

# Freedom on the Net 2025 - Zimbabwe



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

Internet freedom in Zimbabwe improved slightly during the coverage period. While the penetration rate for mobile service increased, internet access continued to be hampered by infrastructure constraints, frequent electricity shortages, and high prices. Authorities persisted in their crackdown on expressions of political dissent online, and both journalists and ordinary users faced arrests, threats, and harassment for their online activity, particularly when they criticized the government.

- Although internet access remained prohibitively expensive for many Zimbabweans, US-based Starlink’s satellite internet service, which became available in Zimbabwe in September 2024, offered more affordable pricing options than other internet service providers (ISPs).<sup>1</sup> Starlink terminals sold out shortly after becoming available,<sup>2</sup> and the company’s entry into the market forced other ISPs to reduce their prices in order to compete (A2 and A4).<sup>3</sup>
- Amendments to the Broadcasting Services Act that were promulgated in May 2025 expanded the scope of the law to include digital media platforms and internet-based broadcasting services such as podcasts.<sup>4</sup> The amendments also strengthened the president’s control over the Broadcasting Authority Board by removing a provision that had allowed for parliamentary consultation on the president’s board appointments (B6).
- Several activists and journalists were arrested and detained for their online content as part of an ongoing crackdown on media freedom in Zimbabwe. In February 2025, Blessed Mhlanga, a journalist for the YouTube-based outlet Heart and Soul TV, was arrested and charged with inciting violence; the case centered on an interview in which a war veteran and former member of the ruling party called for President Emmerson Mnangagwa’s resignation.<sup>5</sup> After being held for nearly three months, Mhlanga was granted provisional release, though he was still awaiting trial at the end of the coverage period. He faced up to three years in prison if convicted (C3).

## Political Overview

The Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) has dominated Zimbabwean politics since independence in 1980 by carrying out severe crackdowns on the political opposition, critical media, and all sources of dissent. President Emmerson Mnangagwa took power in 2017

after the military intervened to remove longtime President Robert Mugabe amid factional divisions within the ruling party. Mnangagwa has largely retained the legal, administrative, and security architecture of the Mugabe era, and has consolidated his authority through acts of repression and a number of constitutional amendments. Endemic corruption, a vast patronage system, weak rule of law, and poor protections for workers and land rights remain critical challenges.

*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

<b>Do infrastructural limitations restrict access to the internet or the speed and quality of internet connections?</b>	<b>2 / 6</b>
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*Score Change: The score improved from 1 to 2 due to increased mobile-service penetration,<sup>6</sup> though electricity rationing and frequent power outages continued to disrupt people's access to the internet.<sup>7</sup>*

A2 0-3 pts

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

<b>Does the government exercise technical or legal control over internet infrastructure for the purposes of restricting connectivity?</b>	<b>5 / 6</b>
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A4 0-6 pts

<b>Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers?</b>	<b>3 / 6</b>
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A5 0-4 pts

<b>Do national regulatory bodies that oversee service providers and digital technology fail to operate in a free, fair, and independent manner?</b>	<b>0 / 4</b>
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## B Limits on Content

B1 0-6 pts

<b>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?</b>	<b>6 / 6</b>
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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

**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 improved from 1 to 2 because the content manipulation observed during the August 2023 electoral cycle was not repeated during the coverage period.*

**B6 0-3 pts**

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

1 /  
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?**

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?**

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**

<b>Are individuals penalized for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards?</b>	3 / 6
<b>C4 0-4 pts</b>	
<b>Does the government place restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption?</b>	3 / 4
<b>C5 0-6 pts</b>	
<b>Does state surveillance of internet activities infringe on users' right to privacy?</b>	2 / 6
<b>C6 0-6 pts</b>	
<b>Does monitoring and collection of user data by service providers and other technology companies infringe on users' right to privacy?</b>	2 / 6
<b>C7 0-5 pts</b>	
<b>Are individuals subject to extralegal intimidation or physical violence by state authorities or any other actor in relation to their online activities?</b>	3 / 5
<b>C8 0-3 pts</b>	
<b>Are websites, governmental and private entities, service providers, or individual users subject to widespread hacking and other forms of cyberattack?</b>	2 / 3

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Kayla Zhu, “Visualized: Starlink vs. Leading Internet Provider Prices in Africa,” Visual Capitalist, January 20, 2025, <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/visualized-starlink-vs-leading-interne...>; Daniel Itai, “Starlink’s entry into Zimbabwe lowers Internet tariffs,” Connecting Africa, November 4, 2024, <https://www.connectingafrica.com/connectivity/starlink-s-entry-into-zim...>; Khadija Alam and Damilare Dosunmu, “Starlink is now cheaper than leading internet provider in some African countries,” Rest of World, January 10, 2025, <https://restofworld.org/2025/starlink-cheaper-internet-africa/>.
- <sup>2</sup>Christ Muronzi, “Demand for Starlink in Zimbabwe is overwhelming capacity,” Rest of World, December 13, 2024, <https://restofworld.org/2024/starlink-in-zimbabwe-sold-out/>; Samuel Nyangi, “Starlink Drives 500% Growth in VSAT Subscriptions in Zimbabwe Since Launch,” Space in Africa, July 3, 2025, <https://spaceinafrica.com/2025/07/03/starlink-drives-500-growth-in-vsate...>
- <sup>3</sup>Ray Ndlovu, “Starlink jolts Zimbabwe’s internet market,” Tech Central, October 24, 2024, <https://techcentral.co.za/starlink-jolts-zimbabwe-internet-market/25395...>; Osamu Ekhatior, “Competitors are slashing prices to compete with Starlink in Zimbabwe,” Tech Point Africa, October 25, 2024, <https://techpoint.africa/news/competitors-compete-starlink-zimbabwe/>.
- <sup>4</sup>Muvingi Mugadza, “Key Amendments Brought about by the Broadcasting Services Amendment Act, 2025,” Afriwise, June 4, 2024, <https://www.afriwise.com/blog/key-amendments-brought-about-by-the-broad...>; Government of Zimbabwe, “Broadcasting Services Amendment Bill 2024,” 2024, [https://www.veritaszim.net/sites/veritas\\_d/files/Broadcasting%20Service...](https://www.veritaszim.net/sites/veritas_d/files/Broadcasting%20Service...);

Daniel Chingundu, “Broadcasting Services Amendment Bill,” Open Parly, March 26, 2025, <https://openparly.com/broadcasting-services-amendment-bill-download-2/>.

- 5 Amnesty International, “Zimbabwe: Further information: Journalist released but charges still pending: Blessed Mhlanga,” May 16, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr46/9385/2025/en/>; Committee to Protect Journalists, “Zimbabwean journalist Blessed Mhlanga jailed over interviews with war veteran,” February 26, 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/02/zimbabwean-journalist-blessed-mhlanga-jailed-ov...>; Committee to Protect Journalists, “Zimbabwe seeks to stifle political debate with jail, threats, legislation,” March 27, 2025, <https://cpj.org/2025/03/zimbabwe-seeks-to-stifle-political-debate-with-...>.
- 6 Simon Kemp, “Digital 2025: Zimbabwe,” Data Reportal, March 3, 2025, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-zimbabwe>.
- 7 Asafika Mpako and Simangele Moyo-Nyede, “AD952: Zimbabweans grow increasingly dissatisfied with government’s provision of electricity,” Afro Barometer, March 5, 2025, <https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/ad952-zimbabweans-grow-increa...>; Farai Shawn Matiashe, “Dry Zimbabwe hit by blackouts but renewables still underfunded,” Context, January 28, 2025, <https://www.context.news/climate-risks/dry-zimbabwe-hit-by-blackouts-bu...>.