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Freedom on the Net 2025 - Iran

Not Free

13

/ 100

A [Obstacles to Access](#) 8 / 25

B [Limits on Content](#) 4 / 35

C [Violations of User Rights](#) 1 / 40

Last Year's Score & Status

12 / 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

Internet freedom remained highly restricted in Iran. While network disruptions were less severe than in previous years, the authorities did impose a major internet shutdown in June 2025, shortly after the coverage period. The government continued its efforts to make access to the global internet more cumbersome and expensive, and pressured users to confine themselves to a domestic version of the internet where authorities could more effectively control content and monitor activity. The regime also employed extensive censorship, surveillance, content manipulation, and extralegal harassment of internet users, making Iran's online environment one of the world's most repressive.

- Network shutdowns during the coverage period were less severe than those in previous years. However, connectivity disruptions were reported ahead of the presidential election in June 2024.¹ In June 2025, shortly after the coverage period, the regime implemented a near-total, nationwide internet shutdown that began just hours after the Israeli military launched a campaign of air strikes in Iran.² The country's communications ministry said the shutdown was a temporary measure necessitated by the "special conditions"

associated with the Israeli attacks, and it was lifted after the 12-day conflict came to an end (A3).³

- Authorities continued to restrict access to thousands of websites, and nearly all major social media platforms—including Facebook, TikTok, X, and YouTube—remained blocked or filtered. In December 2024, the government announced that its Supreme Council for Cyberspace had decided to lift restrictions on WhatsApp and Google Play (B1).⁴
- In August 2024, journalist and activist Hossein Shanbehzadeh was sentenced to 12 years in prison after responding to a post on X by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, with a single period. Khamenei's original post was missing a period, and Shanbehzadeh's response garnered more likes and shares on the platform than the original post. Shanbehzadeh had been arrested in June and charged with spreading lies and "propaganda against the state," among other offenses (C3).⁵
- Reporting from FilterWatch in April 2025 found that authorities had used IMSI (international mobile subscriber identity) catchers to identify and surveil women in Isfahan by intercepting their mobile phone traffic and tracking their location data.⁶ The use of IMSI catcher technology, among other surveillance tactics, was part of the regime's ongoing effort to enforce its mandatory hijab law, which a growing number of women have openly defied in recent years (C5).⁷
- Women were subjected to arrests and physical assaults in retaliation for social media posts in which they protested the mandatory hijab law. In September 2024, the British Broadcasting Corporation described the case of one woman who was blindfolded, taken an unknown location, detained and repeatedly interrogated, and ultimately charged with offenses including "promoting corruption and fornication," after she posted a photo of herself with uncovered hair in public. Following her conviction, she received 50 lashes and a suspended prison sentence (C7).⁸

Political Overview

The Islamic Republic of Iran holds elections regularly, but they fall short of democratic standards due in part to the influence of the hard-line Guardian Council, an unelected body that disqualifies all candidates it deems insufficiently loyal to the clerical establishment. Ultimate power rests in the hands of the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and the unelected institutions under his control. These institutions, including the security forces and the judiciary, play a major role in the suppression of dissent and other restrictions on civil liberties.

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

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? 2 / 6

Score Change: The score improved from 1 to 2 because disruptions in internet service during the coverage period were not as severe or widespread as in previous years, though localized connectivity restrictions were reported.[9](#)

A4 0-6 pts

Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers? 0 / 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? 0 / 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? 0 / 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? 0 / 4

B4 0-4 pts

Do online journalists, commentators, and ordinary users practice self-censorship? 1 / 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? 0 / 4

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? 2 / 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? 0 / 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? 0 / 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?

Footnotes

- 1 FilterWatch, "Power Crisis Contributes to Widespread Internet Disruptions," August 21, 2024, <https://filter.watch/english/2024/08/21/network-and-policy-monitoring-j...>; João Tomé, "Global elections in 2024: Internet traffic and cyber threat trends," Cloudflare, December 23, 2024, <https://blog.cloudflare.com/elections-2024-internet/>.
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- 4 "Iran to lift ban on WhatsApp, Google Play, state media report," Al Jazeera, December 24, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/12/24/iran-to-lift-ban-on-whatsapp-...>; "Iran restores access to WhatsApp and Google Play after they were banned amid protests," AP News, December 24, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/iran-social-media-whatsapp-google-d886b47c42...>; "Iranian users dismiss WhatsApp unblocking as too little, too late," Iran International, December 25, 2024, <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202412251354>.
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- 6Solmaz Eikder, "A Battlefield Named Isfahan: Targeted Use of IMSI-Catchers and Surveillance Cameras to Enforce Chastity and Hijab Law," FilterWatch, April 17, 2025, <https://filter.watch/english/2025/04/17/investigated-report-isfahan-tar...>; United Nations Human Rights Council, "Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran," March 14, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/...>
- 7Deepa Parent, "Drones, informers and apps: Iran intensifies surveillance on women to enforce hijab law," the Guardian, March 24, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/mar/24/iran-police-...>; Noël James and Diya Mehta, "Women This Week: Iran Using Electronic Surveillance to Enforce Veiling Laws," Council on Foreign Relations, March 24, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/women-week-iran-using-electronic-surveillance-...>
- 8Reha Kansara and Ghoncheh Habibiazad, "'Lashed for a social media photo' in Iran," BBC, September 16, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9qgq919yl5o>.
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