was unblocked following requests from Libyan bloggers.[49]
On April 18, 2015, Facebook was reportedly inaccessible for a few hours in some areas of Tripoli.
LPTIC denied responsibility for the interruption, instead releasing a statement reiterating its com-
mitment to free speech and insisting that the interruption had been caused by armed groups taking
control of the LTT.[50]

There is little transparency and no legal framework related to the blocking of websites in Libya, as

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45   See "Organizations and media figures and human rights condemns blocking" [in Arabic] *Alwasat News*, April 8, 2015,
accessed May 11, 2015, http://bit.ly/1G6sEbk.
46   See Explanation about blocking "Alwasat News" on LPTIC, Facebook Post, February 25, 2015, http://on.fb.me/1GdNeGm;
LPTIC's Statement regarding the blockage of Facebook in Tripoli, LPTIC, Facebook Post, [Arabic] February 22, 2015, https://goo.
gl/PWAlG2; In English, https://goo.gl/iFDX1g.
47   Libya Herald, "LTT blocks pornographic websites," *Libya Business News*, September 13, 2013, http://bit.ly/1k5Iwki
48   OpenNet Initiative, "Internet Filtering in Libya - 2006/2007," http://bit.ly/1LbkQDM ; "Regulations," Libya ccTLD, accessed
August 30, 2012, http://nic.ly/regulations.php.
49   Libyan Internet users reporting inaccessibility to their wordpress blogs; Nezar Abudayna, Twitter Post, February 10, 2014,
1:19PM, http://bit.ly/1X4QVT3; Abdulrazig Almansori, Facebook Post [in Arabic], February 10, 2014, https://goo.gl/gOwxdF.
50   See LPTIC's Statement regarding the blockage of facebook in Tripoli, LPTIC,Facebook Post, [Arabic] February 22, 2015,
https://goo.gl/PWAlG2; In English, https://goo.gl/iFDX1g.

regulations have yet to be formulated. Officially, all regulations from the Qadhafi era remain valid. When accessing a banned website, users are shown a message from the authorities noting that the site has been blocked. As most state institutions are based in Tripoli, the internationally recognized House of Representatives (HOR), which is based in Tobruk, does not seem to have access or control over the country's telecommunications services.

Content Removal

Authorities do not frequently request private providers or intermediaries to delete content. Rather, there are coordinated efforts to "report" Facebook pages for deletion, particularly for political views against militias. Separately, many Qadhafi-era government webpages containing information on laws and regulations from before the uprising are inaccessible, as is the online archive of the old state-run Libyan newspapers. Some of these websites may have become defunct after the officials running them were ousted or hosting fees were left unpaid, but others were likely taken down deliberately when the revolutionaries came to power.

Media, Diversity, and Content Manipulation

After a sudden opening of the online media landscape after the fall of Qadhafi, negative trends such as self-censorship, verbal harassment, and a lack of quality reporting now characterize Libya's online sphere. The 2011 revolution brought a notable increase in the number of bloggers writing within Libya, particularly on issued related to political activism, hope for the future, and government criticism. However, a sizable number of Libyan bloggers, online journalists, and ordinary citizens continue to practice some degree of self-censorship due to continued instability and increasing threats and violence against journalists over the past years.[51] Social taboos such as sexual abuse or conflicts between warring tribes and rival cities are off-limits. Online writers also shy away from expressing religious opinions for fear of being marked as an atheist or a Shiite sympathizer, both of which can be life-threatening. Many commentators avoid criticizing the 2011 revolution, General Haftar, the GNC, and Libya Dawn, mainly out of fear of retribution from armed groups and nonstate actors.

Despite the growth in self-censorship, the online media landscape remains much more diverse than in previous years, with few dominant news providers and several privately owned outlets. Many of Libya's online outlets have clear political agendas and lack quality journalism and professionalism, instead publishing incitement and propaganda. The low levels of reliability and credibility have made it difficult for many to find neutral and objective sources of news about Libya.[52]

The online advertising market has grown slowly and websites related to the Amazigh (whose language was banned under Qadhafi) and other minorities are now flourishing.[53] Interestingly, Facebook is often the platform of choice for city and even government officials to publish updates and official communication. From April 2012 to April 2013, the number of Facebook users in Libya doubled from some 400,000 to 860,000.[54] The social networking site was the most visited website in the country

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51   Reporters Without Borders, "2013 World Press Freedom Index: Dashed Hopes After Spring," accessed in March 2013, http://bit.ly/1bMr3Xz.
52   See Mohamed Eljarh, "The State of Journalism and Media in the New Libya," *Middle East Online*, January 12, 2012, http://bit.ly/1G6txQZ.
53   Tracey Shelton, "Libya's media has its own revolution," *Global Post*, March 18, 2012, http://bit.ly/1OwCwh3.
54   Socialbakers, "Libya Facebook Statistics," accessed April 10, 2012, http://bit.ly/1VT0zeq; and Ghazi Gheblawi, "Free speech in post-Gaddafi Libya," Index on Censorship, April 22, 2013, http://bit.ly/1VT0Huv.

and has also become the main source of news about Libya for a large number of users inside and outside the country.[55] The latest available figures on Facebook use among Libyans recorded some 25.8 percent using the service in 2014.[56]

Digital Activism

Over the past years, Libyans have used Facebook and Twitter to mobilize around a variety of causes. Recent campaigns include the "No Extension of GNC" movement, when social media users protested the decision of the GNC to remain in power past the transitional deadline of February 7, 2014. The move prompted massive protests in Benghazi's Freedom Square, which quickly spread into violent clashes around the country. Since 2014, Libyan activists have promoted democratic values, campaigned against incitement, and dismissed propaganda on Facebook. Most of these campaigns started and spread through hashtags, reflecting the impact of hashtag activism on creating change in Libya.

One of these campaigns was #IAmTawfik,[57] launched after the death of two young activists in Benghazi. It was created to promote peace and hope in Libya's future, as well as to show the resilience of the country's youth and civil society in the face of targeted killings of those fighting for a free Libya. An online campaign in the lead up to the month of Ramadan asked landlords to decrease rental prices for displaced families in Benghazi.[58] The campaign was well received and had a notable effect on the ground. Other trending campaigns included "Say yes to resuming schools in Benghazi;"[59] #MyLibya,[60] a social media campaign to show the bright side of Libya; #IWantMyCountryBack,[61] launched on Twitter to express Libyans' anger at the current state of affairs; and "Benghazi will not kneel,"[62] a collective online effort to assemble people to the streets for a massive demonstration against the Islamist extremist group *Ansar Alsharia* and affiliated groups in August 2014.

Violations of User Rights

Freedom of opinion, communication, and press are guaranteed by Libya's Draft Constitutional Charter, released by the Libyan Transitional National Council in September 2011.[63] However, delays in the drafting of a constitution and the general absence of law enforcement have contributed to weak rule of law in the country. The laws that do exist on the books remain, for the most part, carried over from the Qadhafi era. The gravest threats to user rights, however, came from armed groups during the coverage period. Several online journalists have faced threats and, in some cases, violent attacks due to the country's highly polarized environment.

55   Alexa, "The Top Sites in Libya," accessed May 31, 2014, http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/LY.

56   Allin1Social, "Facebook Statistics Worldwide," accessed July 8, 2015, http://bit.ly/1NI1Kcm.

57   Valentina Primo, "Why Are Libyans Screaming #IAmTawfik?" *Barakabits*, October 10, 2014, accessed July, 9, 2015, http://bit.ly/1NduLJJ; I Am Tawfik, Official Facebook of the campaign, https://www.facebook.com/iamTawfikOfficial.

58   Social media coverage of the decreasing the rental price campaign, May, 2015. Facebook https://goo.gl/WmKlGj; Twitter, #خفض_ايجاري_كرمر_رمضانكن_مبارك, https://goo.gl/l7NLfo.

59   Facebook page of the campaign [in Arabic], https://goo.gl/znZNTL.

60   "Amid chaos, Libyans took on the bright side,"*BBC Trending*, June 11, 2014, accessed July, 9, 2015, http://bbc.in/1NI2myE.

61   "Libyans refuse to give up their country, sharing their feelings with hashtag #IWantMyCountryBack," *Your Middle East*, December 27, 2014, accessed July, 9, 2015, http://bit.ly/1RbDkFQ.

62   Erin Gallagher, "Libya protests in Benghazi Against Terrorism & Against Extremism," *Revolution News*, February 8, 2014, accessed July, 7, 2015, http://bit.ly/1GdOA40.

63   Libyan Transitional National Council, "Draft Constitutional Charter for the Transitional Stage," September 2011, http://bit.ly/1RIRpvc.

Legal Environment

Several Qadhafi-era laws remain on the books due to the absence of any significant legal reform in the country since the revolution. Harsh punishments remain for those who publish content deemed offensive or threatening to Islam, national security, or territorial integrity. A law on collective punishment is particularly egregious, allowing the authorities to punish entire families, towns, or districts for the transgressions of one individual.[64] Because of their vague wording, these laws can be applied to any form of speech, whether transmitted via the internet, mobile phone, or traditional media. When new laws have been passed, changes have been cosmetic. In February 2014, the GNC amended Article 195 of the penal code to outlaw any criticism of the 2011 "February 17 Revolution" or its officials, as well as members of the GNC,[65] using similar language to that used to outlaw criticism of Qadhafi's "Al-Fateh Revolution."[66] The judiciary has gained in independence since 2012, when, in a landmark decision, the Supreme Court of Libya declared a law that criminalized a variety of political speech unconstitutional.[67] More recently, however, state bodies remain subject to pressure from a variety of armed militias.

Prosecutions and Detentions for Online Activities

Law enforcement was sparse of over the coverage period, due to the ongoing conflict. There were no reported arrests of individuals for their online activities over the coverage period, although extra-legal violence by militias was prevalent (See "Intimidation and Violence").

Surveillance, Privacy, and Anonymity

Uncertainties remain over the actions of domestic intelligence agencies in the new Libya. A July 2012 report from the *Wall Street Journal* indicated that surveillance tools leftover from the Qadhafi era had been restarted, seemingly in the fight against loyalists of the old regime.[68] Others suspect that these tools were activated to target those with an anti-Islamist agenda. During an interview on al-Hurra TV in March 2012, the Minister of Telecommunications stated that such surveillance had been stopped because the interim government wanted to respect the human rights of Libyans. An organization representing IT professionals in Libya refuted his remarks in an online statement, saying telecom sector employees had confirmed that the surveillance system was reactivated.[69] Its status in 2014 was unclear. Given the lack of an independent judiciary or procedures outlining the circumstances under which the state may conduct surveillance, there is little to prevent the government, security agencies, or militias who have access to the equipment from abusing its capabilities.

The Qadhafi regime had direct access to the country's DNS servers and engaged in widespread surveillance of online communications. State of the art equipment from foreign firms such as the

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64   IREX, *Media Sustainability Index – Middle East and North Africa 2005*, (Washington D.C.: IREX, 2006), 36, http://bit.ly/1GdOOrH.

65   Reporters Without Borders, "Free expression in new Libya approached with same draconian Gaddafi-era law," IFEX, February 19, 2014, http://bit.ly/1RbDNYw.

66   Amnesty International, "Three years on, Gaddafi-era laws used to clamp down on free expression," ReliefWeb, February 12, 2014, http://bit.ly/1hF31SQ.

67   Human Rights Watch, "Libya: Law Restricting Speech Ruled Unconstitutional," June 14, 2012, http://bit.ly/1jpemIu.

68   Margaret Coker and Paul Sonne, "Gadhafi-Era Spy Tactics Quietly Restarted in Libya," *Wall Street Journal*, July 2, 2012, http://on.wsj.com/1jpeCY2.

69   Libya Telecom & Technology, Facebook post [in Arabic], March 31, 2012, 7:16am, http://on.fb.me/1LN9G5n.

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French company Amesys,[70] and possibly the Chinese firm ZTE, were sold to the regime, enabling intelligence agencies to intercept communications on a nationwide scale and collect massive amounts of data on both phone and internet usage. Correspondents from the *Wall Street Journal* who visited an internet monitoring center after the regime's collapse reportedly found a storage room lined floor-to-ceiling with dossiers of the online activities of Libyans and foreigners with whom they communicated.[71]

After the capture of Tripoli by armed militias, many concerns have been raised over the role of LPTIC in monitoring mobile and internet communication, particularly from individuals in Benghazi. Although LPTIC released an official statement denying the accusations on its Facebook page,[72] its involvement in political and security affairs remains vague among many Libyans.[73]

Intimidation and Violence

The breakdown of the rule of law and the growing influence of militias has resulted in a worrying uptick in threats and violence against online journalists and activists. Since the end of 2011, the country has experienced a wave of killings and attacks against activists and journalists. According to Human Rights Watch, most were politically motivated.[74] The following cases were reported during the coverage period:

- Two young activists, Tawfik Ben Saud and Sami Elkawafi, were killed on September 19, 2014. The identity of the shooter was unknown, but many linked the attacks on armed groups and extremists.[75] Both were leading bloggers and social media activists involved in organizing demonstrations and promoting peace and democracy.

- Mohamed Bettou, Mohamed El Messmari, and Siraj Ghatess, three bloggers and activists well known for their outspoken support of human rights, were brutally killed in November 2014 in the eastern city of Derna, home to many extremists.

- In February 2015, blogger and civil rights activist Intisar al-Hasiri was found dead in her vehicle, apparently having been shot in the head.[76] Al-Hasiri was an outspoken advocate of human rights, rule of law, and democracy in Libya.[77]

- Moez Bannon, a political and social media activist based in Tripoli, has been reported missing since July 2014 after he spoke out against the city's militias.[78]

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70   Ivan Sigal, "Libya: Foreign Hackers and Surveillance," *Global Voices Advocacy*, October 26, 2011, http://bit.ly/1k5L2qv.

71   Paul Sonne and Margaret Coker, "Firms Aided Libyan Spies," *Wall Street Journal*, August 30, 2011, http://on.wsj.com/1KvvJDg.

72   See LPTIC's Statement regarding the blockage of Facebook in Tripoli , LPTIC, Facebook Post , April 19, 2015, http://on.fb.me/1jAS0mY.

73   "LPTIC confusion and political in fighting, chairman abroad since summer," *Libya Herald*, January 29, 2015, http://bit.ly/1Phs4tM.

74   Human Rights Watch, "Libya: Investigate Killing Political Activist," July 26, 2013, http://bit.ly/1LP2Kel.

75   Chris Stephen, "Teenage peace activists among dead in Libya 'black Friday'," *The Guardian*, September 20, 2014, http://bit.ly/Z3HZ80.

76   Ajnadin Mustapha and Salem Ali, "Civil rights activist murdered in Tripoli," *Libya Herald*, February 24, 2015, http://bit.ly/1RITaZb.

77   David Sands and Rebecca Jackson, "The Sacrifice of Women Who Participate in Nation Building in the Middle East and North Africa," Democracy Speaks (blog), March 13, 2015, http://bit.ly/1EbdBpg.

78   See "The kidnapping of Moez Banon," [in Arabic] *Alwasat News*, July 25, 2014, http://bit.ly/1G6vpJI.

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Tension and conflict has resulted in an overall increase in online hate speech, defamation, harassment, and even death threats. In late 2014, militias and extremists used Facebook to target and silence activists.[79] For example, anonymous users set up a Facebook page featuring the names, photos, and addresses of Benghazi activists calling for their assassinations and kidnapping. The page was taken down after online activists reported it.[80]

Technical Attacks

Websites are highly vulnerable to cyberattacks in Libya, with prominent news sites such as *Libya Herald* employing protection measures against distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks. No similar examples were reported during the coverage period. Anti-militia Facebook pages were consistently hacked or closed down after mass reporting by users, a significant concerning given that most Libyans consider Facebook to be their main source of news.

79   Nadia Burnat, "The attempt to silence Libya's activist generation," *Middle East Eye,* February 13, 2015, accessed on 13 May 2015, http://bit.ly/1GHFuY0.

80   See Radio France Internationale,"Mysterious Facebook "hit list" causes uproar in Libya,"Soundcloud, 4:02, http://bit.ly/1MBU2Pt.