

Internet shutdowns in Iran

SplinterCon

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Internet shutdowns under the international law

Iran is a party to major United Nations human rights treaties guaranteeing the right to freedom of expression, access to information, as well as the and the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

The Government of Iran is therefore bound to respect, protect, promote and fulfill the human rights of anyone within its jurisdiction.

Main international standards related to internet shutdown

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- The the UN Human Rights Committee General Comment No. 34 of 12 September 2011 on the right to freedom of expression.
- The United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 32/13, adopted by consensus in June 2016.
- The UN Human Rights Committee General Comment 37 on the right to peaceful assembly of 17 September 2020.
- The 2022 report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Constitution

The ITU Constitution does leave room for countries to justify shutdowns.

Articles 34 and 35 of the ITU Constitution gives states the right to cut off access to telecommunication services or “international telecommunication services” if they prove “dangerous to the security of the State.”

Articles 34 and 35 must be read based on the International Human Rights Law.

Six-part test related to internet shutdowns

- (a) Legality,
- (b) Necessary to achieve a legitimate aim,
- (c) Proportional to the legitimate aim,
- (d) Subject to prior authorization by a court or another independent adjudicatory body,
- (e) Communicated in advance to the public and telecommunications or internet service providers,
- (f) Subject to meaningful redress mechanisms accessible to those whose rights have been affected by the shutdowns.

About our Data

- Our tracker uses both quantitative and qualitative data to record the number of internet shutdowns in the world in a given year and to characterize the nature of the shutdowns, including their magnitude, scope, and causes.
- Sometimes we can confirm an internet shutdown through means such as technical analysis, but we also rely heavily on contextual information, such as news reports or personal accounts.

Our definition of internet shutdowns

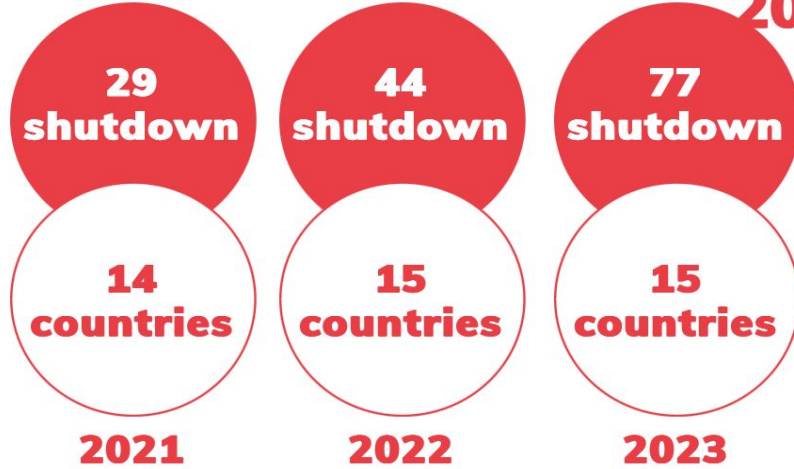
An internet shutdown is defined as an intentional disruption of internet or electronic communications, rendering them inaccessible or effectively unusable, for a specific population or within a location, often to exert control over the flow of information.

For more details about our methodology and dataset:

<https://www.accessnow.org/guide/shutdown-tracker-optimization-project/>

Middle East and North Africa regional overview in

2023



Iran: 34
Palestine: 16*

*all imposed by Israel

Iraq: 6

Jordan: 3 Libya: 3 Mauritania: 2
Oman: 2 Sudan: 2 Syria: 2
Türkiye: 2 Algeria: 1 Lebanon: 1
Qatar: 1 Saudi Arabia: 1
United Arab Emirates: 1

Grindr is blocked in 8 countries:

Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates

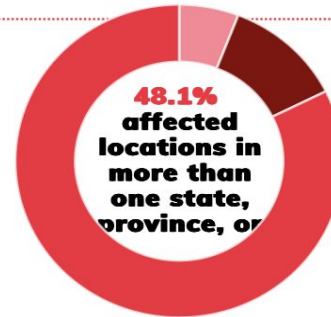
Shutdowns during natural



Earthquake in Türkiye and



Floods in Libya



45.5% affected more than one city in the same state, province, or region

6.5% only affected one city, county, or region

Internet shutdowns in 2023 in the MENA region

In 2023, authorities and warring parties in the MENA region shut down the internet in: Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Türkiye, and United Arab Emirates.

Key regional findings include:

- **The worst year on record:** authorities implemented at least **77** internet shutdowns in **15** countries across the MENA region — the highest annual number of both shutdown incidents and perpetrators on record since 2016;
- **The violence:** weaponizing internet access during armed conflicts to control information flows and conceal crimes, warring parties shut down the internet at least **18** times in [Palestine](#) and [Sudan](#);
- **The escalating scale:** **Iran** shut down the internet **34** times in protest crackdowns — a jump from **19** shutdowns in 2022 — and **Israel** shut down the internet in **Palestine** **16** times during its war on Gaza endangering millions under siege;
- **The broadening scope:** **Libya** and **Türkiye** blocked the internet during devastating natural disasters that claimed tens of thousands of lives;
- **The ongoing patterns:** authorities in **Iraq**, **Syria**, **Algeria**, and **Iran** imposed a total of **10** shutdowns during school exams; and
- **The targeting:** the Grindr app was blocked in **Iran**, **Jordan**, **Lebanon**, **Oman**, **Qatar**, **Saudi Arabia**, **Türkiye**, and **United Arab Emirates**.

Internet freedom in Iran

Iran's authorities have extensive control over around 57.4 million internet users in a total population of about 82 million.

The demonstrations of the 2009 Green Movement saw Iran's first nationwide shutdown, along with the subsequent censorship of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook.





































The events of 2009 led to the establishment of institutional and legal mechanisms for regulating the internet:

- The Computer Crimes Law (CCL),
- The establishment of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace (SCC),
- The prioritisation of the development of the NIN.

Internet shutdowns in Iran

- In 2023, Access Now and the #KeepItOn coalition recorded a surge in internet shutdowns in Iran, reaching **34** compared to **19** in 2022,
- Iran is the biggest perpetrators of internet shutdowns in the MENA region,
- Iranian authorities use a range of methods to interfere with internet access.

Shutdown triggers in 2023

 Conflicts	 Protests	 Exams	 Elections
74 shutdowns in 9 countries during conflicts	63 shutdowns in 15 countries during protests	12 shutdowns in 6 countries "to prevent exam cheating"	5 shutdowns in 5 countries tied to elections
2023: 74 	2023: 63 	2023: 12 	2023: 5 
2022: 36 	2022: 63 	2022: 8 	2022: 5 
2021: 19 	2021: 39 	2021: 11 	2021: 7 
2020: 15 	2020: 16 	2020: 8 	2020: 10 
2019: 52 	2019: 65 	2019: 8 	2019: 12 
2018: 2 	2018: 45 	2018: 11 	2018: 12 
2017: 3 	2017: 37 	2017: 7 	2017: 6 
2016: 3 	2016: 27 	2016: 6 	2016: 5 

Emerging trigger in 2023:



Natural disasters

4 shutdowns in **4** countries during natural disasters

Triggers for internet shutdowns in Iran

Shutdowns during protests and instability

Shutdowns during exams (2023)

Shutdowns during elections (2021)

Shutdowns during protests and instability


Protests are the main triggers for internet shutdowns, few examples include:

- 1.** In November 2019, protests erupted in Iran after the government decision to increase the fuel price. The authorities responded with excessive force against protesters. The death toll ranges from verified reports of 304 to unconfirmed reports of up to 1,500 deaths. The number of those injured by security forces was estimated at 4,800. During the protests, authorities also disconnected millions of Iranians from the Internet.
- 2.** As protests broke out in the city of Behbahan on the evening of 16 July 2020, the unrest quickly resulted in a shutdown in that particular city until the early morning hours of 17 July 2020.
- 3.** During the Mahsa Amini protests in 2022, the Iranian authorities imposed **15** internet shutdowns across the country. **Eight** of them have impacted ethnic minorities such as Kurdhish, Baluchi and Ahwazi in Kurdistan, Khuzestan, Sistan and Baluchestan.
- 4.** Throughout 2023, Iranian authorities maintained long-standing blocks of specific apps and services, such as Signal, which has been restricted since January 2021, and WhatsApp, Instagram, Skype, LinkedIn, and Viber, all of which have been restricted since 2022. Iranians rely heavily on the internet and these platforms for organizing protests, communicating, and sharing important information.

Shutdowns during exams

Iran has also expanded its use of internet shutdowns in other contexts. In January 2023, authorities disrupted local internet access during university admission exams in an attempt to prevent leaking of exam questions and other forms of cheating.

This caused significant disruption, negatively impacting businesses and people residing in those areas.



Shutdowns during elections

On June 20, 2021, authorities in Iran responded to clashes between two local tribes following local city council elections by cutting off mobile connections for the entire day in Yasuj, the provincial capital of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province.



How internet shutdowns is being implemented?

Shutdown decisions have no clear legal framework, but only have precedent as occurring as national security decisions, which is why they are always made in the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC).

According to the current precedent, the SNSC orders shutdowns, which are then implemented through to the Ministry of ICT.

The National Internet Network (NIN)

Shutdowns are generally costly for countries, resulting in losses that can be equivalent to millions of US dollars due to services that are no longer accessible or the loss of communication with global partners and supply chains.

In 2012, Iran initiated the development of a NIN, a domestic internet infrastructure hosted inside Iran, with the aim of being secure from foreign attacks.

The NIN allows authorities to:

- monitor content based on political, cultural, and religious criteria.
- monitor data and traffic on this network which will undermine data protection and the right to privacy for Iranian users.

Forms of internet shutdowns

- Websites and platforms blocking by means of DNS injection,
- Blocking access to specific communications platforms by using commercial filtering appliances,
- DDoS (Distributed Denial of Service) and other DoS (Denial of Service) attacks (Radio Frequency Jamming) have been used particularly to suppress satellite signals.
- Throttling HTTPS traffic to rend the internet nearly unusable.

Impact of internet shutdowns on Human Rights in Iran

- Authorities took advantage of the communications blackout to act with impunity as it was almost impossible to monitor and document violence in real time.
- Censorship.
- Mobilisation for protests became severely limited.
- Calls for protest could also lead to direct persecution if noticed on controlled services on the NIN, which are monitored by authorities.
- Social rights (education)
- Economic rights.

More information

Open Observatory of Network Interference, Internet Censorship in Iran: Network Measurement Findings from 2014-2017, September 2017. Available online at:

<https://ooni.org/post/iran-internet-censorship/#network-landscape>

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A joint investigation by Amnesty International and The Hertie School in partnership with the Internet Outage Detection and Analysis (IODA) project, The killings Iran's internet shutdown hid. Available online at:

<https://iran-shutdown.amnesty.org/>



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attention**



Access Now (<https://www.accessnow.org>) defends and extends the digital rights of individuals and communities around the world. As a grassroots-to-global organization, we partner with local actors to bring a human rights agenda to the use, development, and governance of digital technologies, and to intervene where technologies adversely impact our human rights. By combining direct technical support, strategic advocacy, grassroots grantmaking, and convenings such as RightsCon, we fight for human rights in the digital age.

For more information, please contact: un@accessnow.org



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