



FREEDOM ON THE NET 2025

Saudi Arabia

NOT FREE

25
/100

A. <u>Obstacles to Access</u>	13 / ₂₅
B. <u>Limits on Content</u>	7 / ₃₅
C. <u>Violations of User Rights</u>	5 / ₄₀

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

25 /100 Not Free

Scores are based on a scale of 0 (least free) to 100 (most free). See the methodology and report acknowledgements.

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

Saudi Arabia continued to rank as one of the world's lowest-scoring countries on internet freedom. Internet users in the kingdom faced extensive censorship and surveillance as well as limited access to diverse content, and users who criticized the government remained subject to persecution, with some receiving decades-long prison sentences for peaceful online expression.

- Saudi Arabia hosted the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in December 2024, and authorities pressured IGF officials to take down an online video and transcript that included a prominent Saudi activist's critical remarks about Saudi Arabia's human rights record. The video was later reposted to the video-sharing platform YouTube with major portions of the critical comments removed (B2). ¹
- Internet users continued to receive lengthy prison sentences in reprisal for their social media activity. ² A British national was sentenced to 10 years in prison for a deleted post in August 2024, and in October it was reported that Mohammed al-Ghamdi, a cartoonist for the Qatar-based newspaper *Lusail*, had been tried in secret and sentenced to 23 years in prison for cartoons that were deemed insulting to Saudi authorities (C3). ³
- In June 2025, after the coverage period, online journalist Turki al-Jasser was executed after being convicted of terrorism and treason due to online publications in which he discussed politically sensitive issues such as Palestine and women's rights (C3). ⁴
- Jailed online journalists and activists faced torture and mistreatment while in prison. ⁵ Prior to his release in February 2025, Assad al-Ghamdi, who was jailed for social media posts in 2022, was subjected to various forms of psychological and physical torture, causing injuries that in some cases required surgical treatment (C7). ⁶
- An online IGF panel that was hosted in Saudi Arabia in December 2024 was hacked by unidentified attackers immediately after participants mentioned the 2018 state-sponsored killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi (C8). ⁷

Political Overview

Saudi Arabia's absolute monarchy restricts almost all political rights and civil liberties. No officials at the national level are elected. The regime relies on pervasive surveillance, the criminalization of dissent, appeals to sectarianism and ethnicity, and public spending supported by oil revenues to maintain power. Women and members of religious minority groups face extensive discrimination in law and in practice. Working conditions for the large expatriate labor force are often exploitative.

*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

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

A3 0-6 pts

Does the government exercise technical or legal control over internet infrastructure for the purposes of restricting connectivity?

4/6

A4 0-6 pts

Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers?

1/6

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?

0/4

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?

1/6

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?

1/4

B3 0-4 pts

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

1/4

B4 0-4 pts

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

0/4

B5 0-4 pts

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

0/4

interest?

B6 0-3 pts

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

0/3

B7 0-4 pts

Does the online information landscape lack diversity and reliability?

1/4

B8 0-6 pts

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

3/6

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?

0/6

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?

0/4

C3 0-6 pts

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

0/6

C4 0-4 pts

Does the government place restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption?

1/4

C5 0-6 pts

Does state surveillance of internet activities infringe on users' right to privacy?

0/6

C6 0-6 pts

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

1/6

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?

1/5

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 ALQST, "Online hacks and censorship taint UN Internet Governance Forum in Riyadh," December 23, 2024, <https://www.alqst.org/en/post/online-hacks-and-censorship-taint-un-inte...>; Human Rights Watch, "UN Censors Criticism of Saudi Arabia at Internet Conference," February 6, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/02/06/un-censors-criticism-saudi-arabia-i...>; Dania Akkad, "UN admits internet conference panel was edited after Saudi complaint," Middle East Eye, February 7, 2025,

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/un-acknowledges-internet-conference-....>

- 2** Committee to Protect Journalists, “Saudi Arabia sentences cartoonist Mohammed al-Ghamdi to 23 years,” October 18, 2024, <https://cpj.org/2024/10/saudi-arabia-sentences-cartoonist-mohammed-al-g...>; Amnesty International Canada, “Saudi Arabia: Death sentence for social media posts commuted,” November 14, 2024, <https://amnesty.ca/urgent-actions/saudi-arabia-death-sentence-for-socia...>
- 3** Patrick Wintour, “British man being held in Saudi Arabia jailed for 10 years, say lawyers,” the Guardian, May 12, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/12/british-man-being-held-in...>; Jemimah Steinfeld, “Ten years in Saudi prison for a tweet,” Index on Censorship, May 19, 2025, <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2025/05/ten-years-saudi-prison-tweet-...>; Amnesty International UK, “Saudi Arabia: British citizen Ahmed al-Doush receives a 10 year sentence,” May 13, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/saudi-arabia-british-citizen-...>; Committee to Protect Journalists, “Saudi Arabia sentences cartoonist Mohammed al-Ghamdi to 23 years,” October 18, 2024, <https://cpj.org/2024/10/saudi-arabia-sentences-cartoonist-mohammed-al-g...>
- 4** Reporters Without Borders, “Reign of terror in Saudi Arabia: the execution of journalist Turki al-Jasser demands an international response,” June 17, 2025, <https://rsf.org/en/reign-terror-saudi-arabia-execution-journalist-turki...>; Committee to Protect Journalists, “Saudi Arabia executes journalist Turki al-Jasser on treason, terrorism charges,” June 14, 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/06/saudi-arabia-executes-journalist-turki-al-jasse...>; UNESCO, “UNESCO Director-General condemns the execution of journalist Turki al-Jasser in Saudi Arabia,” July 1, 2025, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-director-general-condemns-exe...>
- 5** Sanad Rights Foundation, “After Seven Years of Detention... Saudi Arabia Executes Journalist Turki Al-Jasser,” June 14, 2025, <https://sanad.uk/2025/06/14/after-seven-years-of-detention-saudi-arabia...>; Committee to Protect Journalists, “Saudi Arabia executes journalist Turki al-Jasser on treason, terrorism charges,” June 14, 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/06/saudi-arabia-executes-journalist-turki-al-jasse...>; Committee to Protect Journalists, “Saudi Arabia sentences cartoonist Mohammed al-Ghamdi to 23 years,” October 18, 2024, <https://cpj.org/2024/10/saudi-arabia-sentences-cartoonist-mohammed-al-g...>

More footnotes



On Saudi Arabia

See all data, scores & information on this country or territory.

See More >

Country Facts

Population

36,410,000

Global Freedom Score

9/100 **Not Free**

Internet Freedom Score

25/100 **Not Free**

Freedom in the World Status

Not Free

Networks Restricted

No

Social Media Blocked

No

Websites Blocked

Yes

Pro-government Commentators

Yes

Users Arrested

Yes

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2024

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