

Freedom on the Net 2025 - Italy



Key Developments, June 1, 2024 – May 31, 2025

Internet freedom in Italy declined during the coverage period, due to an expansion in the legal scope for website blocking and confirmation that the government had deployed spyware to surveil activists. Pro-Kremlin influence operations and cyberattacks were an ongoing concern. Despite these challenges, the country retained a relatively open online environment.

- In October 2024, the popular cloud-storage service Google Drive was briefly blocked in Italy based on an order under Piracy Shield, a legal mechanism administered by the Communications Regulatory Authority (AGCOM) that allows copyright holders to demand the rapid blocking—within 30 minutes—of internet protocol (IP) addresses that they accuse of illegally disseminating content, particularly live sports broadcasts (B1 and B3).¹
- In February 2025, AGCOM approved an expanded version of Piracy Shield, after Parliament adopted the necessary legal amendments in October 2024. The changes would compel virtual private network (VPN) and domain name system (DNS) providers, not just internet service providers as under the old system, to restrict access to sites that have been accused of illegally streaming any live event, again within the 30-minute timeframe. The new rules also require search engines to deindex the designated sites (B3 and C4).²
- In February 2025, *The Guardian* reported that a journalist and two prominent migration activists were among 90 people notified in late January that their devices had likely been targeted in 2024 with the Graphite spyware product, developed by the Israeli firm Paragon. In March 2025, the University of Toronto’s Citizen Lab identified an additional Italian migration activist whose device was found to have been targeted using Graphite.³ The Italian government and its external intelligence service admitted that they had used Paragon products but denied spying on journalists and activists.⁴ In June 2025, after the coverage period, a parliamentary intelligence oversight committee released a report confirming that the government had used Graphite against at least two of the identified migration activists (C5).⁵
- In December 2024, Italy’s data protection authority imposed a €15 million (\$15.9 million) fine on OpenAI, the US-based developer of the popular ChatGPT chatbot, because the company had failed to report a March 2023 data breach and processed Italians’ personal information without legal authorization, among other infractions (C6).⁶

Political Overview

Italy's parliamentary system of government features competitive multiparty elections. Civil liberties are generally respected, but concerns about the rights of migrants and LGBT+ people persist. Regional inequalities are long-standing and substantial. Endemic problems with corruption and organized crime pose an enduring challenge to the rule of law and economic growth.

*This report has been abridged for Freedom on the Net 2025 due to **ongoing budget constraints**. Please consider making a **donation** to support future editions of this vital resource.*

*For additional background information, see last year's **full report**.*

A Obstacles to Access

A1 0-6 pts

Do infrastructural limitations restrict access to the internet or the speed and quality of internet connections?	6 / 6
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Score Change: The score improved from 5 to 6 because internet access rates increased, according to some measurement sources.⁷

A2 0-3 pts

Is access to the internet prohibitively expensive or beyond the reach of certain segments of the population for geographical, social, or other reasons?	2 / 3
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A3 0-6 pts

Does the government exercise technical or legal control over internet infrastructure for the purposes of restricting connectivity?	6 / 6
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A4 0-6 pts

Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers?	5 / 6
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A5 0-4 pts

Do national regulatory bodies that oversee service providers and digital technology fail to operate in a free, fair, and independent manner?	3 / 4
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B Limits on Content

B1 0-6 pts

Does the state block or filter, or compel service providers to block or filter, internet content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards?	4 / 6
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B2 0-4 pts

Do state or nonstate actors employ legal, administrative, or other means to force publishers, content hosts, or digital platforms to delete content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards?

3 /
4

B3 0-4 pts

Do restrictions on the internet and digital content lack transparency, proportionality to the stated aims, or an independent appeals process?

2 /
4

*Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 because Piracy Shield—a legal mechanism that requires the rapid blocking of any sites accused of illegally streaming live sporting and other events without adequate opportunities for appeal—was expanded in scope during the coverage period.*⁸

B4 0-4 pts

Do online journalists, commentators, and ordinary users practice self-censorship?

3 / 4

B5 0-4 pts

Are online sources of information controlled or manipulated by the government or other powerful actors to advance a particular political interest?

3 /
4

B6 0-3 pts

Are there economic or regulatory constraints that negatively affect users' ability to publish content online?

3 /
3

B7 0-4 pts

Does the online information landscape lack diversity and reliability?

4 / 4

B8 0-6 pts

Do conditions impede users' ability to mobilize, form communities, and campaign, particularly on political and social issues?

6 /
6

C Violations of User Rights

C1 0-6 pts

Do the constitution or other laws fail to protect rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and press freedom, including on the internet, and are they enforced by a judiciary that lacks independence?

4 /
6

C2 0-4 pts

Are there laws that assign criminal penalties or civil liability for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards?

2 /
4

C3 0-6 pts

Are individuals penalized for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards? | 5 / 6

C4 0-4 pts

Does the government place restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption? | 3 / 4

C5 0-6 pts

Does state surveillance of internet activities infringe on users' right to privacy? | 2 / 6

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 because the government was found to have used commercial spyware to surveil prominent activists who worked on migration issues.⁹

C6 0-6 pts

Does monitoring and collection of user data by service providers and other technology companies infringe on users' right to privacy? | 3 / 6

C7 0-5 pts

Are individuals subject to extralegal intimidation or physical violence by state authorities or any other actor in relation to their online activities? | 3 / 5

C8 0-3 pts

Are websites, governmental and private entities, service providers, or individual users subject to widespread hacking and other forms of cyberattack? | 2 / 3

Footnotes

- 1 Mike Masnick, "Italy's 'Piracy Shield' Misfires, Blocks Google Drive In Anti-Piracy Blunder," Techdirt, October 21, 2024, <https://www.techdirt.com/2024/10/21/italys-piracy-shield-misfires-block...>
- 2 Andy Maxwell, "Italy Approves Piracy Shield VPN/DNS Proposal, Risk of Prison For ISPs Intact [Updated]," Torrent Freak, October 1, 2024, <https://torrentfreak.com/italy-approves-piracy-shield-vpn-dns-proposal-...>; Chiara Castro, "Italy to require VPN and DNS providers to block pirated content," Tech Radar, February 19, 2025, <https://www.techradar.com/vpn/vpn-privacy-security/italy-to-require-vpn...>
- 3 Bill Marczak, John Scott-Railton, Kate Robertson, Astrid Perry, Rebekah Brown, Bahr Abdul Razzak, Siena Anstis, and Ron Deibert, "Virtue or Vice? A First Look at Paragon's Proliferating Spyware Operations," The Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto, March 19, 2025, <https://citizenlab.ca/2025/03/a-first-look-at-paragons-proliferating-sp...>; Stephanie Kirchgaessner and Angela Giuffrida, "Italian founder of migrant rescue group 'targeted with spyware'," The Guardian, February 5, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/feb/05/activists-critical-o...>
- 4 Nicole Winfield and Paolo Santalucia, "Italian government denies it spied on journalists and migrant activists using Paragon spyware," Associated Press, February 13, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/italy-israeli-spyware-paragon-whatsapp-meta-...>; Bill Marczak, John Scott-Railton, Kate Robertson, Astrid Perry, Rebekah Brown, Bahr Abdul Razzak, Siena Anstis, and Ron Deibert, "Virtue or Vice? A First Look at Paragon's Proliferating Spyware Operations," The Citizen Lab at the University of

Toronto, March 19, 2025, <https://citizenlab.ca/2025/03/a-first-look-at-paragons-proliferating-sp...>

- **5** Bill Marczak and John Scott-Railton, "Graphite Caught First Forensic Confirmation of Paragon's iOS Mercenary Spyware Finds Journalists Targeted," The Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto, June 12, 2025, <https://citizenlab.ca/2025/06/first-forensic-confirmation-of-paragons-i...>
- **6** Ravie Lakshmanan, "Italy Fines OpenAI €15 Million for ChatGPT GDPR Data Privacy Violations," The Hacker News, December 23, 2024, <https://thehackernews.com/2024/12/italy-fines-openai-15-million-for.html>.
- **7** International Telecommunications Union Datahub, "Italy, Individuals Using the Internet," accessed September 2024, <https://datahub.itu.int/data/?e=ITA&i=11624>.
- **8** Mike Masnick, "Italy's 'Piracy Shield' Misfires, Blocks Google Drive In Anti-Piracy Blunder," Techdirt, October 21, 2024, <https://www.techdirt.com/2024/10/21/italys-piracy-shield-misfires-block...>
- **9** Bill Marczak and John Scott-Railton, "Graphite Caught First Forensic Confirmation of Paragon's iOS Mercenary Spyware Finds Journalists Targeted," The Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto, June 12, 2025, <https://citizenlab.ca/2025/06/first-forensic-confirmation-of-paragons-i...>