

حملة - المركز العربي
لتطوير الإعلام الاجتماعي
7amleh - The Arab Center For
the Advancement of Social Media



Hashtag Palestine 2023

#Hashtag Palestine 2023

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Throughout 2023, a wide range of social and political developments both locally and globally, had a profound impact on the digital spHere In 2023, Israel's constant assaults on Palestinian communities in the West Bank, coupled with unprecedented levels of aggression inflicted on Gaza have led to an alarming escalation in human rights violations against Palestinians living in the occupied Palestinian territory and Palestinian citizens of Israel. This rapid deterioration has coincided with a simultaneous targeting of digital rights, not just for Palestinians but also those who advocate for Palestinian human rights.

During the same period, Israeli authorities cracked down on digital rights by persecuting Palestinians for simply expressing their views or opinions on various online platforms, through a variety of measures including censorship, surveillance and arrests. Furthermore, Israel persistently and intentionally disrupted communications and internet infrastructure in Gaza. In addition to introducing draconian legislation to restrict freedom of expression and criticism of Israel's actions in Gaza. This included vague and discriminatory legislation such as the ninth amendment to the anti-terrorism law, which refers to the alleged consumption of what Israel deems as terrorist publications. These violations occurred within the broader framework of government policies to expand surveillance and digital repression of Palestinians, including the deployment of mass surveillance tools and mobilization of a vast voluntary movement to report individuals expressing criticism of Israeli policies.

Social media platforms played a key role in facilitating Israel's oppressive measures. While social media companies, especially Meta's online platforms, have long been accused of restricting Palestinian content, the evidence shows that these policies intensified in 2023, despite prior commitments to address these discriminatory policies. The most notable measures included mass content removals and extensive "shadowbanning" of users criticizing Israel or posting in support of Palestinians. During Israel's war on Gaza, these content restrictions and removals soared to unprecedented levels. Users of Meta's platforms, including journalists, activists, media pages and those simply documenting reality on the ground or posting in support of Palestinian rights were subject to account banning, content removal and other restrictive measures. Such policies appeared to explicitly target those in support of Palestinian rights, with the purpose of restricting freedom of information, and censoring the Palestinian narrative.

Simultaneously, incitement and hate speech in Hebrew surged virtually unchecked on social media platforms. The widespread dissemination of misleading and false information propagated on social media channels throughout the year, reaching its peak

during Israel's aggression on Gaza. This phenomenon was particularly visible on Meta's platforms, as well as on Telegram and X (formerly Twitter). Throughout the year, 7amleh monitored and documented thousands of digital rights violations, which included hate speech, incitement to violence, and content censorship. The Palestinian Observatory of Digital Rights Violations (7or) worked to verify these violations and follow up on a case-by-case basis in order to ensure a safe and fair digital space.

It is within this framework that 7amleh issues the ninth annual "Hashtag Palestine 2023" report. The purpose of this report is to monitor, analyze and critique the data and emerging trends throughout 2023, and the impact on the digital rights of Palestinians. This includes violations of the right to freedom of expression, breaches of the right to privacy and security, and the deployment of digital tools for the monitoring, prosecution, and targeting of Palestinians. This is at a time when 7amleh, through the 7or Observatory, documented a record-high total of 4,400 violations, including content removal and account restrictions, in addition to incitement to violence and hate speech. Digital rights violations have reached a record high, highlighting the need for social media companies, third states and other stakeholders to take urgent action. This report offers policy recommendations to ensure a safe and equitable digital space for all.

Methodology

The report utilizes user reports from the 7or database of digital rights violations, which is an observatory for documenting Palestinian digital rights violations. Thus, this database is considered an essential indicator for monitoring the state of Palestinian digital rights. Furthermore, the report reviewed academic articles, studies, and journalistic materials examining Palestinian digital rights. In addition, 7amleh conducted qualitative research interviews with experts and professionals in the field of digital rights, with the aim of supporting and enriching the report with their inputs.



Digital Infrastructure

Digital Infrastructure

Israel controls the Palestinian information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure, leading to a disparity in digital access. Israeli citizens enjoy access to the fourth generation network (5G), however in the West Bank, Palestinians only have access to 3G, and in Gaza, the population only has access to 2G, leading to a stark digital divide. During its war on Gaza, Israel weaponized digital accessibility. For many Gazans, internet connectivity is the only link to the outside world, including family and friends. The loss of this connection is catastrophic, not just psychologically but also physically, as Gazans cannot communicate with each other or access vital, life-saving information. During this war, Israel systematically targeted Gaza's infrastructure, including internet and telecommunications networks,¹ which caused communication blackouts across online platforms, digital applications, and telecommunication networks between Gaza and the rest of the world. Internet Outage Detection and Analysis (IODA) data illustrated a significant decline in communications with Gaza in conjunction with Israeli airstrikes². Israeli airstrikes damaged the offices and infrastructure of the main telecommunications service provider, Paltel³, as well as Al-Watan Tower, disrupting Internet service providers. Other providers, such as Fusion and Jetnet, suffered infrastructure damage, causing widespread outages in internet and telecommunications.

By October 10, Israel had destroyed various communication networks in Gaza. This was worsened by mounting damage to the electrical network and fuel shortages. The residents of Gaza were left with only minimal channels of communication⁴. The headquarters building of the General Administration of the Fixed Telephone Network and Home Internet, located in the Al-Rimal neighborhood, was bombed, and many of the company's buildings and facilities were partially destroyed across Gaza, which in turn led to continuous interruptions to the Internet.⁵ This coincided with the beginning of Israel's "ground maneuver," which was accompanied by devastating missile strikes on Gaza City, causing temporary electricity blackouts and regular Internet outages.⁶

1 The New Arab. The occupation destroyed 60% of Gaza: Scorched earth war. 04/12/2023. Link [Here](#)

2 IODA. 2023. Link [Here](#)

3 Paltimes. Occupation aircraft bombed the headquarters of the telecommunications company in Gaza City. 09/10/2023. Link [Here](#)

4 Techcrunch News. Internet access in Gaza is collapsing as ISPs fall offline. 27/11/2023. Link [Here](#)

5 Palestinian News and Information Agency News. "Palestinian Telecommunications" warns of complete cessation of its services in Gaza after the destruction of 35% of its network. 13/10/2023. Link [Here](#)

6 BBC report. Internet outage in Gaza: How it happened and how the network returned. 29/10/2023. Link [Here](#)

The data indicates that there were at least eight internet blackouts in Gaza, from October 7 until the end of the year.⁷ Fuel shortages also contributed to disruptions in internet connectivity. NetBlocks reported that Palestinian internet service provider NetStream collapsed due to a severe shortage of fuel supplies in late October. Subsequently, NetBlocks observed a major breakdown in connectivity across the Gaza Strip, affecting leading telecommunications companies in the region. This incident represents the largest internet outage in Gaza since the start of the war.⁸ This was indicated in the statement of the Palestinian Telecommunications Company “Paltel” on November 1 that communications and Internet services were completely cut off in the Gaza Strip due to the interruption of international communication again, as a result of the continuous bombing and deliberate shutdown by Israeli authorities, which reoccurred at the end of December.⁹

Until the end of 2023, the internet in Gaza worked intermittently, with partial outages and complete outages from time to time, due to bombing or power or fuel outages. Access to the internet varied from one region to another within the Gaza Strip. The deliberate targeting of ICT and telecommunication networks severs Palestinians from the outside world, and impacts the flow of information. As a result, internet access is weaponized to silence Palestinians, and prevent the documentation of the reality on the ground.¹⁰

7 The New Araby. Gazans resort to street internet amid the aggression. 28/12/2023. Link [Here](#)

8 Accessnow news. #KeepItOn: Telecommunications blackout in the Gaza Strip is an attack on human rights 13/10/2023. Link [Here](#)

9 Reuters News. Palestinian telcom: Communications, internet services completely cut off in Gaza 01/11/2023. Link [Here](#)

10 BBC report. Internet outage in Gaza: How it happened and how the network returned. 29/10/2023. Link [Here](#)



Privacy and Censorship

Privacy and Censorship

Israeli Authorities

Israel uses digital surveillance systems and various invasive technologies such as remote biometric surveillance technologies and facial recognition to track Palestinians and monitor them. One such facial recognition system is “Red Wolf,” which is utilized to track Palestinians and implement harsh movement restrictions.¹¹ The Israeli government pushed a draft bill in February 2023, allowing the Israeli police to use advanced biometric cameras in public places. This included the use of “Hawk Eye” technologies, that allow for the monitoring of vehicle license plates. The draft bill sparked criticism regarding violations of privacy and concerns about the impact of surveillance measures.¹² 7amleh pointed out that the bill “constitutes a major threat to the basic rights of individuals, including their digital rights and the right to privacy, peaceful assembly, expression, and movement. This bill may be used to target Palestinian citizens of Israel, to suppress their basic freedoms, and increase restrictions on Palestinians and their social and political activities due to permanent surveillance.”¹³

In February 2023, leaked documents revealed that Israeli-owned internet companies such as Voyager Labs and Cognyte have developed mechanisms and technologies that rely on fake accounts and use avatar characters to pose as real people, with the aim of collecting information, espionage, and spreading disinformation. This technology is part of a broader industry providing digital surveillance tools to defense, law enforcement and intelligence agencies around the world.¹⁴

The development and unrestricted deployment of surveillance technologies in the occupied Palestinian territory has an oppressive impact on the lives of civilians living under Israeli military occupation. This further enforces human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territory. In addition, the development of these technologies has negative implications for human rights globally.¹⁵ Amazon also contributed to installing surveillance systems and collecting biometric data through the “Nimbus” project. Amazon

11 Amnesty International study. Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories: Automated Apartheid: How facial recognition fragments, segregates and controls Palestinians in the OPT. 02/05/2023. Link [Here](#)

12 Jerusalem Post. Israeli gov't to pass bill allowing police use of public biometric cameras. 17/02/2023. Link [Here](#)

13 7amleh News. 7amleh Center warns of the repercussions of facial recognition cameras bill. 21/09/2023. Link [Here](#)

14 Haaretz Reports. Fake Friends: Leak Reveals Israeli Firms Turning social media Into Spy Tech. 28/02/2023. Link [Here](#)

15 7amleh Publications. The Israeli surveillance industry and human rights: Its effects on the Palestinians and its repercussions in the world. 19/12/2023. Link [Here](#)

indicated its intention to continue providing this assistance through the company's announcement to invest an additional \$7 billion in Israel until 2037, despite widespread criticism.¹⁶

Academic Helga Tawil-Souri said that Israeli technologies have become particularly appealing to countries interested in using new techniques and technologies to strengthen digital surveillance capabilities, exercise control over their citizens, suppress fundamental rights, and for use in military intelligence applications. Israel relies on the Palestinian population to develop its technologies for military and security control and oversight.¹⁷ In addition, it is clear that Israel is positioning itself as a leader in the development of technological and digital border/barrier technologies, through its continued investment in technologies that allow it to exercise security control over the Palestinians. Israel markets these sort of border/barrier technologies, such as walls, checkpoints, and electronic gates, to a global market.¹⁸

Israel has established an infrastructure for surveillance cameras in the occupied Palestinian territory. A key example of this is the "Smart City Initiative" project in Hebron, which aims to incorporate digital capabilities that strengthen Israel's military occupation. This was accomplished by installing and deploying cameras on the sides of buildings, lighting poles, observation towers, and rooftops. Checkpoints are also intensive points for penetrating the privacy of Palestinians, controlling them, and dominating their bodies, movements and speech. Israeli authorities equipped the Al-Shuhada Street checkpoint with more than 20 audio, visual, and other monitoring devices.¹⁹ In addition, the number of surveillance and inspection points equipped with cameras inside Jerusalem and the Old City has increased, which in turn supports Israel's control over the Palestinian population by constantly monitoring them and their movement.²⁰

The Israeli government has reportedly been using spyware supplied by NSO Group to track down individuals kidnapped or killed by Hamas in the recent conflict. The Israeli military and security establishment also uses the "Pegasus" program to track people affected by Hamas' actions, eavesdrop on mobile phone signals, and has established a "war room" to unlock phones related to missing or killed individuals.²¹

16 Ahmad, Ibsais. Amazon Is Investing in AI-Assisted Apartheid in Palestine. 08.21.2023. Link [Here](#)

17 Research interview. Helga Tawil Souri, associate professor at New York University. 30/10/2023

18 MintPress news. How Israeli Cyber Weapons Are Taking Over Latin America. 03/03/2023. Link [Here](#)

19 Amnesty International study. Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories: Automated Apartheid: How facial recognition fragments, segregates and controls Palestinians in the OPT. 02/05/2023. Link [Here](#)

20 The Palestine Chronicle. Monitored in Jerusalem: How Israel Succeeded in Making Surveillance Technology Racist. 08/02/2023. Link [Here](#)

21 Sam Sabin. Israel's NSO unleashes controversial spyware in Gaza conflict. Axios, Technology. 14/11/2023. Link [Here](#)

Palestinian Authority

The Palestinian Authority made legal efforts to strengthen privacy and data integrity. The Personal Data Protection Draft Law, in its third reading since June 2022, is a positive stride towards fortifying the rights of Palestinians and establishing legal safeguards for digital data. Conversely, 7amleh provided an evaluation, emphasizing concerns related to transparency in the drafting process, uncertainties about the independence of the national authority overseeing personal data protection, and deficiencies in individual rights concerning personal data, such as the absence of the right to digital erasure outlined in the decree law. This underscores the pressing need to disclose the draft and subject it to public discussion before formal approval²².

On the other hand, the Palestinian Authority continues to violate the privacy of its citizens, neglects to address violations by other parties, neglects encroachment of the security sector on civilian life, and fails to enforce the law due to the lack of legislation, as the aforementioned decree-law is still under discussion. Moreover, the existing laws are inadequate in safeguarding citizens' rights in line with international standards, leading to increased violations and the disclosure of personal data. This amplifies the injustices - including the lack of the right to privacy - faced by Palestinians living under occupation.²³

22 7amleh Publications. Personal Data Protection Draft Law by Decree from a Human Rights–Based Perspective. 2023. Link [Here](#)

23 7amleh Publications. Position Paper: Endless Violation and Mistreatment of Palestinians' Right to Privacy and Personal Data 2023. Link [Here](#)



Freedom of Speech and Expression

Freedom of Speech and Expression

Israeli Authorities

At the beginning of 2023, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir established a special task force to “combat incitement,” which he himself chaired. The task force worked to monitor content critical of the policies of the Israeli authorities. The taskforce carried out 319 monitoring operations for incitement to “terrorism”, and in 130 cases the content was removed from the Internet. Based on the task force’s work, criminal investigations were opened in 22 cases so far, and 18 people were arrested on the pretext of incitement via social media platforms.²⁴

An amendment to the “Anti-Terrorism Law” was proposed on May 7, 2023, for discussion in the Ministerial Committee for Legislation, which allows the security services to prosecute supporters of terrorism. The amendment relates to the “similarity” of the crimes, where the state and security services become authorized to define what “terrorism” is.²⁵ Accordingly, on November 8, 2023, the Knesset approved, in the final reading, the Ninth Amendment of the draft Anti-Terrorism Law, regarding the consumption of terrorist publications. The new law stipulates a one-year prison sentence for anyone who systematically and regularly accesses publications that are published by entities who Israeli authorities designate as terrorist organisations. What distinguishes this law is the prohibition of consuming terrorist publications on social media platforms, without the condition of carrying out actions and activities. Prosecution is based on “intent,” which therefore contributes to restricting freedom of expression, thought, and opinion. This amendment led to the increase of Israeli authorities’ surveillance of Palestinian citizens of Israel and East Jerusalem residents, while violating their rights to privacy, freedom of expression, and the right to knowledge.²⁶

The former director of the Israeli Cyber Unit, Eric Barbing, revealed that Israel had officially asked Meta to delete words and phrases that Israel considered “offensive.” The former Israeli official said that Meta responds quickly and even removes the majority of content that violates Israel’s policies. This shows the relationship between the social media platforms, led by Meta, and the Israeli government.²⁷

The Israeli government and institutions have taken a series of measures against Palestinian

24 Ynetnews. The Anti-Incitement to Terrorism Team was established about two months ago. What has it been doing since then? This is the data. 21/04/2023. (Hebrew Language). Link [Here](#)

25 Amir Fox and Mordechai Kremantzier. Position Paper “Amending the Anti-Terrorism Law Would Disproportionately Harm Freedom of Expression.” Israel Democracy Institute. 08/05/2023. (Hebrew Language). Link [Here](#)

26 7amleh Publications. Position Paper on the Israeli Law Prohibiting the Consumption of Terrorist Publications. 20/11/2023. Link [Here](#)

27 Television investigation, Al Jazeera Channel. What is Hidden is Greater TV Program, episode “Closed Space.” 08/09/2023. Link [Here](#)

citizens of Israel following the War on Gaza. The measures include imposing restrictions on freedom of expression and expulsion/suspension of students from academic institutions. To date, there have been 104 cases and complaints filed against Palestinian students in Israeli academic institutions due to content and posts on social media platforms. The institutions claim that the posts are “supportive of terrorism.” More than 50 letters have been received from workers and employees who have been fired or had their jobs frozen in various sectors. There have been more than 100 detainees. At least 80 of them have been detained based on posts on social media. The “Anti-Incitement task force,” headed by Ben Gvir, investigated 180 cases related to alleged incitement. At the time of reporting, 93 of these cases the State Attorney’s Office approved the commencement of a criminal investigation.²⁸

A lawyer for the Adalah Center, Adi Mansour, pointed to an escalation in the number of arrests and suspensions of individuals, including journalists, activists, and influencers based on opinion posts, on social media platforms such as “Facebook,” “Instagram,” “X,” and others. This demonstrates how after the events of October 7, a pattern of arrest and detention has become commonplace, extending prohibition and banning to all groups and social strata. According to Mansour, this measure relies on limited “ambiguity” within the terrorism laws enacted by the state since 2016 and subsequent amendments. By not defining clearly what constitutes terrorism, the police and security legal agencies are empowered to restrict freedom of expression and intensify arrest campaigns after October 7. Judges themselves clearly said to the lawyers that since October 7 there are other “historical considerations,” which leads to further suppression of freedom of expression digitally.²⁹

Palestinian Authority

A proposed decree-law regarding the regulation of publishing, journalism, and media was circulated in the Palestinian government during the year 2023. If the decree-law is approved, it will entail many risks to freedom, including those with digital dimensions. The most important of which is the proposal’s adoption of ambiguous and vague words and terms that open a wide scope for restricting media freedoms and criminally prosecuting and punishing journalists and opinion holders. Some of these ambiguous terms include: civil peace, the historical Palestinian narrative, disturbing relations between countries, ethics and public morals.³⁰

28 A report, Adalah Center Systematic suppression campaigns on Freedom of Speech of Palestinian Citizens of Israel. 29/11/2023. Link [Here](#)

29 Research interview. Lawyer Uday Mansour, Adalah - Legal Center for the Protection of Arab Minority Rights. 3/11/2023

30 AMAN. Civil Society Organizations Statement Concerning the Draft Law by Decision No. () of 2023: Regulations on Publishing, the Press and Media 26/08/2023 Link [Here](#)

The Palestinian Authority also circulated a proposal for a draft decree-law to regulate the right to access information, and it too creates human rights concerns. Most notably, the proposal does not include an independent oversight body to monitor access to information, the many exceptions to the principle of information disclosure, and at other times restricting access and dissemination of information.³¹

Social Media Platforms

In 2022, Meta's oversight board commissioned Business for Social Responsibility (BSR) to conduct a due diligence exercise into the impact of its policies and processes in Israel and Palestine during the May 2021 escalation. While BSR issued comprehensive recommendations, Meta still has not fully implemented these. Despite some progress, the company still moderates Palestinian voices and narratives in a discriminatory and disproportionate manner and has not yet disclosed in a transparent manner the nature of its relationship with the Israeli cyber unit and its impact on content policies. The company is still not sufficiently transparent with regard to content management in the Palestinian context.³²

Meta's online platforms discriminated against content supportive of the Palestinian cause, especially in the Arabic language, as a result of their massive investment in the "Content Classifier" in Arabic specifically. At the same time, the hostile content classifiers in the Hebrew language were ineffective due to their lack of sufficient data to deal with offensive content, as stated by internal Meta documents.³³ The measures taken by Meta varied in general, including deleting and removing content, restricting or disabling accounts, pages, and groups, or reducing access to content that supports Palestinian rights. Meanwhile, Meta has not made significant progress toward automating the removal of violent and inciting content in Hebrew.

The use of shadowbanning on Meta's platform is widespread. This is a mechanism for reducing the accessibility of content to users. This in turn prevents the spread of the Palestinian narrative. The company also made some temporary updates to Facebook after the events of October, in terms of reprogramming comment methods and the publishing audience and reducing accessibility capabilities. For example, the default status for the

31 AMAN. Civil Society Organizations and Media and Human Rights Associations Warn of the Government's Aim to Pass a Law that Restricts the Freedom of Accessing Information 25/05/2023. Link [Here](#)

32 7amleh News. Statement on a meta update regarding the implementation of the recommendations of the Business for Social Responsibility report. 27/09/2023. Link [Here](#)

33 Sam Schechner, Jeff Horwitz and Newley Purnell. Inside Meta, Debate Over What's Fair in Suppressing Comments in the Palestinian Territories. WSJ. 21/10/2023. Link [Here](#)

publishing audience became “Friends” only. Many users do not notice these changes, which serves as a de facto policy of silencing and suppression of speech, especially in contexts of war and crises. Another technical measure when interacting with posts is changing the “Share” icon to “Send a Personal Message” to convert your desire to share publicly into a private share.³⁴ Furthermore, Instagram has sometimes restricted fundraising capabilities for the Gaza Strip. The “Games for Gaza” charity package on Itch.io, which aims to raise money for Palestinian medical aid, faced major challenges on Instagram due to the restrictions.³⁵

Meanwhile, “X” (formerly Twitter), under the management of Elon Musk, removed restrictions on content, and adopted a more liberal policy than Meta for economic reasons and to attract new users, according to Nadim Nashif, Director of 7amleh.³⁶ This creates more freedom for the Palestinian user, but at the same time it has created the opportunity for a large amount of incitement emanating from Israeli society. The “X” platform is subject to a lot of political pressure regarding Palestinian content, which led to a major campaign to delete and restrict tens of thousands of content and posts.³⁷ Nashif also reported that “Telegram” adopted a more “liberal” policy without any controls and standards and is not abiding by international regulations and human rights considerations, which allows extremist settler groups to call for assassinations or organize attacks against Palestinian villages without any repercussions. This makes it an attractive platform for all extremist parties from all sides.³⁸

Although Meta is at the forefront of violating freedom of expression and opinion, many violations remain on X. Although X has lifted some restrictions on Palestinian content, it is still a space where Israeli incitement and hate speech against the Palestinians is rampant. On the other hand, 7amleh noted that TikTok was relatively balanced. However, following increased pressure on the company, the intensity of censorship increased. Telegram provides a free space for all parties without any censorship or restrictions, which also leads to high levels of incitement and calls for more violence explicitly on an individual level against Palestinians as well as on a collective level. LinkedIn also joined the list of platforms violating the digital rights and freedoms of Palestinians, by deleting content

34 Research interview. Ahmad Al-Qadi, Monitoring and Documentation Manager for 7amleh Center. 15/11/2023

35 Joan Zahra. “Why Is Instagram Censoring a Palestinian Aid Fundraiser?”. The Mary Sue. 06/11/2023. Link [Here](#)

36 Research interview. Nadim Nashif, co-founder and executive director of 7amleh Centre. 6/11/2023

37 News on Al-Araby TV. Deleting accounts that support the Palestinian cause. Musk yields to pressure. 13/11/2023 Link [Here](#)

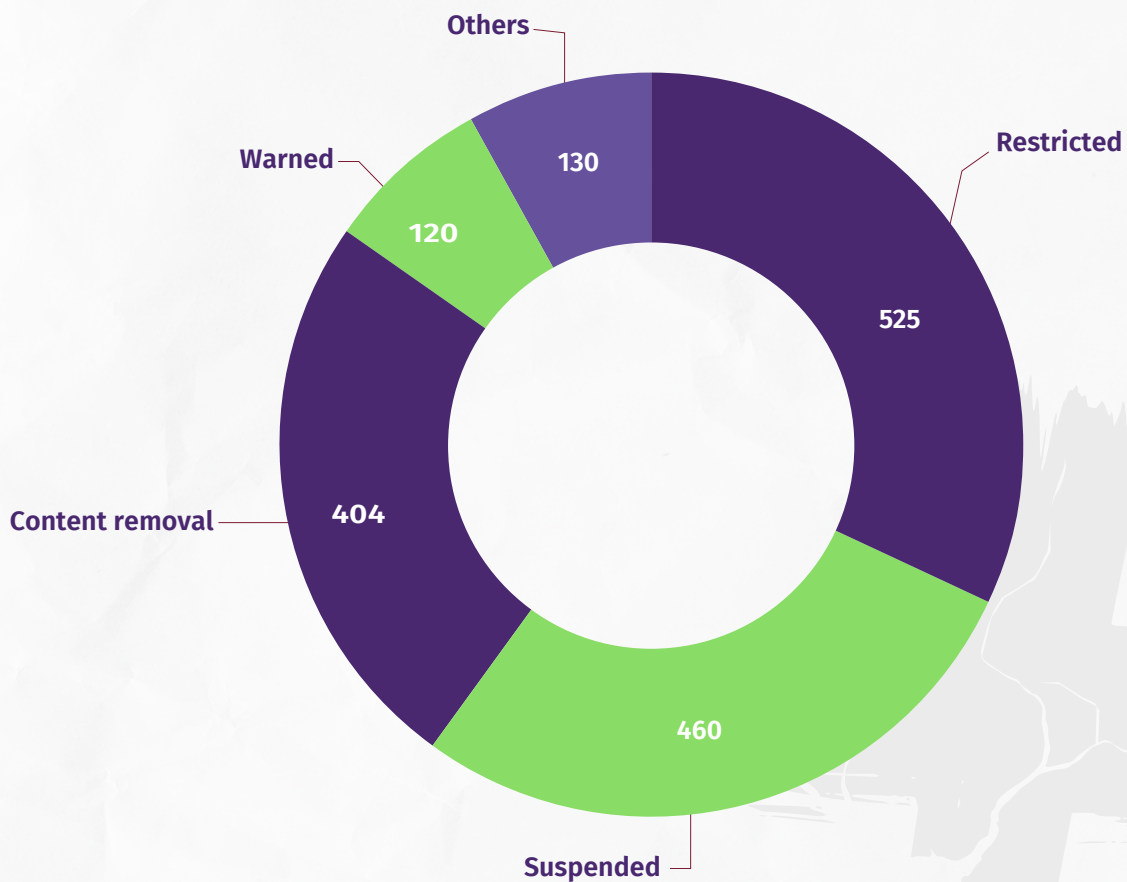
38 Research interview. Nadim Nashif, co-founder and executive director of 7amleh Centre. 6/11/2023

calling for Israel to comply with international law, as well as informing its users that their posts were violating the platform's "content policies."

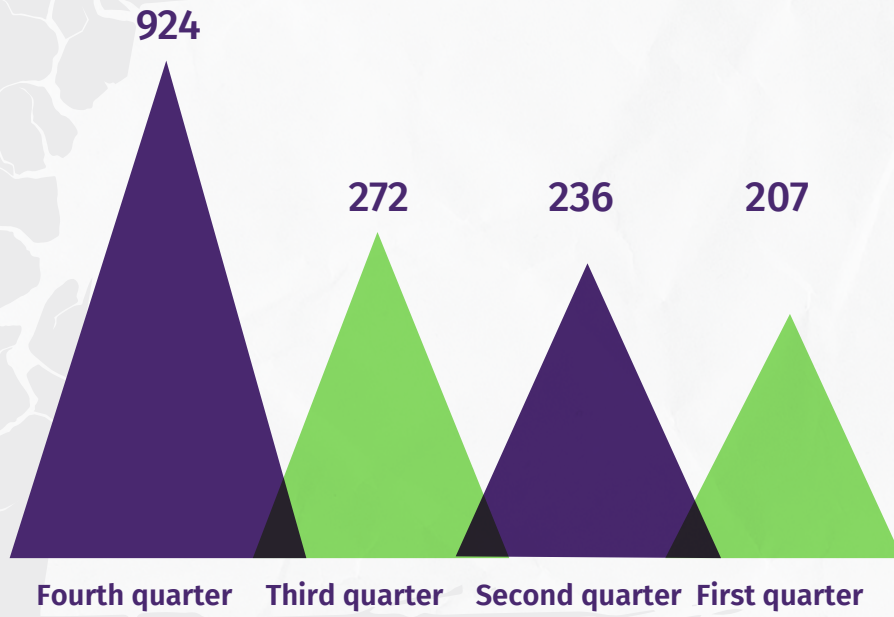
The following are the most prominent figures collected by 7amleh through the Palestinian Observatory of Digital Rights Violations "7or":

The total number of censorship violations documented by 7amleh: 1639

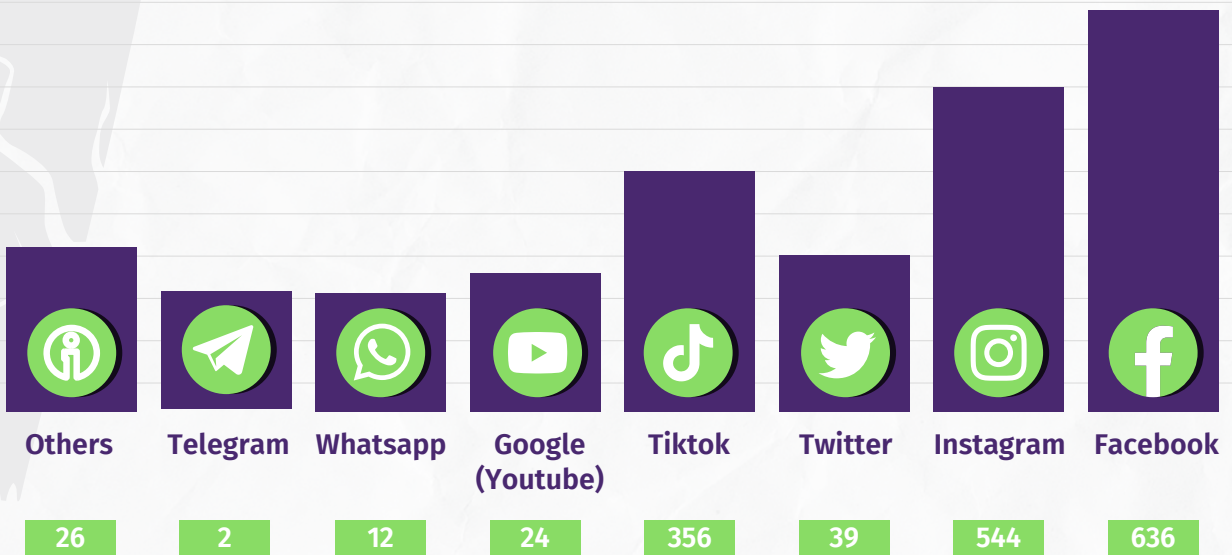
Disaggregation of violations by type of suspension/restriction



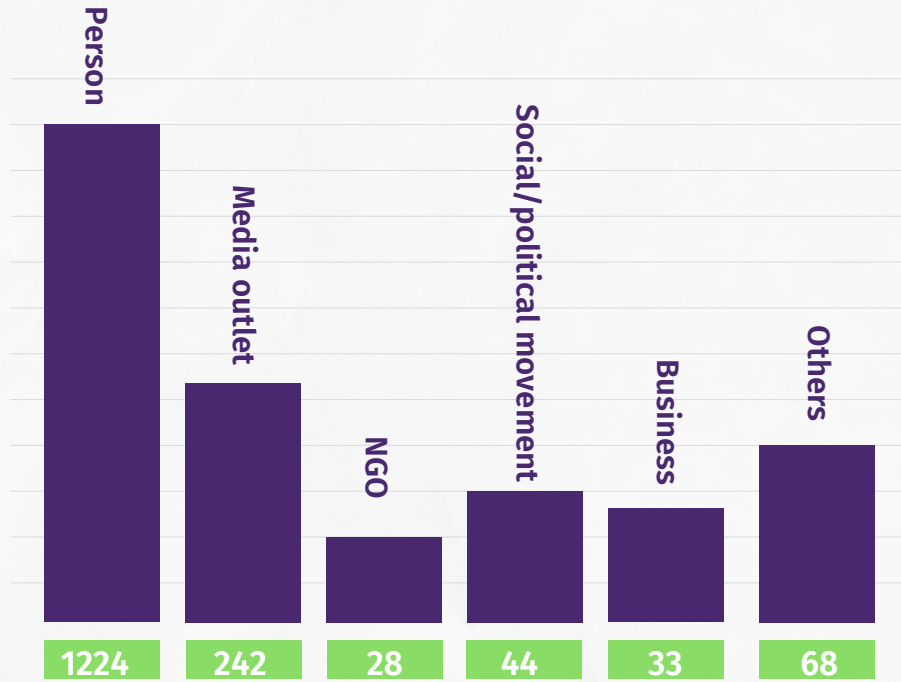
Disaggregation of violations by quarter



Disaggregation of violations by platform



Disaggregation of violations by affected-entity type



Disaggregation of violations by victim type³⁹

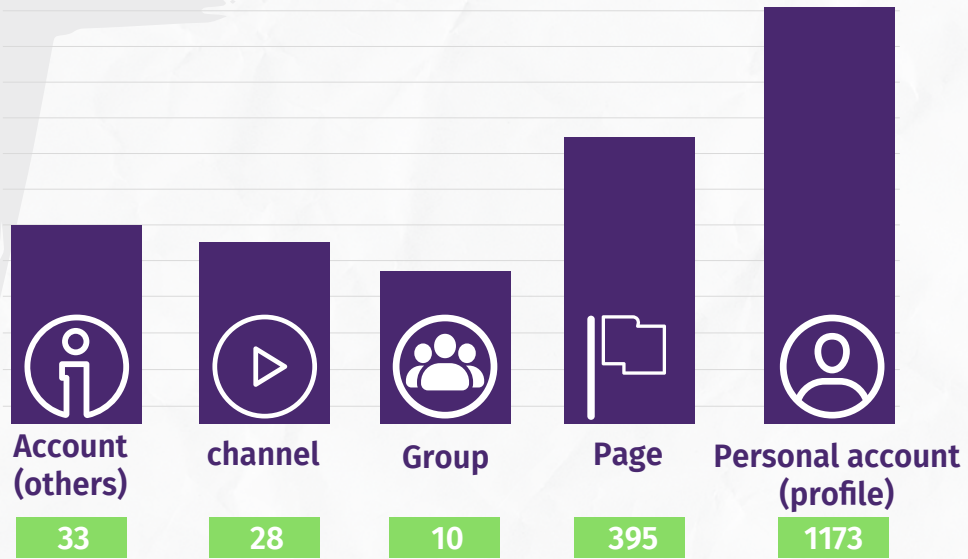


³⁹ A person may have more than one characteristic at the same time, for example, a political activist and a journalist, and therefore the characteristics are more than the number of affected people.

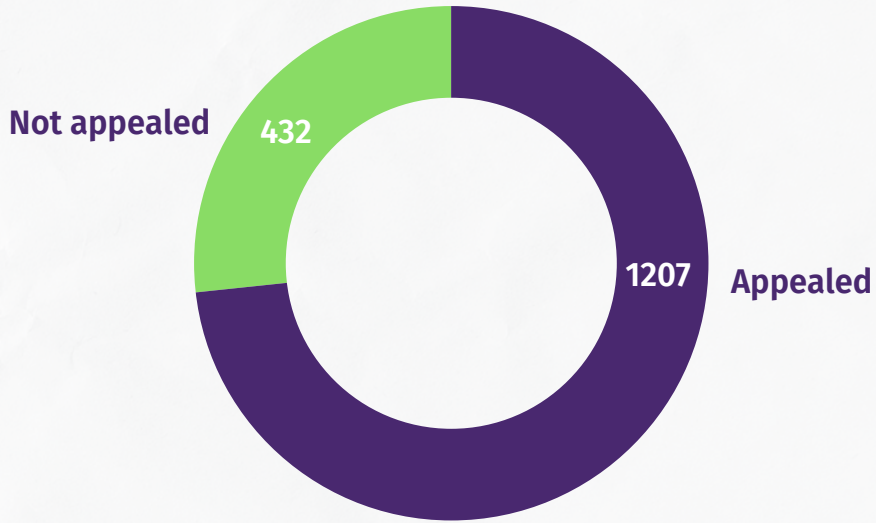
Disaggregation of victims by sex



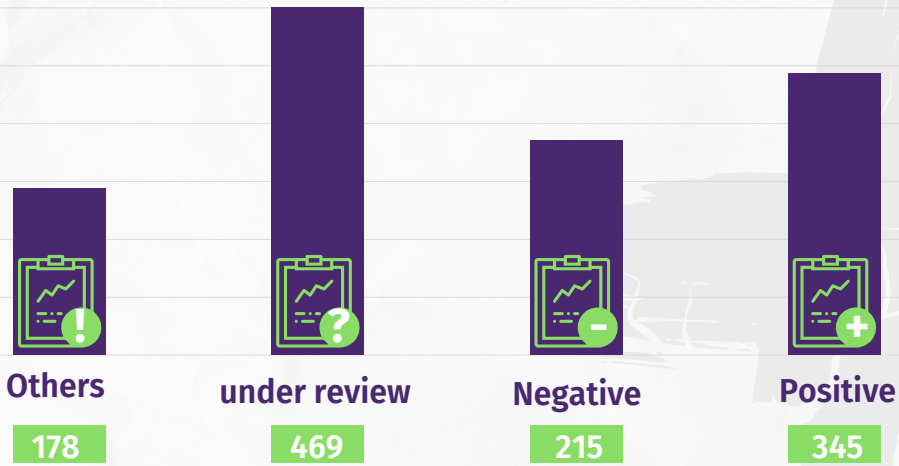
Classification of victims according to the type of account on social media platforms



Number of violations followed up by the company



Disaggregation of the companies' responses to the reports that 7amleh has followed up to date





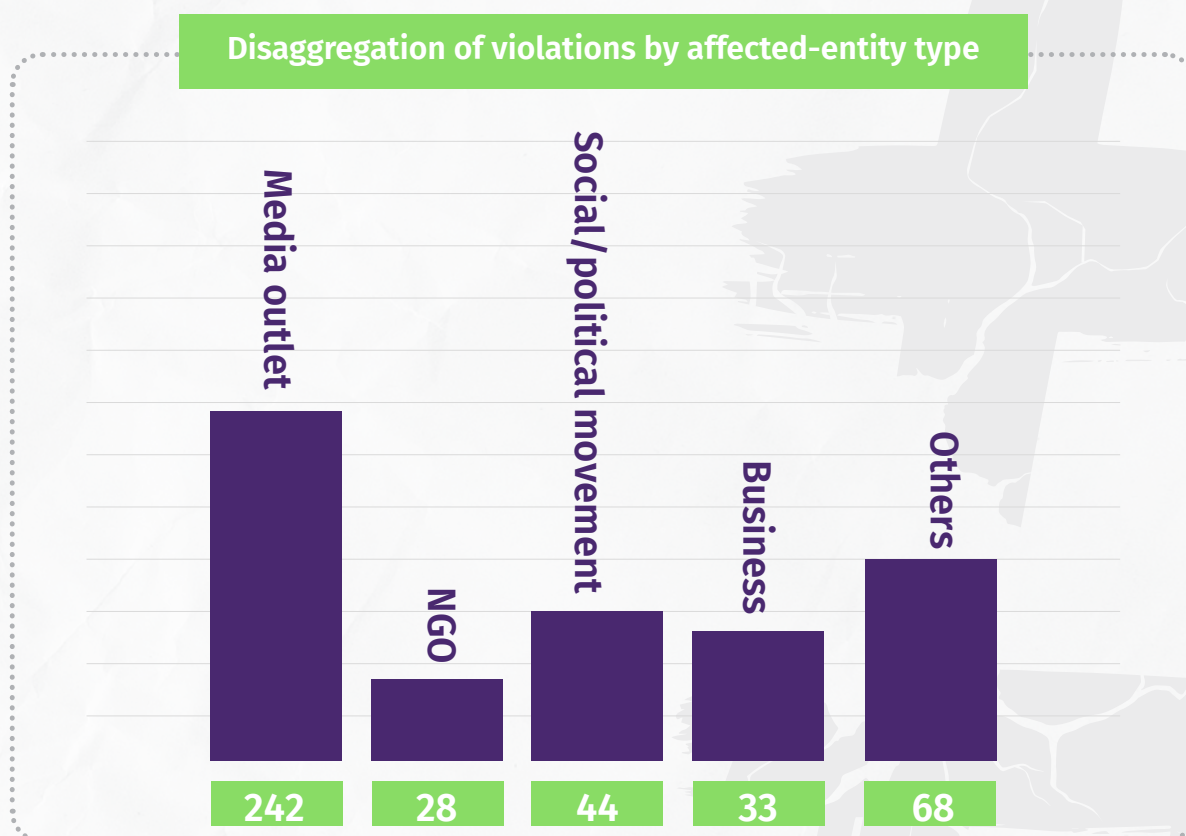
The right to assemble and organize.

The right to assemble and organize.

Restrictions on the right to assembly and organization have emerged clearly recently, as Ahmad Al-Qadi, the Monitoring and Documentation Manager for 7amleh, reported during a research interview. He stated that the policy of Meta works systematically to undermine the freedom of Palestinians to organize and assemble based on political considerations. This essentially consisted of restricting and suspending Facebook groups, news pages, and political pages from the platform, and removing much of the content they published to their audiences.

Facebook banned the hashtag “#طوفان_الاقصى” (Al-Aqsa Flood), which undermined Palestinian freedom of organization and assembly, considering the hashtag a form of collective action and organization on the internet. On the other hand, it provided complete freedom of organization to the Israelis for organized interaction on Meta’s platforms and on X through Hashtag “#חרבות ברזל”, which is the name given by the Israeli authorities to the war on Gaza. According to Al-Qadi, this hashtag is also used by Israelis for collective incitement against Palestinians.⁴⁰ It is a clear policy that reduces the possibilities of organizing on social media platforms, such as groups and pages, among Palestinians (and activists supporting Palestinian rights).

Digital platforms have also adopted a clear policy that restricts the right of Palestinians to organize and assemble in many and varying ways, as the numbers show:



40 ibid.

Therefore, social media platforms did not only restrict freedoms for individuals, but went beyond that when it came to Palestinian users and pro-Palestine activists. Platforms restricted the ability of collective digital organization on the internet through groups, pages, channels, and digital hashtags, through which a collective voice can be raised for any cause.

The pages, channels, and groups that were restricted or disabled include the content of political and social movements, as the graphic largely shows, or non-governmental organizations, media outlets and other forms of political organization in the modern era. This restricts the ability of these parties to advocate for rights in a practical way.



**The right to protection from racist and
discriminatory speech and all forms of hate.**

The right to protection from racist and discriminatory speech and all forms of hate.

Hate speech and incitement in the Hebrew language continued to intensify on social media platforms during 2023. At the beginning of the year, a violent incitement campaign was launched by Israelis on social media platforms, including incitement and demands for genocide and erasure, and calls for the killing and death of Arabs, particularly in the town of Huwara. Following this sustained incitement, Israeli settlers carried out a violent attack on the town on the evening of Sunday, February 26, 2023. Armed settlers rampaged in the town, attacking residents and setting fire to property. The settlers opened fire with live ammunition, killing a Palestinian and causing widespread panic. The attack was considered the largest and most widespread since the Second Intifada, and many international and Arab newspapers described it as a “pogrom” against the Palestinians.⁴¹ In conjunction with the continuous violent incitement before and after the incident, in which official bodies participated, including the Minister of Finance, “Bezalel Smotrich,” as well as the Deputy Chairman of the Settlements Council in the northern West Bank, “Davidi Ben Zion.” Before the incident, these public figures called for the annihilation of Huwara, and this was followed by encouragement and celebration of these calls by activists, news websites, right-wing pages and groups on social media platforms.⁴²

Israeli instigators used a number of hashtags to express their “joy” and the continuation of incitement, the most popular of which is the hashtag “#Let’s erase Huwara,” as the number of views reached more than half a million during the violent events.⁴³

Following the events of October, the level of digital hate speech and incitement increased to an unprecedented level. In the context of the war on Gaza that Israel launched after October 7 2023, 7amleh detected around 3 million (2,935,000) instances of violent content in Hebrew against Palestinians on social media. The type of posts varied, with 68% of the incitement based on political affiliations and/or nationalist sentiments and 29% rooted in racist bias. This is in addition to violent discourse based on gender, religious and other grounds.⁴⁴ Incitement also increased on Telegram with the full knowledge and

⁴¹ Middle East Eye, News. Israeli press review: Columnist warns ‘Kristallnacht was relived in Huwwara’. 28/02/2023. Link [Here](#)

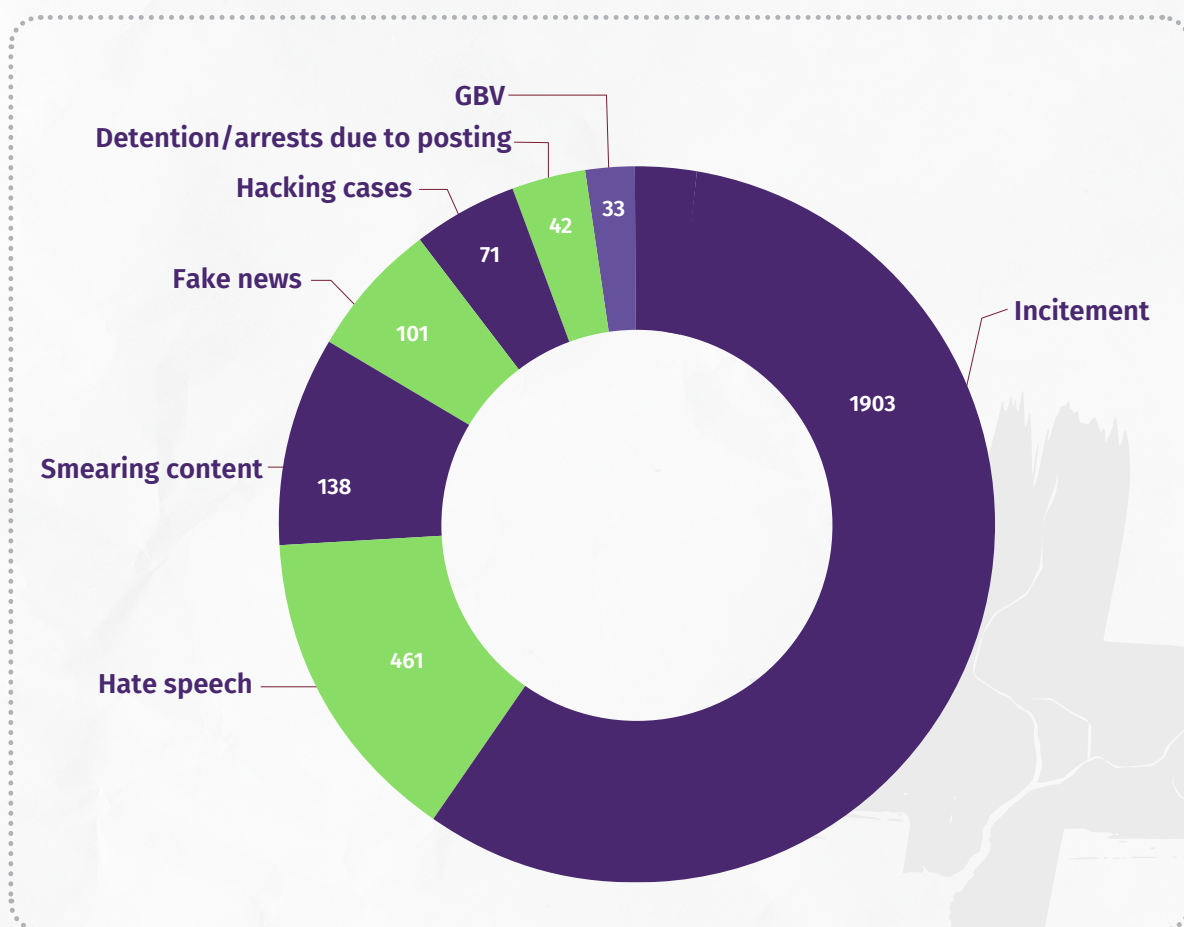
⁴² 7amleh publications. An Analysis of the Israeli Inciteful speech against the Village of «Huwara» on Twitter.1/2/2023. Link [Here](#)

⁴³ 7amleh Publications. “An Analysis of the Inciteful speech against the Village of “Huwara” on Twitter platform. 1/6/2023 Link [Here](#)

⁴⁴ 7amleh News. 7amleh Center monitors over one million instances of hate speech and/or incitement to violence in Hebrew targeting Palestinians on social media. 14/11/2023. Link [Here](#)

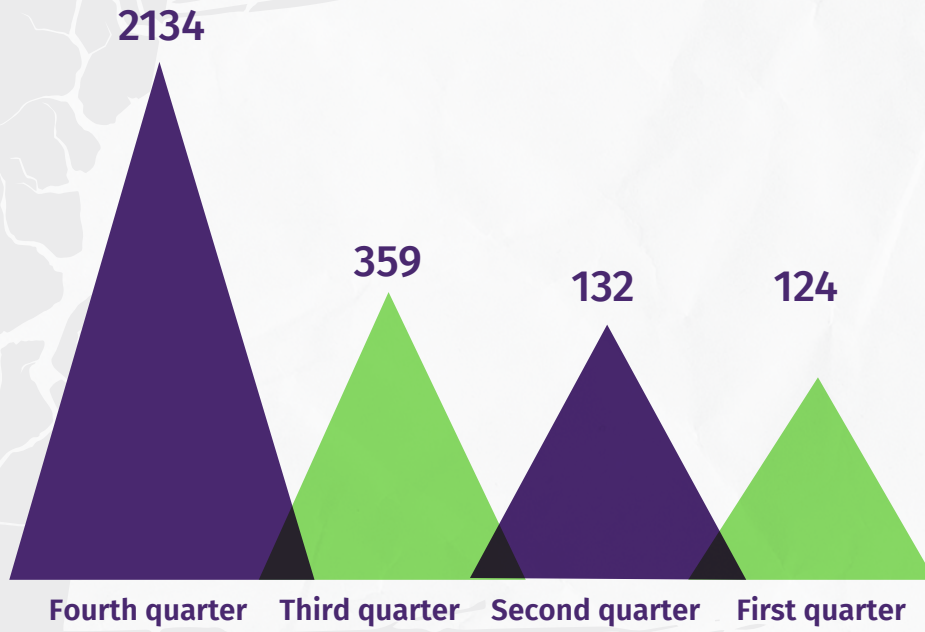
awareness of the company, without any censorship. The platform also allows freedom for Palestinians, while at the same time also allowing incitement against Palestinians, exposing them to danger. Perhaps the most prominent incitement channel was “Nazi Hunters,” which published the names and pictures of Palestinian activists, journalists, and academics. This aimed to create a state of control, terrorization and intimidation, according to Nadim Nashif.⁴⁵

The following are the most prominent forms of violent speech documented by 7amleh in the Hebrew language during the aforementioned period:

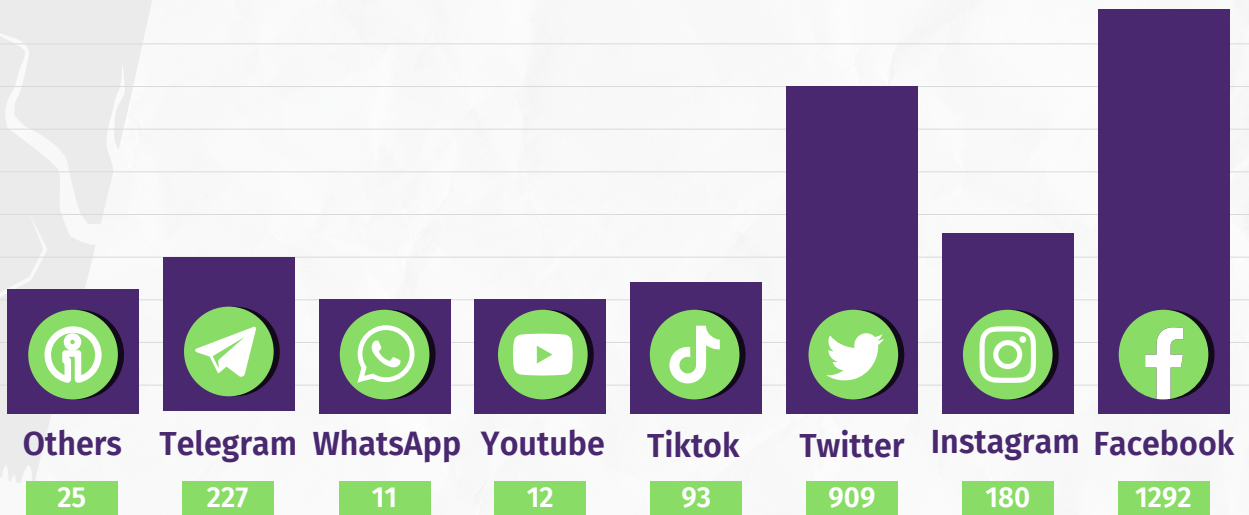


⁴⁵ Research interview. Nadim Nashif, co-founder and executive director of 7amleh Centre. 6/11/2023

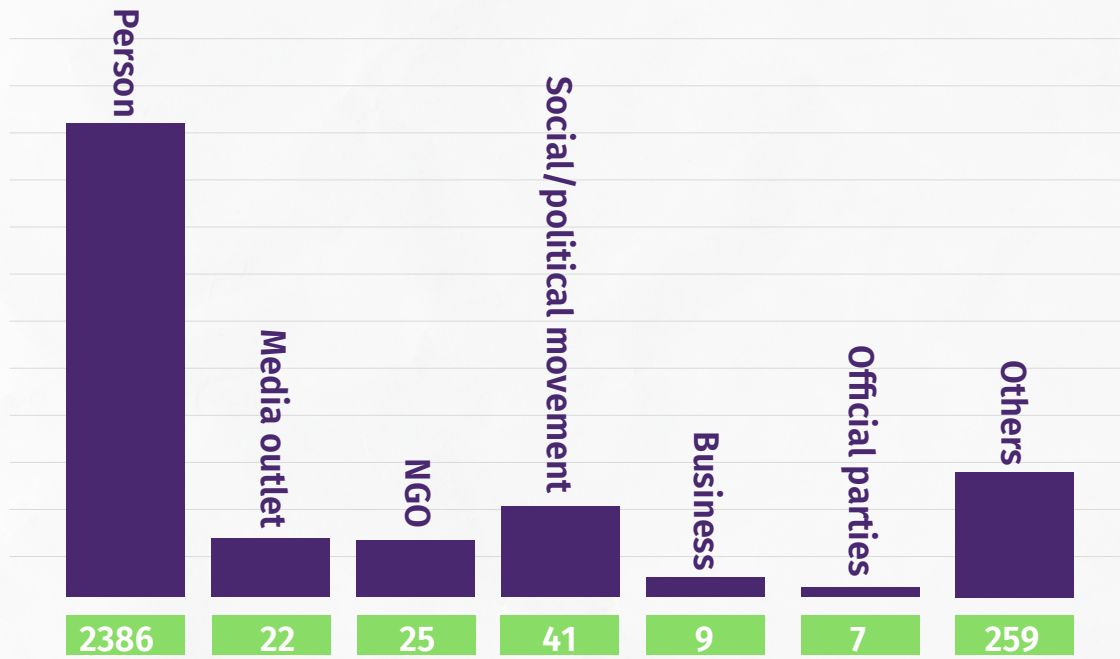
Disaggregation of violations by quarter



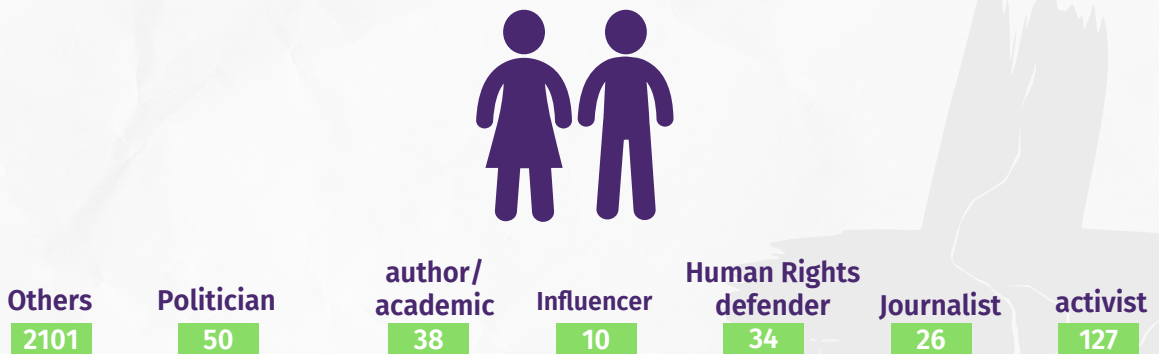
Disaggregation of violations by platform



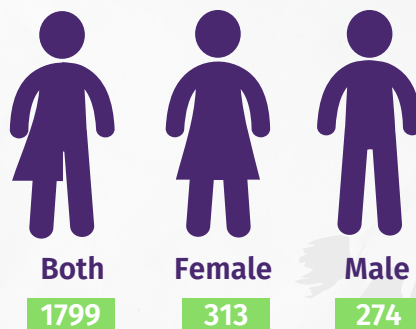
Disaggregation of violations by affected-body type



Disaggregation of violations by victim type⁴⁶

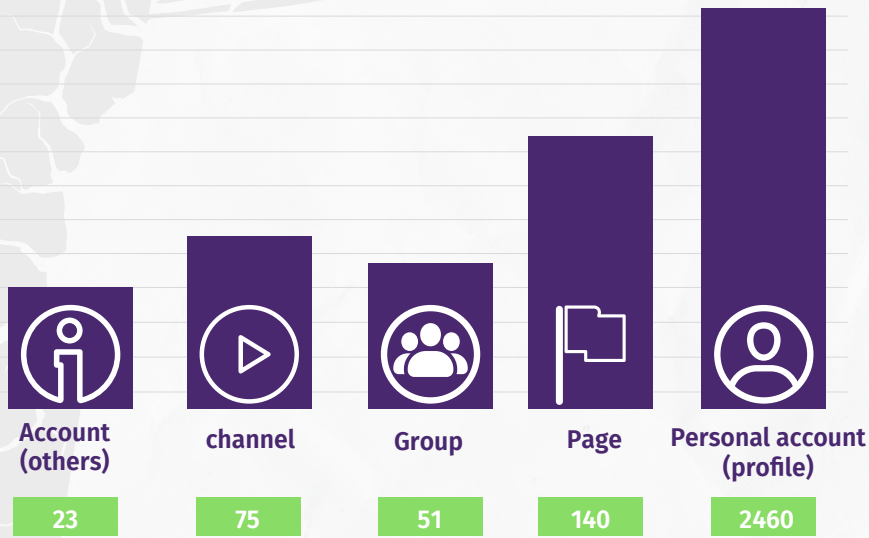


Disaggregation of victims by gender

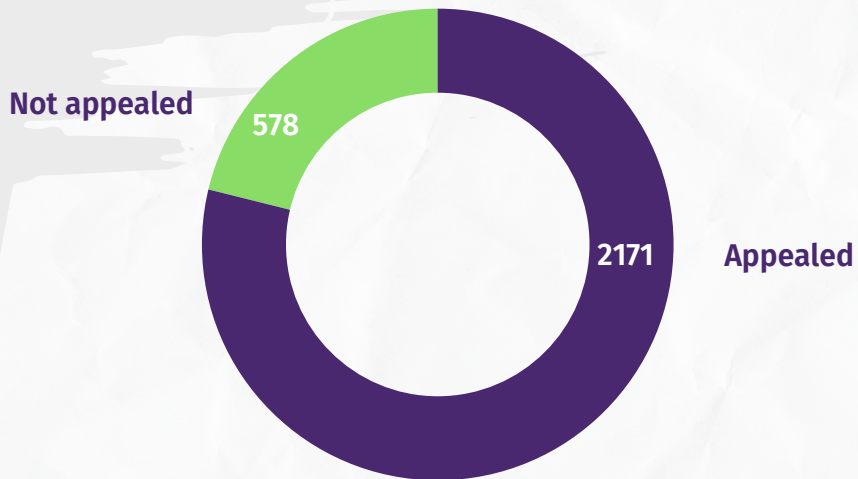


⁴⁶ A person may have more than one characteristic at the same time, for example, a political activist and a journalist, and therefore the characteristics are more than the number of affected people.

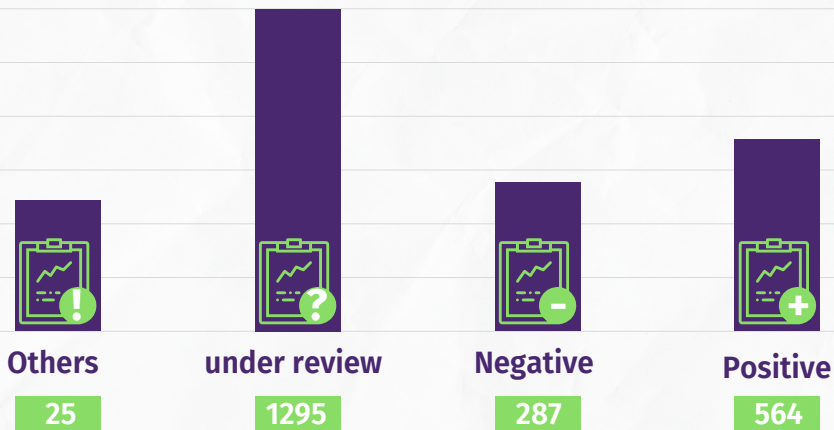
Classification of victims according to the type of account on social media platforms



Number of violations followed by the company



Disaggregation of the companies' responses to the reports that 7amleh has followed up to date





Digital Economy

In response to PayPal's discriminatory business practices against the Palestinian population in the occupied territory, eleven members of the US Congress, including Representatives Mark Pocan, Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, and others, sent a letter urging the CEO of PayPal, Dan Schulman, to expand its services to include Palestinians in the occupied territory, to pressure the company to change its policy. The proposal affirms the company's responsibility to adhere to non-discriminatory practices and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. This initiative is part of the "PayPal4Palestine" campaign launched in 2016 in cooperation with 7amleh. The campaign highlights how PayPal services are available in Israel, including in the illegal settlements, while Palestinians are prevented from accessing these services. This negatively affects the economic opportunities and development available to Palestinians.⁴⁷

Palestinians are still struggling to gain full access to some global digital platforms, such as YouTube and Amazon. For example, YouTube blocks Palestinians from its revenue-sharing program, which means Palestinians can create content on the platform, but they cannot generate revenue from it. This is deemed as a targeted assault on the Palestinian economy orchestrated by digital companies collaborating with Israel, particularly amidst elevated unemployment stemming from mobility challenges in the West Bank and especially in the Gaza Strip.⁴⁸

Bitcoin has gained great popularity in the occupied Palestinian territory, in light of the absence of PayPal services, particularly in Gaza. But at the same time, the company recently closed the Binance accounts of many Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza at the request of the Israeli authorities.⁴⁹ Also, Bitcoin is a less trusted medium compared to PayPal. The inability to access PayPal limits the opportunities available to Palestinian companies, especially in the field of software development and e-commerce.⁵⁰

Also, WISE, which provides financial services, most notably cross-border digital money transfers, closed many accounts belonging to Palestinian institutions, especially after the events of October 7 and the subsequent Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip. Consequently, many reliable financial outlets for money transfers have been closed to Palestinians,

47 7amleh News. 7amleh Center cooperates with 11 members of the Congress to send a letter to PayPal to pressure them to open the company's services to Palestinians. 24/05/2023. Link [Here](#)

48 India Today Tech, Palestinians struggle with limited access to global platforms like YouTube, Amazon and PayPal. 29.11.2023. Link [Here](#)

49 Bitcoin news. Palestine and "BTC" are converging as PayPal steps away. 06/08/2023. Link [Here](#)

50 Louisa Alexa. Why Bitcoin Can't Replace PayPal in Palestine. Forbes, 23/06/2023. Link [Here](#)

and this will have negative repercussions on the Palestinian digital economy and digital transformation.

In the last months of 2023, 7amleh documented 12 instances of account suspensions, restrictions, or transfer denials that related to Palestinian accounts on platforms such as PayPal, Amazon, Binance, and others, in addition to the WISE accounts mentioned above.



**Special Emphasis: Repercussions
and Transformations after the
Events of October 7**

Special Emphasis: Repercussions and Transformations after the Events of October 7

General Overview

The human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territory deteriorated following the start of the Israeli war on Gaza after October 7. This was equally true for the situation of digital rights on various social media platforms. This generally restricted freedom of expression in various forms, and also allowed room for incitement and the spread of hate speech against Palestinians.

7amleh monitored racist phenomena on Meta's platforms, including those related to restricting Palestinian content, such as hiding or restricting the access of posts by influencers, journalists, and activists, which contributed to a decrease in the number of views and obstructed access to information. As a result, Meta blocked the ability to comment, under the pretext of preventing unspecified activities to protect the standards of the platform's community. The word "(Praise be to God) الحمد لله - Palestinian" was also automatically translated into "Palestinian terrorist" on Instagram, before the platform apologized and corrected the error. Al-Qadi added that the freedom of assembly and organization of Palestinians has been subjected to exclusions and violations. Furthermore, artificial intelligence generated tools within the platforms have sided with the Israeli narrative in several prominent examples, such as automatically translating the word "Palestinian" into "terrorist". Meta acknowledged this and corrected this "error".⁵¹

From October 7, 2023 until the end of the year, 7amleh documented a total of 3,035 digital violations, including 910 removal/restriction violations against Palestinians or pro-Palestine accounts, and eight digital financial accounts such as PayPal. In addition to 2,117 instances of violent, hateful, and inciteful content in the Hebrew language against Palestinians and those who support their rights.

Meta's Platforms

Meta was at the forefront of companies exercising censorship over Palestinian voices and narratives, even after the improvements that the company pledged to implement following the [Due Diligence Report](#) completed by the independent auditing firm Business for Social Responsibility (BSR). 7amleh continues to detect and document numerous cases of silencing, repression, restriction, and deletion of Palestinian content on the various Meta platforms since October 7.⁵²

⁵¹ Research interview. Ahmad Al-Qadi, Monitoring and Documentation Manager for 7amleh Center. 15/11/2023

⁵² 7amleh Publications. A Briefing on the Palestinian Digital Rights Situation Since October 7th, 2023" 01/11/2023. Link [Here](#)

The following are some of the discriminatory phenomena that were monitored and documented by 7amleh:

- The number of views on influencers' stories decreases, and other stories are preferred over them, because they contain news from other pages (Shadowbanning).
- [Meta has changed the default visibility settings](#) for all its users in the region from "public" to "[friends only](#)" in order to limit the number of people who can read and comment on public posts.
- It also changed comment settings to limit who can comment to [your circle of friends or page followers for more than 24 hours](#).
- [Blocking the ability to comment](#) under the pretext of preventing unspecified activities to protect the standards of the platform community.
- [Automatically translating the word "Palestinian" into "Palestinian terrorist", which the company fixed](#) without any clarification.
- Repeatedly considering [the symbolic image of the Palestinian flag as a negative/harmful symbol](#) and automatically hiding it in posts (without deleting it).
- A programming error resulted in the hiding of content showing [victims of the bombing of the Arab National Hospital under the pretext that the images violated the platform's community standards and included images of nudity](#).
- Excessive restrictions on [Arabic content and considering it a violation](#), while leaving out the same content if expressed in English.
- [Maintaining Hebrew hashtags calling for the erasure of Gaza \(such as #למחוקאתעזה\) without censorship or accountability](#), despite the blatant incitement to violence these hashtags contain.

On the other hand, Meta censored the hashtag [#طوفان_الاقصى](#) in the Arabic language since the first day of the escalation, which it did not do with regard to the parallel hashtag in Hebrew [#חרבות_ברזל](#) (#Iron_Swords); It did not see it as a violation of its policies.

In numerous instances, the issue arises from excessive control over Palestinian content and observed inconsistencies in enforcing company policies. The company intentionally reduced the level of confidence interval for content removal from 80% to 25%, implying that any content flagged as potentially violating by automated models would be removed

if it exceeded the 25% threshold. Consequently, this resulted in the disproportionate removal and heightened restriction of Arabic content.

The Israeli Cyber Unit contributed to restricting digital content supportive of Palestinians, as the unit claims that it submitted 8,000 requests to Facebook and TikTok to remove content supportive of Palestine within a month of the war, with a response rate of 94%. Success rates vary with other platforms. It is worth noting that the Cyber Unit stands behind the request to censor critical hashtags, including the Arabic hashtag #طوفان_الاقصى via the aforementioned Meta platforms.⁵³

Violent speech

X has also become a digital space full of incitement, hatred, and violence against Palestinians, due to the absence of any real management of Hebrew content, and also the platform's lack of cooperation with civil society and human rights organizations. The platform least capable of combating incitement and violent speech is Telegram, as it is not at all concerned with content management. Consequently, this has become a source of great concern throughout the crisis, given that it allows explicit calls for genocide of Palestinians, collective punishment, or calls for burning property and vandalism in Palestinian villages and towns.⁵⁴

The risk of violations on TikTok has increased following October 7. Violations on TikTok are not on the same scale as other platforms, but there is a sharp escalation in the prosecution and censorship of Palestinian content. As for the inflammatory Hebrew content, there has been a positive development in this regard, in terms of removing a large portion of the violent content as a result of reporting carried out by civil society. As for Google's YouTube, pro-war propaganda is sponsored by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and much of it contains particularly violent material and hate speech.

Israeli Authorities Persecute Activists

In addition to this, illegal persecutions and dissemination of personal information are increasing, as the Israeli authorities cooperate with targeted harassment groups on social media platforms. These groups publish personal information about influential Palestinian activists and journalists, which increases campaigns of harassment, investigations, and arrests by the authorities and security services. This is a dangerous indicator of the cooperation between official authorities and violent/hateful online harassment groups.

53 Thomas, Brewster. Israel Has Asked Meta and TikTok To Remove 8,000 Posts Related To Hamas War. Forbes, 14.11.2023. Link [Here](#)

54 ibid.

7amleh documented forced searches of mobile phones in East Jerusalem. It was reported that the Israeli occupation forces forcibly searched the phones of Palestinians in East Jerusalem at checkpoints, and when any content was found on these devices that expressed solidarity with Gaza or documents of human rights violations by Israeli officials in the region, it was cause for arbitrary arrests or physical violence.⁵⁵

Prosecuting activists who support Palestinian rights

Digital expressions of solidarity with Palestine have been restricted at universities in Europe and the United States. As an example, Wayne State University in the United States faced allegations of viewpoint discrimination and limitations on communication channels with the Student Senate due to a statement supporting the Palestinians.⁵⁶ This type of crackdown has also occurred in the United Kingdom, where reports have pointed to a “culture of fear” resulting from social media surveillance, targeting individuals, especially faculty and students of color who support Palestine.⁵⁷

The European Commissioner for the Internal Market and Enterprises, Thierry Breton, made statements regarding the obligations that social media platforms must adhere to under the Digital Services Act, which relates to content management in crisis situations. Unfortunately, these statements did not refer to the experiences of Palestinians during the escalation of violence, and the European Union’s pressure to remove content that was primarily supportive of Palestine.⁵⁸

In the United States, the US Congress Energy and Commerce Committee called on electronic platforms to inform the committee of their policies regarding managing illegal content, while ignoring the Palestinian experience and focusing strictly on Israel’s concerns. Likewise, Senator Ted Cruz led the Senate Commerce Committee in dealing with the digital platforms X, Meta, TikTok, and Google, completely ignoring the Palestinian experience and focusing on how the platforms adhere to U.S. laws and sanctions that require proactive censorship of content which could be in violation of terrorism laws.

55 *ibid.*

56 Jenna Prestininzi. Investigation: Emails reveal WSU officials stifling student Palestine advocacy. The South End, 2/01/2023. Link [Here](#)

57 Middle East Eye, News. Israel-Palestine war: Social media surveillance creates a ‘culture of fear’ on UK campuses. 21/11/2023. Link [Here](#)

58 Euronews. EU’s Thierry Breton gives Elon Musk 24-hour ultimatum to deal with Israel-Hamas misinformation on X. 11/10/2023. Link [Here](#)



Report summary

Report summary

- The residents of Gaza encountered significant hurdles in the realm of digital infrastructure and online access after the intensified siege and the Israeli war. The damage inflicted on communication infrastructure and the resulting disruption of internet services made accessing communication tools a huge challenge for the population.
- The Israeli authorities increased the use and application of surveillance technologies such as “facial recognition” in the territory occupied since 1967, especially in Hebron and East Jerusalem, and the deployment of checkpoints and barriers.
- A special task force was established to combat “incitement,” led by Itamar Ben Gvir, a far-right member of the new government in Israel, who began restricting freedom of expression and taking strict measures against Palestinians. He led an “anti-incitement” team, monitoring and removing inflammatory content on the Internet and opening criminal investigations in this context.
- On May 7 2023, a proposal was submitted to amend Israel’s anti-terrorism law, giving the security services the power to prosecute alleged supporters of terrorism, in particular targeting the less serious crime of belonging to a terrorist organization. This amendment provides a three-year prison sentence for acts such as displaying symbols or posting supportive content, raising concerns about potential violations of freedom of expression.
- On November 8, 2023, the Knesset ratified the Ninth Amendment to the Constitution criminalizing the passive consumption of publications defined as terrorist materials, even without intent or actions. Critics say this law restricts access to information and freedom of expression, especially influencing Palestinian activists and influencers on social media.
- It was observed that the Israeli authorities carried out increased arrests of ordinary users, activists, journalists, and influencers, based on opinion posts on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and others, as a result of the war on Gaza.
- Meta has significantly discriminated against Arabic-language content on its various platforms. Whereas TikTok adopted a more balanced policy. While X allowed a margin of freedom to publish what was happening in Palestine. However, it also allowed a large margin of freedom to publish violent speeches against Palestinians in Hebrew.

- Meta profited from publishing violent content in Hebrew through its paid advertisements program. Meanwhile, Telegram adopted a policy of freedom without controls, which has paved the way for unrestrained incitement and threats.
- Violent and inflammatory rhetoric against Palestinians has escalated dramatically on Hebrew-language social media platforms, where incitement and calls for violence and extermination appear in an unprecedented manner.



Recommendations

Recommendations

Companies

The social media company must take effective policies to protect the digital rights of Palestinians, including:

- Transparency in automated content management.
- Conduct a comprehensive audit and provide full transparency about the datasets used in AI training.
- Technology companies must comply with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
- Ensure that its content management policies are enforced fairly with all users of various nationalities and languages, while taking into account the socio-economic and political contexts when implementing its policies.
- Involve civil society institutions and organizations, specialists, academics and experts in formulating and implementing these policies in a cooperative manner.
- Take decisive measures to enhance transparency, such as publishing content censorship requests that it receives from governments, and more specifically from repressive governments, occupation authorities, and bodies affiliated with those governments, such as the Cyber Unit. Additionally, it is crucial to unveil any “technical errors” that result in discriminatory practices against specific nationalities and communities.
- Commitment to conduct regular, comprehensive and independent reviews (due diligence) to ensure compliance with human rights.
- Invest in a language classifier for the Hebrew language in order to manage content fairly and equally in the sharp rise in incitement and hate speech in Israeli society against the Palestinians.
- Digital economy companies such as PayPal must adhere to business and human rights principles and begin working to end digital discrimination in their electronic payment services in the occupied Palestinian territory.
- Telegram must adhere to the principles of business and human rights and change its policy of “absolute freedom” for users. It has a duty to ban and prevent users from engaging in digital activity that threatens the freedoms of others.

Civil Society Organizations and Non-profit Institutions

- Strengthen collaboration and coordinate teamwork in an intersectional manner, in order to protect Palestinian digital rights and digital rights in general.
- Increase pressure on various governments and companies with the aim of obliging them to adhere to international law and the principles of labor and human rights.
- Work continuously and steadily to understand the impact of digital policies and digital services provided by governments and companies on human rights and hold them accountable for these policies and services.
- Establish training initiatives and ongoing awareness campaigns addressing detrimental behaviors on social media platforms, including defamation, blackmail, incitement, and dissemination of misleading news. Collaborate with schools, universities, and government institutions to implement these programs effectively.
- Continue monitoring and documenting digital rights violations and analyzing their impact on the Palestinian human rights situation as a whole.
- Universities and colleges should develop courses on digital rights, to increase interest in the politics of discrimination and inequality within the digital world.

Palestinian Authority

- Enhance effective communication with pertinent Palestinian ministries, including the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, as well as engage with social media platforms. Encourage them to cease digital discrimination against Palestinians and advocate for improved reporting mechanisms on Hebrew-language content that systematically incites against the Palestinian population.
- The draft law on the protection of privacy and personal data needs to be presented for public review and discussion with civil society and relevant parties.
- Establish an independent oversight body to work on the right to privacy.
- Work to develop Palestine's presence digitally and the presence of the Palestinian narrative in several languages in cooperation with ministries, civil society institutions, experts, and various relevant parties.
- Activate the activities of the Ministerial Digital Rights Committee to raise awareness of Palestinian digital rights across school and university curricula in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

- Push towards continuing the development of the open government data initiative, such as forming a follow-up committee and ensuring work within clear mechanisms and timelines.
- Amend a decree on the Cybercrime Law, work to enhance freedom of expression online, and stop arrests based on criticism of official figures under the pretext of “insulting high dignitaries.”
- Take all necessary measures to ensure work to strengthen the rule of law and work to protect and enhance the safety and security of Palestinians digitally, regardless of their gender, partisan and religious affiliations.

Third party countries

- Put pressure on Israeli authorities to stop their systematic violations of Palestinian digital rights, among other human rights.
- Put pressure on technology companies in general, and social media companies in particular, to stop any discriminatory practices against Palestinians, among other oppressed communities around the world, and push towards enhancing transparency in these companies’ content moderation policies and on the nature of their cooperation with various state actors.
- Ensure that technology companies comply with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and international humanitarian law when designing and implementing their various policies.
- Stop the use of NSO Group technologies, spyware, and all similar surveillance technologies, which were developed by violating the rights of Palestinians by experimenting on them, and push towards banning their use.
- Immediately halt the sale, transfer and use of surveillance technology; Until adequate human rights guarantees are developed, consistent with international conventions, including the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
- Commit to the right to freedom of opinion and expression and adopt the definition of anti-Semitism, agreed upon by Jewish and Palestinian human rights defenders, such as the Jerusalem Declaration on Anti-Semitism, rather than the IHRA definition which is often weaponised to stifle criticism of Israeli policies.⁵⁹
- Promote political debate free of all forms of racism and hatred, including anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and other types of racist speech.

⁵⁹ The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism. 2023. Link [Here](#)

حملة - المركز العربي
لتطوير الإعلام الاجتماعي
Zamleh - The Arab Center For
the Advancement of Social Media

