

Freedom on the Net 2025 - Tunisia



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

Internet freedom in Tunisia continued to deteriorate in the wake of President Kaïs Saïed’s 2021 seizure of extraordinary powers. The authorities implemented restrictive laws, imposed prison sentences for social media posts, and presided over a repressive environment in which the operating space for independent media and freedom of expression online was steadily reduced.

- Authorities ordered the removal of online content and pressured outlets to engage in prepublication censorship. For example, in July 2024, the head of the official news agency Tunis Afrique Presse, Najeh Missaoui, ordered the deletion of a widely distributed article about a new candidate entering the presidential race ahead of the October 2024 election.¹ Also during the coverage period, several privately owned media organizations preemptively removed controversial political programs and outspoken news commentators who were previously critical of the regime, and authorities imposed media blackouts on sensitive topics, such as a highly politicized trial of opposition figures and other dissidents in early 2025 (B2 and B5).²
- In August 2024, a journalist from the independent news website Tomedia who was covering the presidential election had his accreditation withdrawn by the Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE). The National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists condemned the move as an arbitrary decision designed to silence critical reporting on the election and the ISIE (B6).³
- In October 2024, the Ministry of Justice announced that anyone who created or shared images or videos that undermine “moral values” would be prosecuted. At least 10 social media influencers were subsequently indicted for such “morality” offenses under vaguely worded laws, and by January 2025, five of them had received prison sentences ranging from 18 months to four and half years (C2 and C3).⁴
- A number of journalists were sentenced to prison for their online reporting during the coverage period. In one case, Chadha Hadj Mbarek, a journalist and social media content editor for the independent Tunisian content firm Instalingo, was sentenced to five years in prison in February 2025. She had been charged under Decree-Law No. 2022-54 for allegedly working on behalf of the opposition party Ennahda and distributing content that was critical of President Saïed and his government. In May, the Committee to Protect Journalists reported that Mbarek’s health was failing in prison and that authorities had denied her necessary medical care (C3 and C7).⁵

Political Overview

After the ouster of a longtime autocrat in 2011, Tunisia held a series of free multiparty elections, and citizens enjoyed considerable political rights and civil liberties under a constitution promulgated in 2014. However, corruption, economic challenges, security threats, and unresolved problems related to gender equality and transitional justice remained obstacles to full democratic consolidation. After his election in 2019, President Kaïs Saïed worked to transform the political system and expand his own executive authority. In 2021, Saïed invoked emergency powers and unilaterally dismissed the legislature and the prime minister. Since then, his administration has undermined Tunisia's other institutions, including the judiciary and the electoral commission, and engaged in campaigns of legal persecution against his opponents.

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?	5 / 6
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Score Change: The score improved from 4 to 5 because mobile internet speeds improved during the coverage period, according to some measurements.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
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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?	5 / 6
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A4 0-6 pts

Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers?	3 / 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?	2 / 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?

6 / 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?

2 / 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?

3 / 4

B4 0-4 pts

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

2 / 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?

2 / 4

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 because online media outlets experienced increasing pressure to follow the government line, and because of a surge in information manipulation campaigns on social media.⁷

B6 0-3 pts

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

2 / 3

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 because many independent online media outlets, which lacked the government connections necessary to secure stable funding, were reducing operations and faced possible closure for financial reasons, with at least one outlet closing entirely during the coverage period.⁸

B7 0-4 pts

Does the online information landscape lack diversity and reliability?

3 / 4

B8 0-6 pts

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

4 / 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?	2 / 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?	1 / 4
C3 0-6 pts	
Are individuals penalized for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards?	2 / 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
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 Bassam Khawaja, "Tunisia Hollows Out its Media Landscape Ahead of Elections," Human Rights Watch, August 12, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/12/tunisia-hollows-out-its-media-lands...>
- 2 Hanene Zbiss, "In Tunisia: Freedom of expression and media diversity in danger," Media Diversity Institute, December 12, 2024, <https://www.media-diversity.org/in-tunisia-freedom-of-expression-and-me...>; Mahdi Jlassi and Vanessa Szakal, "Tunisia: Authorities impose silence around political trial," Nawaat, March 22, 2025, <https://nawaat.org/2025/03/22/tunisia-authorities-impose-silence-around...>
- 3 "Tunisia: Union rejects withdrawal of accreditation for journalist covering election," Middle East Monitor, August 22, 2024, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20240822-tunisia-union-rejects-withdr...>

- 4“Tunisia: 'Moral values', the new pretext to repress freedoms,” Middle East Eye, January 27, 2025, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/tunisia-moral-values-new-pretext-rep...>
- 5Committee to Protect Journalists, “Tunisian journalist Chadha Hadj Mbarek sentenced to 5 years in prison,” February 7, 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/02/tunisian-journalist-chadha-hadj-mbarek-sentence...>; Committee to Protect Journalists, “Tunisian journalist’s health rapidly deteriorates in prison hunger strike,” May 16, 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/05/tunisian-journalists-health-rapidly-deteriorate...>
- 6Ookla, “Tunisia,” Speedtest, Accessed October 2025, <https://www.speedtest.net/global-index/tunisia>.
- 7Bassam Khawaja, “Tunisia Hollows Out its Media Landscape Ahead of Elections,” Human Rights Watch, August 12, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/12/tunisia-hollows-out-its-media-lands...>; Arab Reform Initiative, “Online Narratives and Manipulations: Tunisian and Regional Panorama,” January 21, 2025, <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/online-narratives-and-manipulat...>; Sahar Khamis, “Tunisia’s Fading Spring: Media Repression Amid Democratic Detours,” Middle East Council on Global Affairs, November 21, 2024, <https://mecouncil.org/publication/tunisias-fading-spring-media-repressi...>
- 8Hanene Zbiss, “In Tunisia: Freedom of expression and media diversity in danger,” Media Diversity Institute, December 12, 2024, <https://www.media-diversity.org/in-tunisia-freedom-of-expression-and-me...>; Reporters Without Borders, “Tunisia’s press freedom in dramatic decline,” May 9, 2025, <https://rsf.org/en/tunisia-s-press-freedom-dramatic-decline#:~:text=Rep...>; “Tunisie: le Journal ‘Acharaa Al-Magharibi’ met la clé sous le paillasson [Tunisia: The newspaper ‘Acharaa Al-Magharibi’ closes its doors],” Kapitalis, October 29, 2024, <https://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2024/10/29/tunisie-le-journal-acharaa-al-....>