

Freedom on the Net 2025 - Kenya



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

Internet freedom in Kenya declined significantly during the coverage period. The authorities responded harshly to mass protests by arbitrarily arresting online activists involved in the demonstrations, disrupting internet connectivity, and temporarily blocking some messaging applications. Surveillance concerns, smear campaigns against protest organizers, and abductions of internet users also persisted.¹

- Internet connectivity was disrupted for around seven hours on June 25, 2024, during protests that had been organized using the hashtag #RejectFinanceBill to oppose controversial tax increases under the proposed Finance Bill, 2024. Though telecommunications companies cited subsea cable problems, multiple technical analyses suggested that the authorities had intentionally restricted connectivity.² Signal and Telegram also showed signs of blocking for several hours during the protests (A3 and B1).³
- Advocacy against the proposed finance bill proliferated on social media: activists used AI chatbots to analyze the legislation and crowdfunding to pay for the medical bills of protesters who had been injured or killed, for example.⁴ However, ahead of the protests, platforms including Instagram, X, and TikTok allegedly removed the #RejectFinanceBill hashtag from their autocomplete functions, forcing users to type out the full hashtag to find relevant tagged content (B2 and B8).⁵
- Hundreds of people were arrested in connection with the protests, including digital activists.⁶ Authorities reportedly confiscated many detainees' devices and questioned them about their social media activity and links to the protests and digital activists.⁷ Arrests for online activities continued throughout the coverage period. For example, software developer Rose Njeri was detained in May 2025, and her whereabouts were unknown for several days before she eventually appeared in court. The arrest appeared to be connected to an online civic platform she had created, and she faced criminal charges under the Computer Misuse and Cybercrime Act.⁸ The law has increasingly been used against journalists, bloggers, and activists (C3).⁹
- In October 2024, the *Daily Nation*, Kenya's largest newspaper, reported that the mobile service provider Safaricom had provided security agencies access to its customers' call records, location information, and other data without court orders, and claimed that this assisted in the tracking and capturing of suspects. The investigation also found that call data records submitted to courts by Safaricom in cases related to suspected state-enforced disappearances showed signs of

inconsistency or manipulation.¹⁰ Safaricom denied the report, called for its retraction, halted its advertising contract with the Nation Media Group, and threatened to sue (C6).¹¹

- The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) documented 82 abductions and disappearances between June and December 2024.¹² Those targeted were generally critics of the authorities, and included online activists.¹³ Abductions spiked in December 2024 after AI-generated photos of President William Ruto in a coffin circulated online (C7).¹⁴
- In June 2025, after the coverage period, blogger Albert Ojwang died in police custody after being detained in connection with online criticism of a top police official. Police reportedly said his death resulted from an accident or a suicide, but an autopsy report found that he had been tortured.¹⁵ Protests took place in Nairobi and other locations after the news broke, with police in the capital deploying tear gas against demonstrators who attempted to march on the parliament; there were also reports of demonstrators setting cars on fire. The Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI) reported that at least three networks blocked the web version of Telegram during the protests; the blocks were reversed the same day they took effect (B1 and C7).¹⁶

*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**.*

Political Overview

Kenya holds regular and competitive multiparty elections. However, pervasive corruption and brutality by security forces remain serious problems. While the country's media and civil society sectors are vibrant, journalists and human rights defenders are vulnerable to restrictive laws and intimidation.

A Obstacles to Access

A1 0-6 pts

Do infrastructural limitations restrict access to the internet or the speed and quality of internet connections?

3 / 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?

1 / 3

A3 0-6 pts

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

4 / 6

Score Change: The score declined from 6 to 4 due to nationwide disruptions to internet connectivity during antigovernment protests that appeared to be intentional, according to multiple technical analyses.

A4 0-6 pts

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

4 / 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?

2 / 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?

4 / 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?

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?

2 / 4

B6 0-3 pts

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

2 / 3

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?

5 / 6

Score Change: The score declined from 6 to 5 due to a crackdown on protests that had been organized by activists and social media users.¹⁷

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?

3 / 6

Score Change: The score declined from 4 to 3 because a number of digital activists were arrested in connection with the June 2024 protests and throughout the coverage period.

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

Score Change: The score declined from 4 to 3 because a media investigation found that a major mobile provider had granted security agencies access to customer call data records and location information without legal oversight.

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

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 due to a spike in abductions and disappearances connected to victims' online activities.

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 Bloggers Association of Kenya, "State of the Internet in Kenya 2020-2024," July 2025, <https://ifreedoms.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/State-of-the-Interne...>
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- 6"Popular Anti-Ruto Taxes Protester Shad Khalif Goes Missing After Abduction," The Star, June 24, 2024, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/in-pictures/2024-06-24-popular-anti-ruto-tax...>; National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders Kenya, "9th Human Rights Defenders Awards," April 2025, <https://defenderscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2024-HRD-Awar...>; Ndubi Moturi and Mercy Simiyu, "Police Arrest Boniface Mwangi, Hussein Khalid, Shadrack Khalif and Others," NTV Kenya, July 25, 2024, <https://ntvkenya.co.ke/news/police-arrest-boniface-mwangi-hussein-khali...>; Richard Munguti, "Activist Boniface Mwangi and Four Others Freed on Cash Bail," Daily Nation, July 26, 2024, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/activist-boniface-mwangi-and-four-othe...>; Kenneth Gachie, "Vocal Protest Organizer Shad Khalif Released After Arrest," Citizen Digital, July 26, 2024, <https://www.citizen.digital/entertainment/vocal-protest-organizer-shad-...>; "Hanifa Farsafi: Meet Activist Who Played Leading Role in #OccupyParliament Protests," The Kenya Times, June 18, 2024, <https://thekenyatimes.com/latest-kenya-times-news/hanifa-farsafi-meet-a...>
- 7Access Now, "Open Letter to Kenya's Government: Cease Attacks on Protesters' Digital Rights," July 16, 2024, <https://www.accessnow.org/press-release/open-letter-to-kenyas-governmen....>
- 8The Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa, "Joint Statement by the ICT Sector on the Unlawful Arrest and Prosecution of Rose Njeri," June 4, 2025, <https://cipesa.org/2025/06/joint-statement-by-the-ict-sector-on-the-unl...>
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