



Document #2133589

Freedom House (Author)

Freedom on the Net 2025 - Rwanda

Not Free

34

/ 100

A [Obstacles to Access](#) 13 / 25

B [Limits on Content](#) 11 / 35

C [Violations of User Rights](#) 10 / 40

Last Year's Score & Status

36 / 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 declined in Rwanda during the coverage period. Progovernment trolls used harassment and manipulated content in an effort to drown out any online criticism of the government ahead of the country's tightly controlled general elections in July 2024, and these practices persisted long after the balloting. Self-censorship remained rampant, as the government continued to imprison people who criticized

it online. Users serving lengthy sentences were at risk of torture, ill-treatment, or forced disappearance.

- Ahead of the July 2024 general elections, social media accounts circulated synthetic or manipulated content designed to advance progovernment narratives and undermine critics of the regime.¹ When Rwanda cut diplomatic ties with Belgium in March 2025, Rwandan accounts on the social media platform X, showing signs of coordinated inauthentic behavior, began to harass Belgian officials using strategies similar to those deployed by a network of accounts identified in the run-up to the elections (B5).²
- In June 2024, the wife of a video blogger active on the YouTube platform was sentenced to 10 years in prison on charges including complicity in genocide denial, trivializing the country's 1994 genocide, and complicity in inciting public unrest. Her husband, who had fled the country, had frequently shared controversial narratives about the ruling party's role in the genocide; he was sentenced in absentia to 15 years in prison for genocide denial.³ Another YouTube user was sentenced to seven years in prison in October 2024 on charges of genocide denial, inciting division, and spreading false information (C3).⁴
- In August 2024, the Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority released new regulations for SIM-card registration. They required users to undergo biometric verification upon registering, and mobile service providers would be obliged to retain registration data for 10 years (C4).⁵

Political Overview

The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), led by President Paul Kagame, has ruled the country since it ousted forces responsible for the 1994 genocide, ending the civil war that began in 1990. While the regime has maintained stability and economic growth, the government continues to suppress political dissent through pervasive surveillance, intimidation, arbitrary detention, torture, and renditions or suspected assassinations of exiled dissidents.

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? 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? 5 / 6

A4 0-6 pts

Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers? 3 / 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? 1 / 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? 3 / 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? 1 / 4

B4 0-4 pts

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

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? 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? 1 / 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? 1 / 6

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 because internet users received lengthy prison sentences for their online activity during the coverage period.

C4 0-4 pts

Does the government place restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption? 2 / 4

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 because new regulations required users of mobile devices to undergo biometric verification when registering a SIM card.

C5 0-6 pts

Does state surveillance of internet activities infringe on users' right to privacy? 1 / 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? 1 / 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? 1 / 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

- 1Wack, Linvill, and Warren, "Old Despots, New Tricks: An AI-Empowered Pro-Kagame/RPF Coordinated Influence Network on X," Media Forensics Hub, Clemson University, June 20,

- 2024, https://open.clemson.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=mfh_r...; Morgan Wack, "AI Propaganda Campaign in Rwanda Has Been Pushing Pro-Kagame Messages – A Dangerous New Trend in Africa," The Conversation, July 11, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/ai-propaganda-campaign-in-rwanda-has-been-p...>; Richard Ngamita, "Synthetic Media in Rwanda's 2024 Elections," Thraets, July 18, 2024, <https://thraets.org/synthetic-media-in-rwandas-2024-elections/>.
- 2Rien Emmery, "#MadelnBelgium: hoe een Rwandese online beïnvloedingsoperatie België viseert – met de hulp van AI [#MadelnBelgium: How a Rwandan Online Influence Operation Targets Belgium – With the Help of AI]," VRT NWS, March 22, 2025, <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2025/03/21/online-campagne-rwanda/>.
 - 3The Chronicles, @ChroniclesRW, "Update: Bicahaga Abdallah who for years used YouTube to advance various controversial narratives, is sentenced to 15yrs for genocide denial," X, June 7, 2024, <https://x.com/ChroniclesRW/status/1799032818540109827>; Nshimiyimana Theogene, "Bicahaga yakatiwe gufungwa imyaka 15, umugore we ahabwa 10 [Bikahaga Sentenced to 15 Years in Prison, His Wife Given 10]," Umuseke, June 6, 2024, <https://umuseke.rw/2024/06/bicahaga-yakatiwe-gufungwa-imyaka-15-umugore....>
 - 4Yves Bucyana, "YouTuber and Rwandan Government Critic Jailed," BBC, October 9, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c153x54049eo>; Nshimiyimana Theogene, "Hakuzimana Abdoul Rachid yakatiwe igifungo cy'imyaka 7 [Hakuzimana Abdoul Rachid Sentenced to 7 Years in Prison]," Umuseke, October 8, 2024, <https://umuseke.rw/2024/10/hakuzimana-abdoul-rachid-yakatiwe-igifungo-c....>
 - 5Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority, "Regulation No 18/R/SM-ICT/RURA/2024 of 09/08/2024 Governing SIM Card Registration in Rwanda," August 9, 2024, <https://www.rura.rw/index.php?elD=dumpFile&t=f&f=140493&token=553b11e6e....>

ecoi.net description:

Report on digital media and internet freedom (reporting period June 2024 - May 2025)

Country:

Rwanda

Source:

[Freedom House](#) (Author)

Published:

13 November 2025

Original link:

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/rwanda/freedom-net/2025>

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Available on ecoi.net since:

4 December 2025

Document ID:

2133589

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Country of Origin and	T +43 1 589 00 583	F.A.Q.
Asylum Research and	F +43 1 589 00 589	Data Protection Notice
Documentation	info@ecoi.net	
(ACCORD)		

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

