

DIGITAL RIGHTS AND INCLUSION IN AFRICA REPORT

CAMEROON
COUNTRY REPORT

2024



Executive Summary

Digital rights and digital inclusion are an integral part of human rights. These rights deserve to be respected and monitored considering the recurring violations, such as internet shutdowns, arrest of journalists and activists, website censorship, website blocking, social media blocking, internet network disruptions, communications controls, mass surveillance and theft of personal data. This report discusses five main legal texts that cover Cameroon's digital landscape: The 2010 law on cybersecurity and cybercrime,¹⁸⁵ the Electronic Communications Act 2010,¹⁸⁶ the 2011 framework law on consumer protection,¹⁸⁷ the 2023 Child Online Protection Act¹⁸⁸ and the 2012 decree establishing the management procedures for the Special Telecommunications Fund.¹⁸⁹ In 2024, Cameroon did not experience any major government-led internet outages, but all electronic communications were seriously disrupted. Approximately 20 micro-internet outages (lasting 30 minutes to 2 hours) were

¹⁸⁵ Telecommunications Regulatory Agency.

"Law No. 2010/012 of December 21, 2010, relating to cybersecurity and cybercrime in Cameroon."

https://www.art.cm/sites/default/files/documents/loi_2010-012_cybersecurite_cybercriminalite.pdf (accessed November 28, 2024).

¹⁸⁶ Telecommunications Regulatory Agency. "Law No. 2010/021 of December 21, 2010 governing electronic commerce in Cameroon" https://www.art.cm/sites/default/files/documents/Loi_2010-013_communications_electroniques.pdf (accessed November 28, 2024).

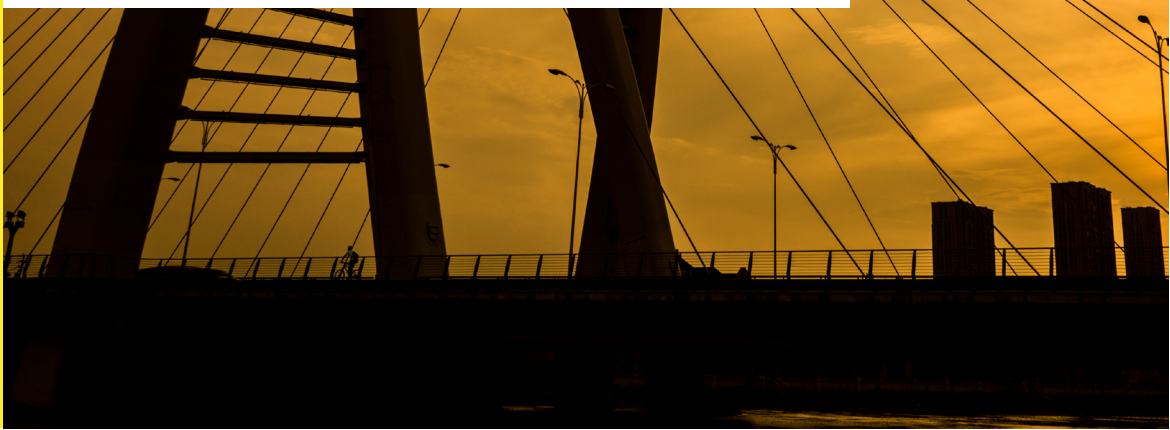
¹⁸⁷ Ministry of Commerce. "Framework Law No. 2011/012 of May 6, 2011 on consumer protection in Cameroon" <https://www.mincommerce.gov.cm/sites/default/files/documents/loi-cadre-n-2011-012-du-06-mai-2011-portant-protection-du-consommateur-au-cameroun.pdf> (accessed November 28, 2024).

¹⁸⁸ Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon. "Law No. 2023/009 of July 25, 2023 establishing a charter for the protection of children online in Cameroon" <https://www.prc.cm/fr/multimedia/documents/9701-loi-n-2023-009-du-25-07-2023> (accessed November 28, 2024).

¹⁸⁹ National Agency for Information and Communication Technologies.

"Decree No. 2012/308 of June 26, 2012, establishing the management procedures for the Special Telecommunications Fund."

https://www.antic.cm/images/stories/data/IMG/pdf/decrets/Modalites_de%20gestion_FST-26-06-2012.pdf (accessed November 28, 2024).



recorded among telecommunications operators due to fiber optic cable outages, electrical incidents and other network outages. Cameroon has two funds for telecommunications sovereignty. Regarding the limited exercise of civil rights, freedom of expression online has been threatened, especially key subjects such as corruption, governance, the economy and the health of the President of the Republic.

This 2024 report presents some progress in comparison to the 2020 Londa report on Cameroon,¹⁹⁰ in which the country had recorded serious online human rights violations following the October 2018 presidential election won by Biya.¹⁹¹ The data presented in this report were collected through desk research that involved exploring and analysing various legal frameworks, reports and similar documents, as well as testimonies on the specific issues covered in this report.

Introduction

Cameroon is a lower middle-income country with a population of 27.9 million, as of 2023.¹⁹² The mobile phone penetration rate reached 87%, with an internet penetration rate of 45.6%. The 4G/5G coverage rate in the country was 64.72% (4G). Cameroon has over 25 million connected devices and 12.87 million internet users.¹⁹³

Over the past five years, Cameroon has been developing strategies for the development of its internet ecosystem. Since 2020, the country has implemented a strategic plan, the National Development Strategy 2020-2030 (NDS30)¹⁹⁴ which highlights the main characteristics of technological growth in key sectors. In 2021, Cameroon began reforming its information and communications technology (ICT) laws. Several draft laws are currently being reviewed by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (Minpostel), including a bill on personal data management.¹⁹⁵

190 Paradigm Initiative 'Londa Cameroon Digital Rights and Inclusion' (2020) <https://paradigmhq.org/report/londa-cameroon-digital-rights-inclusion-2020-report/> (accessed November 28, 2024).

191 Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon 'The President – Biography' <https://www.prc.cm/fr/le-president/biographie> (accessed November 28, 2024).

192 Banque Mondiale 'Country Overview – Cameroon' <https://www.banquemondiale.org/fr/country/cameroon/overview> (accessed November 28, 2024).

193 Team France 'Market Sheet – Telecoms, Internet and Broadcast' <https://www.teamfrance-export.fr/fiche-marche/tech/telecom-internet-et-broadcast/CM> (accessed November 28, 2024).

194 Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development 'SND30' <https://minepat.gov.cm/fr/snd30/>

195 Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications 'APD Decree' 230518 Décret APD FIN _CLEAN.pdf (accessed November 28, 2024).

Internet Access

In 2024, Cameroon recorded approximately twenty disruptions of the Internet and telecommunications networks.¹⁹⁶

Network quality and exorbitant communication prices pushed several million users to launch the “Aeroplane Mode” Movement in 2023.¹⁹⁷ The movement involved denouncing and boycotting the telecommunications services of all the country’s service providers. After several weeks of boycotts, the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications initiated consultations that involved the service providers. The boycott ended after a few months, and recommendations¹⁹⁸ were formulated during the consultations, however, these operators are facing challenges in implementing them.

The Internet penetration rate has increased by 2% during the past 5 years, reaching 45.6% in 2024 with around 50 Internet service providers nationwide. Network disruptions between 2023 and 2024 caused users to lose millions of CFA francs. Even though Framework Law No. 2011/012 requires operators to provide a service that meets the minimum requirements of durability, usability, reliability and ensures legitimate satisfaction, operators have not yet committed to reimbursing the losses.¹⁹⁹ These disturbances violate principle 38 of the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights.²⁰⁰

Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression in Cameroon is often under severe threat due to the regularly tense sociopolitical context. In recent years, journalists, activists and bloggers have been intimidated due to their opinions online. The political crisis²⁰¹ in the two English-speaking regions continues to impact social life, as well as the level of freedom of expression in Cameroon.

Hate speech generally puts activists of the ruling party²⁰² and the main opposition party against members of certain tribes (Bulu, Beti, Bamileké) and “Anglophones” on the other. Law No. 2019/020 demonstrates against hate speech.²⁰³ Since 2019, no specific convictions for hate speech have been recorded in Cameroon. In October 2024, the Minister of Territorial Administration issued a statement banning any debate on the Head of State’s health on social media and in traditional media. These acts contribute to threats to freedom of expression.²⁰⁴

Certain provisions of the law of 12 December 2010 relating to cybersecurity and cybercrime stifle freedom of expression,²⁰⁵ as well as communications from LGBTQ+ communities.²⁰⁶

Access to Information

Barriers to freedom of expression are often heightened by the lack of a legal framework to promote

196 Investing in Cameroon: ‘Internet disrupted in Cameroon due to submarine cable outage’ <https://www.investiraucameroun.com/telecom/1503-20447-internet-perturbe-au-cameroun-a-cause-d-une-panne-sur-des-cables-sous-marins> (accessed November 28, 2024).

197 Radio France International. Cameroon: Consumers put phones in “airplane mode” to protest operator rates <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20230428-cameroun-des-t%C3%A9l%C3%A9phones-de-consommateurs-en-mode-avion-pour-d%C3%A9noncer-les-tarifs-des-op%C3%A9rateurs> (accessed November 28, 2024).

198 Digital Business Africa ‘Cameroon / Airplane mode – Of the five recommendations made by Minpostel, Orange has already fulfilled three and MTN four’ <https://www.digitalbusiness.africa/cameroun-sur-les-cinq-recommandations-formulees-par-le-minpostel-orange-a-deja-execute-trois-et-mtn-quatre/> (accessed November 28, 2024).

199 Article 10(1), Framework Law No. 2011/012 of May 6, 2011 on consumer protection in Cameroon

200 ACHPR. Principle 38 (3), Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa

201 Amnesty International ‘Cameroon rampant atrocities amid anglophone regions must be stopped’ <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2023/07/cameroon-rampant-atrocities-amid-anglophone-regions-must-be-stopped/> (accessed November 28, 2024).

202 Cameroon People’s Democratic Rally <https://www.rdpdpdm.cm/> (accessed November 28, 2024).

203 Article 241(2), Law No. 2019/020 of 24 December 2019, supplementing certain provisions of Law No. 2016/007 of 12 July 2016 on the Penal Code

204 Radio France International ‘Cameroon – Minister of Territorial Administration bans any debate on Paul Biya’s health’ <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20241011-cameroun-le-minist%C3%A8re-de-l-administration-territoriale-interdit-tout-d%C3%A9bat-sur-la-sant%C3%A9-de-paul-biya> (accessed November 28, 2024).

205 Article 78(1), Law No. 2010/012 of December 21, 2010 relating to cybersecurity and cybercrime in Cameroon.

206 Article 83(1), Law No. 2010/012 of December 21, 2010 relating to cybersecurity and cybercrime in Cameroon.

access to information. Cameroon does not have a law on access to information. Cameroon has also been accused of using Law No. 2014/028 of 23 December 2014 against terrorism to restrict freedom of expression. Some Cameroonian journalists have been forced to leave the country when their safety was under threat.²⁰⁷

Data protection and confidentiality

Cameroonian cyberspace was the field of several types of attacks in 2024, including account hacks, phishing, identity theft and data loss, the most significant of which was the theft of 10 gigabytes of data during a hack at the National Social Security Fund (CNPS), which was later dismissed²⁰⁸ before being resolved.

Nevertheless, the Cameroonian authorities, through Minpostel and ANTIC, launched a major cybersecurity campaign among young people in 2023.

Cybersecurity benefits from a legal framework, through the 2010 law on cybersecurity and cybercrime which condemns “anyone who processes or causes to be processed, even through negligence, personal data in violation of the prerequisites for their implementation.”²⁰⁹

Censorship and content moderation

Between 2023 and 2024, the Cameroonian government made 7 data access requests to Meta.²¹⁰ All the requested data related to legal proceedings. A total of 38 content restrictions²¹¹ were implemented by Meta based on Cameroonian law during the same period. Meta responds to government data access requests following applicable law and the terms of service. The government has not made any requests to remove user data from TikTok in the past two years.²¹² On December 31, 2023, Google received a content removal request from the government for defamation.²¹³ The content was not removed. Some communication controls violate Principle 41 of the Charter.²¹⁴

AI and Emerging Technologies

Cameroon is committed to the development of artificial intelligence and technological innovation. In June 2024, institutions began consultations aimed at developing a strategic plan for artificial intelligence.²¹⁵ However, the lack of legislation on personal data management does not promote the regulation of emerging technologies and innovation. However, the Charter encourages States in “the development, use, and application of artificial intelligence.”²¹⁶

207 Jeune Afrique: ‘Paul Biya orchestrated the failure of independent media in Cameroon,’ explains Haman Mana. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1564338/politique/paul-biya-a-orchestre-la-faillite-des-medias-independants-au-cameroun-explique-haman-mana/> (accessed November 28, 2024).

208 Cybersecurity Mag. <https://cybersecuritymag.africa/tag/cnps> (accessed November 28, 2024).

209 Article 74, Law No. 2010/012 of December 21, 2010 relating to cybersecurity and cybercrime in Cameroon.

210 Meta ‘Reports – Government data requests – Cameroon’ <https://transparency.meta.com/reports/government-data-requests/country/CM/> (accessed November 28, 2024).

211 Meta ‘Reports – Government data requests – Cameroon’ <https://transparency.meta.com/reports/government-data-requests/country/CM/> (accessed November 28, 2024).

212 Tiktok Reports – Government removal requests – Cameroon’ (2023) <https://www.tiktok.com/transparency/fr-fr/government-removal-requests-2023-2> (accessed November 28, 2024).

213 Google ‘Transparency Report – Government requests to remove content – Cameroon’ Government requests to remove content – Google Transparency Report (accessed November 28, 2024).

214 ACHPR. Principle 41, Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa

215 Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications <https://www.minpostel.gov.cm/index.php/en/actualites/485-conia> (accessed November 28, 2024).

216 ACHPR. Principle 39 (6), Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa

Digital inclusion

As part of the development of the country's technological facilities, the Special Telecommunications Fund requires telecommunications operators to contribute 3% of their annual revenue. The ICT sector has a second source of telecommunications funding. "Network operators and service providers are subject to the payment of an annual fee of 1.5% of their revenue, excluding taxes."²¹⁷ The management of telecommunications funds does not appear to be transparent, as no public management reports have been available for several years.

Cameroon has stepped up the development of its digital infrastructure over the past five years, through the construction of database centers, data centers, the improvement of the fiber optic internet connection between Cameroon and Brazil via submarine cables, and the deployment of two Internet Exchange Points (IXPs)²¹⁸ in Douala and Yaoundé.

²¹⁷ Article 34 (3), Law No. 2010/013 of December 21, 2010 Governing electronic communications in Cameroon

²¹⁸ Internet Society. https://pulse.internetsociety.org/en/ixp-tracker/details/?country_code=CM&ixp_id=2541#members-list (accessed November 28, 2024).

Conclusion

Cameroon has experienced multiple disruptions to its internet network that were not directly attributable to the government. Principles of freedom of expression, access to information, and the protection of personal data have been violated, negatively impacting human rights online. While the government has demonstrated a commitment to improving digital rights and inclusion through the reforms it has initiated, several shortcomings are evident: respect for digital rights and internet freedoms.

In 2025, Cameroon will hold a presidential election amid a complex context of violations of internet freedoms. Digital ecosystem stakeholders fear a resurgence of these violations on the eve of this election. Year 2017, Cameroon had already recorded 93 days²¹⁹ of internet shutdowns aimed at stifling political demands and limiting hate speech in the two regions of the northwest and southwest.

Recommendations

Government

- Prepare a management report on the Special Telecommunications Fund for the past 10 years;
- The Telecommunications Regulatory Agency (ART) and the National Agency for Information and Communication Technologies (ANTIC) must enforce laws promoting the rights of Internet users;
- Accelerate the implementation of the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy;
- The government must implement fair laws, following international human rights standards.

Parliament

- Provide the country with appropriate new laws and regulations that take into account the evolution of ICT.

Civil society organisations and individuals

- Develop advocacy initiatives, increase awareness-raising activities, and participate in multi-stakeholder forums and meetings on Internet governance;
- ICT users must limit cyberattacks, hate speech and online disinformation.

Telecommunications companies

- Comply with international laws and standards governing their activities countrywide ;
- Limit data access in response to illegal requests from government institutions.

Evolution of recommendations between 2020 and 2024

Based on the recommendations of the 2020 Londa Report on Cameroon²²⁰, the country has made some progress in improving its technological infrastructure:

- The Government of Cameroon is in the consultation stage to develop a National Artificial Intelligence Strategy.
- The government has begun drafting several bills, including the law on personal data management.

219 British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-41449099> (accessed 28 November 2024).

220 PIN. <https://paradigmhq.org/report/londa-cameroon-digital-rights-inclusion-2020-report/> (accessed 28 November 2024).

The Score Index

Key Indicators of Londa 2025	Declaration of the ACHPR (P for Principle)	Score	Justification
1. Internet Outages	P38(2)	3	In 2024, internet outages were caused by telecommunications operators. Operators regularly report incidents on the state of the network.
2. Lack of laws, policies and other measures to promote universal, equitable, affordable and meaningful access to the Internet	P37	3	The Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Act 2010 provides provisions for universal and equitable internet access.
3. Criminalisation of fake news	P22(2)	3	Certain provisions of the Penal Code punish false news.
4. Sedition Legislation	P22(2)	3	The Penal Code punishes seditious shouts or chants.
5. Arbitrary arrests and harassment of media, human rights defenders and citizens	P20(1) & (2)	2	Media practitioners are often harassed and arrested in connection with their opinions.
6. Data protection legislation.	P42	2	There is a draft law.
7. States intervene and demand the removal of online content by internet intermediaries	P38 & P39(4)	3	Requests for removal of content are made as part of legal proceedings.
8. Breach of confidentiality of communications	P41	3	Privacy invasions are small-scale.
9. The government's failure to proactively disclose and disseminate information about digital technologies.	P29(3)	2	Disclosure efforts are limited.

10. National strategies on AI and emerging technologies	P39(6)	2	In the process of being adopted.
11. Adoption of child-specific laws, policies and measures promoting children's digital safety and privacy online.	P8 P40(1)	4	Cameroon has a law on children's digital safety.
12. Digital inclusion	P37(3)	2	The government has set up a national program on digital technologies.
TOTAL (up to 60)		32	

