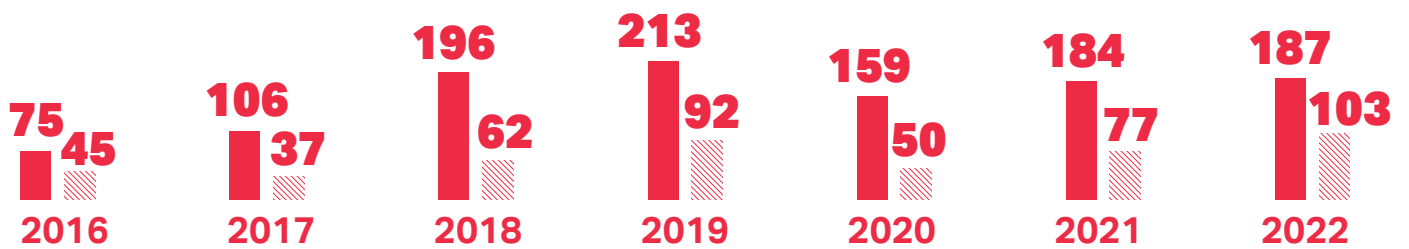


I. Internet shutdowns in 2022: a global overview

Overview of 2022 data

Documented internet shutdowns by year *

■ Total number of shutdowns
□ Total number of shutdowns, not including India



* These numbers reflect the latest data available as of publication of this report and include updates to previously published totals for past years.

Number of countries where shutdowns occurred



India: 84

Ukraine: 22**

Iran: 18

Myanmar: 7

Bangladesh: 6

Jordan: 4

Libya: 4

Sudan: 4

Turkmenistan: 4

**Afghanistan: 2 Burkina Faso: 2 Cuba: 2
Kazakhstan: 2 Russia: 2 Sierra Leone: 2
Tajikistan: 2 Uzbekistan: 2**

**Algeria: 1 Armenia: 1 Azerbaijan: 1 Brazil: 1
China: 1 Ethiopia: 1 Iraq: 1 Nigeria: 1
Oman: 1 Pakistan: 1 Somaliland: 1
Sri Lanka: 1 Syria: 1 Tunisia: 1 Turkey: 1
Uganda: 1 Yemen: 1** Zimbabwe: 1**

** Shutdowns were imposed by external forces during armed conflict in Ukraine and Yemen.

Shutdown triggers in 2022

Protests	62 shutdowns in 16 countries during protests	Active conflicts	33 shutdowns during active conflicts
Exams	8 shutdowns in 6 countries "to prevent exam cheating"	Elections	5 shutdowns in 5 countries tied to elections

Shutdown trends in 2022

1. Grave human rights abuses*** and violence shrouded by shutdowns on the rise

→ **48 shutdowns in 14 countries coinciding with documented human rights abuses:**

Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Iran, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Myanmar, Russia, Sierra Leone, Somaliland, Sudan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and active conflict zones in Ukraine and Yemen

*** Human rights abuses include cases where there is evidence of violence, including murder, torture, rape, or apparent war crimes by governments, militaries, and police or security forces.

2. Countries entrenched in repeat offenses and prolonged shutdowns

→ **787+ days**

By the end of 2022, people in Tigray, Ethiopia had endured **2+** years of full communications blackout, and many remain disconnected

→ **33 of the 35 countries that imposed shutdowns are repeat offenders since 2016**

→ **500+ days**

People in many regions across Myanmar had been in the dark for 500+ days by March 2023

→ **16 shutdowns worldwide lasted from 2021 to 2022 and 16 are now ongoing from 2022 to 2023, compared to 8 between 2020 and 2021**

3. Targeted shutdowns and their immeasurable harms

→ **23 countries had 28 service-based shutdowns in 2022:**

Afghanistan, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Burkina Faso, China, India, Iran, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Oman, Russia, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Ukraine (imposed by Russian military), Uzbekistan, and Zimbabwe

→ **Layered tactics of shutdown + censorship + surveillance:**

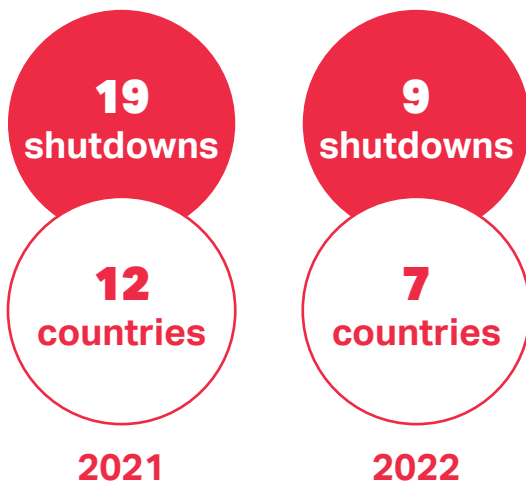
Iran: Nationwide platform blocks + curfew-style mobile blocks in regional hotspots

Myanmar: Disrupting mobile networks, VPN access, encrypted messaging + forcing people onto heavily surveilled, military-operated ISP networks

Ukraine: Cyberattacks impacting Ukrainian ISPs + attempts to force occupied territories onto highly censored and surveilled Russian networks

Africa

Regional overview in 2022



Ethiopia: 1

Ongoing Tigray shutdown reached 787 days at end of 2022

Uganda: 1

Ongoing Facebook block reached 719 days at end of 2022

Burkina Faso: 2 Sierra Leone: 2 Nigeria: 1 Somaliland: 1 Zimbabwe: 1

44.5% of shutdowns related to protests

Sierra Leone: 2 Somaliland: 1 Zimbabwe: 1

33.3% of shutdowns targeted platforms

Burkina Faso: 1 Nigeria: 1 Uganda: 1

Although 2022 marked a record low for the annual number of shutdowns in the region since we started tracking in 2016, Africa is still home to the world's longest currently active shutdown globally in Tigray, Ethiopia. At least **four** of the region's nine shutdowns took place alongside reported human rights abuses, both in the context of violent crackdowns on protests and active conflict. Elections have historically been a significant trigger for shutdowns across Africa, but there were relatively fewer elections in the region in 2022, and we documented **one** ongoing election-related platform shutdown in Uganda that had been in place since 2021.¹ Since there will be more elections in 2023, Access Now and #KeepItOn coalition will continue to closely monitor the situation.²

Shutdowns during protest and unrest

Authorities in Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Somaliland, and Zimbabwe all responded to protests and major political events with internet shutdowns.

After joining the shame list of countries imposing internet shutdowns in November 2021, the government of Burkina Faso began the new year by responding to anti-government protests on January 10 with a country-wide mobile internet shutdown, providing no explanation for its actions.³ Although authorities restored access the following day, the government persisted in blocking Facebook, citing

¹ Monitor (2022). *Facebook to remain shut as govt talks with tech giant stall*. Retrieved February 22, 2023, from <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/facebook-to-remain-shut-as-govt-talks-with-tech-giant-stall-3912172/>.

² Access Now (2022). *2023 elections and internet shutdowns watch*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.accessnow.org/2023-elections-and-internet-shutdowns-watch/>.

³ Desobeissance Civile. Facebook Post. January 10, 2022. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.facebook.com/Desobeissancecivileburkina/posts/4817989371573475/>.

“national security” as a justification.⁴ A few weeks later on January 23, following reports of a coup attempt, the government once again cut off mobile connections across the country,⁵ restoring access two days later.⁶

When anti-government protests escalated in Sierra Leone over the rising cost of living, authorities flipped the kill switch to quell the protests.⁷ The last time the government of Sierra Leone imposed internet shutdowns was in 2018, during elections.⁸

Similarly, authorities in Somaliland, a self-declared state within the internationally recognized boundaries of Somalia, shut down internet access in a knee-jerk reaction to protests which erupted in August 2022 following the postponement of presidential elections.⁹ The shutdowns, which affected the Woqooyi Galbeed region as well as parts of Southern and Central Somalia, lasted about 10 hours.¹⁰ In 2017, Somaliland authorities shut down access to social media during elections.¹¹

Finally, Zimbabwean authorities intermittently disrupted internet service in an attempt to interfere with the “Yellow Sunday” rally held by the opposition party Citizens’ Coalition for Change. As supporters gathered for the rally, people began to report difficulty accessing social media platforms.¹² Zimbabwe has previously imposed internet shutdowns to quash protests.¹³

Shutdowns during elections

Elections, often linked with protests and unrest, have long been a consistent trigger for internet shutdowns in Africa. As we have noted, the record-low number of election-related shutdowns in 2022 (**one** ongoing shutdown in Uganda from 2021) is likely due to the relatively small number of elections that took place. It’s also possible that civil society advocacy played a role in dissuading authorities from interference.

The Gambia was on our elections watchlist,¹⁴ and in April 2022, the country maintained access to the internet throughout its legislative elections, despite a history of imposing elections-related shutdowns dating back to 2016.¹⁵

Kenya, meanwhile, made and kept its commitment to #KeepItOn during the August 2022 general election, standing out as a leader among its neighbors in East Africa. That includes Uganda, which had blocked Facebook ahead of the January 2021 general elections and to date has not lifted the block.¹⁶

Kenya’s government does not have a history of shutdowns, but it was on our elections watchlist due to increasing political tensions and the rampant spread of misinformation online. To prevent an election shutdown, Access Now and our coalition partners

⁴ Anadolu Agency (2022). *Burkina Faso restricts Facebook after internet outages*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/burkina-faso-restricts-facebook-after-internet-outages/2480343/>.

⁵ Faso7 (2022). *Burkina Faso: La connexion Internet mobile à nouveau coupée*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://faso7.com/2022/01/23/burkina-faso-la-connexion-internet-mobile-a-nouveau-coupee/>.

⁶ Access Now (2022). *Burkina Faso must immediately end its internet shutdown, not extend it*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.accessnow.org/burkina-faso-internet-shutdown/>.

⁷ Access Now (2022). *#KeepItOn in Sierra Leone: the government must stop wielding internet shutdowns for political control*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.accessnow.org/keepiton-in-sierra-leone/>.

⁸ African Freedom of Expression Exchange (2018). *Sierra Leone Joins Global Trend: Shuts Down Internet and Mobile Services during Elections*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from https://www.africafex.org/digital-rights/sierra-leone-joins-global-trend-shuts-down-internet-and-mobile-services-during-elections_trashed/.

⁹ Access Now (2022). *#KeepItOn in Somaliland: authorities cannot quash public protest and access to information*. Retrieved February 22, 2023, from <https://www.accessnow.org/keepiton-in-somaliland/>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Africa News (2017). *Somaliland to shut down social networks during election period*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.africanews.com/2017/11/11/somaliland-to-shut-down-social-networks-during-election-period/>.

¹² Zimbabwe Independent (2022). *Cyberspace the new Zim political battlefield*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.newsday.co.zw/theindependent/amp/slider/article/4091/cyberspace-the-new-zim-political-battlefield/>.

¹³ Al Jazeera (2019). *Zimbabwe imposes internet shutdown amid crackdown on protests*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/1/18/zimbabwe-imposes-internet-shutdown-amid-crackdown-on-protests/>.

¹⁴ Access Now (2022). *#KeepItOn: 2022 elections and internet shutdowns watch*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.accessnow.org/elections-internet-shutdowns-watch-2022/>.

¹⁵ Africa News (2016). *Gambia’s Jammeh slams request to stabilize internet on election day*. Retrieved February 22, 2023, from <https://www.africanews.com/2016/12/01/gambia-s-jammeh-slams-request-to-stabilize-internet-on-election-day/>.

¹⁶ The New York Times (2021). *Uganda Blocks Facebook Ahead of Contentious Election*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/13/world/africa/uganda-facebook-ban-elections.html/>.

hosted trainings for journalists, human rights defenders, and election observers, and maintained steady pressure on the Kenyan government and telecom executives to #KeepItOn throughout the 2022 general election period.¹⁷

Ahead of the Kenya election, then Interior Cabinet Secretary, Fred Matiang'i, indicated the government had no intention of shutting down the internet.¹⁸ He did, however, make it clear the government intended to take the spread of misinformation and hate speech seriously.¹⁹ After research by the human rights organization Global Witness revealed that Meta's Facebook approved ads with hate speech,²⁰ the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) threatened to block the platform in Kenya unless Meta took measures to curtail the spread of hateful content. The agency gave Meta seven days to meet its demands.²¹ Several civil society organizations and a number of government officials condemned this threat out of concern for free expression surrounding the elections. Ultimately the government confirmed that neither the internet nor social media platforms would be blocked.²²

Since election shutdowns remain a threat, Access Now and the #KeepItOn coalition will track elections in **11** countries in Africa in 2023, all of which have

previously imposed shutdowns.²³ **This is an important opportunity for the democracies of Africa to chart a new course, with strong commitments to #KeepItOn throughout their election periods.**

Sustained platform blocks

In 2021, the governments of Nigeria²⁴ and Uganda²⁵ each took action in evident retaliation against social media platforms that removed posts by government leaders or their followers. After the platforms removed these posts because they failed to meet the terms of service, government authorities blocked the platforms entirely.

Nigeria's government blocked access to Twitter for a full seven months, sparking widespread public outcry.²⁶ Authorities only lifted the block in January 2022 following extensive negotiations with the company.²⁷ Civil society groups sued over the legality of this Twitter ban, and in 2022, they secured an important victory with the Community Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS Court) declaring the blocking unlawful.²⁸

The Ugandan government, meanwhile, has persisted in blocking Facebook for more than two years, and as of February 2023, Ugandans can only access it by using VPNs.²⁹

¹⁷ Access Now (2022). *Eyes on Kenya: government must uphold commitment to connectivity during elections*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.accessnow.org/kenya-government-internet-connectivity-elections/>; Access Now (2022). *Warning: blocking online platforms in Kenya will spread election disinformation*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.accessnow.org/kenya-online-platforms-social-media-blocking-internet-shutdown-election/>.

¹⁸ The Star (2022). *We won't shut down internet during elections - Matiang'i*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2022-06-09-we-wont-shut-down-internet-during-elections-matiangi/>.

¹⁹ The People Daily (2021). *Matiang'i: State won't switch off Internet but we're watching you*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.pd.co.ke/news/matiangi-state-wont-switch-off-internet-but-were-watching-you-83867/>.

²⁰ Global Witness (2022). *Facebook approves ads calling for ethnic violence in the lead up to a tense Kenyan election*. Retrieved February 22, 2023, from <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/press-releases/facebook-approves-ads-calling-ethnic-violence-lead-tense-kenyan-election/>.

²¹ The East African (2022). *Kenya threatens ban on Facebook over hate speech*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/kenya-threatens-ban-on-facebook-over-hate-speech-3896380/>.

²² Joe Mucheru EGH (@mucheru). Twitter Post. 1:48 AM. July 30, 2022. Retrieved February 22, 2023, from <https://twitter.com/mucheru/status/1553271302005334016/>.

²³ See *supra* note 2.

²⁴ Access Now (2022). *Blocking access to Twitter in Nigeria is a flagrant violation of fundamental rights*. Retrieved February 22, 2023, from <https://www.accessnow.org/nigeria-blocks-twitter-keepiton/>.

²⁵ The New York Times (2021). *Uganda Blocks Facebook Ahead of Contentious Election*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/13/world/africa/uganda-facebook-ban-elections.html/>.

²⁶ The New York Times (2022). *Nigeria Lifts 7-Month Ban on Twitter*. Retrieved February 22, 2023, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/13/world/africa/nigeria-lifts-twitter-ban.html/>.

²⁷ Access Now (2022). *Blocking access to Twitter in Nigeria is a flagrant violation of fundamental rights*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.accessnow.org/nigeria-blocks-twitter-keepiton/>.

²⁸ Access Now (2022). *ECOWAS Court victory: Twitter ban in Nigeria declared unlawful*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.accessnow.org/ecowas-court-nigeria-unlawful-twitter-ban/>.

²⁹ Monitor (2022). *Facebook to remain shut as govt talks with tech giant stall*. Retrieved February 22, 2023, from <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/facebook-to-remain-shut-as-govt-talks-with-tech-giant-stall-3912172/>.

// Ethiopia

Ethiopia's Tigray region has been shut off from telecommunications services since the beginning of the civil war on November 4, 2020.³⁰ A peace agreement between Ethiopia's federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) — which includes government commitments to restore access to essential services across the region — began to take hold in November 2022.³¹ But we have only started to see limited connectivity since December 2022, when Ethio Telecom began infrastructure repairs. As of February 2023 the majority of people in the region remain disconnected, and those who have regained some access are largely struggling with slow speeds and limited 2G services.³²

The years-long internet shutdown in Tigray and affected neighboring communities paints a vivid picture of how devastating and dangerous these acts of disconnection can be. Aside from the immediate impact of cutting off the region's six million people from the rest of the world, the ongoing communication blackout has resulted in multifaceted threats to Tigrayans' fundamental rights.³³ Since it is one of the longest uninterrupted internet shutdowns to have taken place during active conflict, it has also had a harrowing impact on people's lives.³⁴ The shutdown provided a cover for warring parties to commit heinous crimes, including systematic and widespread murder, rape, and sexual violence against vulnerable groups.³⁵ It also prevented delivery of humanitarian aid to affected communities suffering from famine and other privations. No one could rely on basic services such as healthcare, banking, employment, and education.

Despite the horrors of the civil conflict and Tigray shutdown, digital rights activists and human rights

Shutdown impact story: Tigray

"I remember the days I woke up and tried calling different numbers every single day hoping that one of my family members would be able to pick up. It is the worst situation that a human being can be in, [not knowing] if your family members are alive or not. Hearing [reports of] all the drone strikes on civilians used to make me lose my mind. I was not able to focus on my school & work. I used to see my siblings in my dreams and eagerly wanted to talk to them but I was not able to for 2+ years. Even now I am still not able to reach out to a few family members because internet access is not restored in all cities of Tigray region."

A young Tigrayan woman based in the U.S.

defenders demonstrated enormous resilience, persisting in drawing the world's attention to the rights violations happening in their communities.³⁶ In solidarity, Access Now and the #KeepItOn coalition worked with local partners and members of the Ethiopian diaspora to amplify Tigrayan voices and demand accountability for the shutdown. We brought together more than 100 civil society organizations and individuals from more than 102 countries to urge the African Union to take action to end the shutdown.³⁷ When Ethiopia hosted the annual Internet Governance Forum in November 2022, our coalition worked to move the situation in Tigray to the top of the global agenda.³⁸

See the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) report for information on shutdowns in Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Sudan.

³⁰ Access Now (2023). *After years in the dark, Tigray is slowly coming back online*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.accessnow.org/tigray-shutdown-slowly-coming-back-online/>.

³¹ United Nations News (2022). *Ethiopia: Peace agreement between Government and Tigray 'a critical first step': Guterres*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/11/1130137/>.

³² See *supra* note 30.

³³ Access Now (2022). *Stranded, suffocated, and in pain: 15 stories from Tigray's internet siege*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.accessnow.org/15-stories-from-tigrays-internet-siege/>.

³⁴ Tghat (2022). *Impact of the Internet Shutdown in Tigray*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.tghat.com/2022/02/24/impact-of-the-internet-shutdown-in-tigray/>.

³⁵ Global Voices (2021). *Vicious mass rape of women has become a weapon against the Tigray in Ethiopian war*. Retrieved February 22, 2023, from <https://globalvoices.org/2021/07/05/vicious-mass-rape-of-women-has-become-a-weapon-against-the-tigray-in-ethiopian-war/>.

³⁶ Tghat (2022). *Open letter to the Internet Governance Forum*. Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://www.tghat.com/2022/09/11/open-letter-to-the-internet-governance-forum/>.

³⁷ Access Now (2022). *Petition: AU must take urgent steps to help reconnect Tigray to the internet*. Retrieved February 22, 2023, from <https://www.accessnow.org/petition-au-reconnect-tigray/>.

³⁸ Internet Governance Forum (2022). *Seventeenth Meeting of Internet Governance Forum*. Retrieved February 6, 2022, from https://mail.intgovforum.org/IGF2022_summaryreport_final.pdf/.

The #KeepItOn campaign unites and organizes global organizations and efforts to end internet shutdowns. The campaign was launched by a coalition of about 70 organizations in 2016 at RightsCon in Silicon Valley. Membership of the coalition has since increased rapidly to more than 300 members from 105 countries around the world ranging from civil society, rights, and advocacy groups to research centers, detection networks, foundations, and media organizations.

This report is a publication of Access Now for the #KeepItOn coalition and was written by Zach Rosson, Felicia Anthonio, and Carolyn Tackett in collaboration with the Access Now team.

The authors would like to especially thank Sage Cheng, Donna Wentworth, Marwa Fatafta, Raman Jit Singh Chima, Wai Phyo Myint, Golda Benjamin, Anastasiya Zhyrmont, Natalia Krapiva, Ángela Alarcón, Bridget Andere, Ji Yeon Kim, Jaimee Kokonya, Namrata Maheshwari, Peter Micek, Kassem Mnejja, Laura O'Brien, Gaspar Pisanu, Agneris Sampieri, Dhevy Sivaprakasam, Chetna Kumar, Alexia Skok, and Megan Kathure, for their contributions. They would like to thank Data4Change, Software Freedom Law Centre India (SFLC.in), Yodet, Digitally Right, Miaan Group, Cloudflare, Internet Outage Detection and Analysis (IODA), Myanmar Internet Project, Athan, Kentik, Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI), and other members of the #KeepItOn coalition for providing valuable information and insights about case studies, reviewing data and sources, and contributing to the report. Any errors, misrepresentations, or inaccuracies are ours alone, and we welcome your feedback.

Design and data visualization by Sage Cheng.

A note on our data

This #KeepItOn report looks at incidents of internet shutdowns documented by Access Now and the #KeepItOn coalition in 2022. While we try to build a comprehensive database, our data relies on technical measurement as well as contextual information, such as news reports or personal accounts. The constraints of our methodology mean that there may be cases of internet shutdowns that have gone unreported, and numbers are likely to change if and when new information becomes available after publication. For further reading, please visit <https://accessnow.org/keepiton-data-methodology>.

February 2023

#KeepItOn

