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Freedom on the Net 2025 - Sri Lanka



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

Internet freedom remained stable in Sri Lanka. Journalists and activists still faced arrests, threats, and harassment for their online activities, including under the 2024 Online Safety Act, which criminalizes “false” and “harmful” online speech such as online harassment and abuse or content deemed to promote ill will and hostility.

- The parliament approved amendments to the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission Act in July 2024, affording the telecommunications regulatory agency new antimonopoly powers, among other measures (A5).¹
- In August 2024, parliament approved amendments to the Online Safety Act that embedded intermediary liability safeguards into the framework and broadened several provisions that established criminal penalties for online speech, among other changes.² The government indicated in May 2025 that it would amend the law further but not seek to repeal it;³ the law had been criticized by civil society for having the potential to be misused to target dissent (B2, B3, and C2).⁴
- A court issued a gag order under the Online Safety Act against online media outlet NewsCenter and its staff in January 2025, prohibiting them from broadcasting false or defamatory statements regarding Hiru media outlets. The order came in response to a civil suit brought by Hiru, which claimed that NewsCenter had undermined Hiru’s reputation by suggesting through its coverage that Hiru was linked to drug-related and other criminality. The lawsuit was thrown out in August, after the coverage period (B6).⁵
- In November 2024, a court reportedly issued a six-month suspended sentence and fine of 5,000 rupees (\$17) under the Online Safety Act to a businessman accused of posting audio recordings containing misleading information about a state minister to various social media platforms (C3).⁶

Political Overview

A pattern of governmental mismanagement, corruption, and economic crisis under Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party rule prompted the 2022 Aragalaya (Struggle) protest movement, which resulted in the ouster of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his brother, Prime Minister

Mahinda Rajapaksa. A new government overseen by veteran politician Ranil Wickremesinghe brought relative stability, but the austerity measures it introduced further damaged public confidence in the political establishment and contributed to a sweeping victory by the leftist opposition National People's Power (NPP) alliance in 2024.

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?	4 / 6
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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
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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?	1 / 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
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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
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B4 0-4 pts

Do online journalists, commentators, and ordinary users practice self-censorship?	2 / 4
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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
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B6 0-3 pts

Are there economic or regulatory constraints that negatively affect users' ability to publish content online?	2 / 3
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B7 0-4 pts

Does the online information landscape lack diversity and reliability?	3 / 4
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B8 0-6 pts

Do conditions impede users' ability to mobilize, form communities, and campaign, particularly on political and social issues?	4 / 6
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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
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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
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C3 0-6 pts

Are individuals penalized for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards?	3 / 6
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C4 0-4 pts

Does the government place restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption?	2 / 4
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C5 0-6 pts

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 Sri Lanka Telecommunications (Amendment) Act, No. 39 of 2024, July 17, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250529024858/https://www.trc.gov.lk/conte....>
- 2 Online Safety (Amendment) Bill, July 26, 2024, https://www.documents.gov.lk/view/bills/2024/7/535-2024_E.pdf.
- 3 "NPP govt decides to keep the Online Safety Act with amendments," May 27, 2025, Sri Lanka Brief, <https://srilankabrief.org/npp-govt-decides-to-keep-the-online-safety-ac....>
- 4 Sanjana Hattotuwa, "Sri Lanka's Online Safety Act: A year in review, and framework for reform," Global Network Initiative, March 3, 2025, <https://globalnetworkinitiative.org/sri-lankas-online-safety-act-a-year...>; Sanjana Hattotuwa, "What no amendment can fix: Sri Lanka's Online Safety Act's latest attempt at legitimacy," blog, August 2, 2024, <https://sanjanah.wordpress.com/2024/08/02/what-no-amendment-can-fix-sri...>; Namini Wijedasa, "OSA amendments only benefit the internet intermediaries, not the citizenry," The Sunday Times, March 3, 2024, <https://www.sundaytimes.lk/240303/news/osa-amendments-only-benefit-the-...>; Maneesha Dullewe, "Online Safety Act: Amendment Bill limbo creates uncertainty," The Morning, June 16, 2024, <https://www.themorning.lk/articles/bhjcZXP4doP3xt3Q3UuG>.
- 5 "TV channel takes another channel to court over reporting NPP MP's comments," Newswire, January 17, 2025, <https://www.newswire.lk/2025/01/17/tv-channel-takes-another-channel-to-...>; "Hiru's lawsuit against the NewsCenter digital media outlet, filed using the OSA, dismissed by court," NewsCenter, August 2025, <https://www.newscenter.lk/articles/hiru-s-lawsuit-against-the-news-cent....>
- 6 "Online Safety Act : Businessman punished for posting fake news against former Minister," Newswire, November 28, 2024, <https://www.newswire.lk/2024/11/28/online-safety-act-businessman-punish...>; "Businessman given 6 months suspended sentence for slandering former state minister on social media," Sri Lanka Brief, November 27, 2024, <https://srilankabrief.org/businessman-given-6-months-suspended-sentence....>