

LONDA 2025

DIGITAL RIGHTS & INCLUSION IN AFRICA REPORT

Botswana

Country Report



PARADIGM
INITIATIVE



LONDA 2025

DIGITAL RIGHTS & INCLUSION IN AFRICA REPORT

Report produced and published by Paradigm Initiative
April 2026

This publication may be reproduced for non-commercial use in any form provided due credit is given to the publishers and the work is presented without any distortion.

Copyright ©2026 Paradigm Initiative

374 Borno Way, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.
media@paradigmhq.org
www.paradigmhq.org



Creative Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial-NoDerivatives
(CC BY-NC-ND) license

ISBN: 978-978-68-6631-4



Botswana

By Oarabile Mudongo

Executive Summary

The 2025 Londa Digital Rights and Inclusion report for Botswana provides a comprehensive assessment of the country's digital landscape, drawing on an extensive review of legislation, policies, platform transparency data, and over 40 authoritative sources across twelve core thematic areas. Through the Londa Score Index, Botswana has achieved a historic leap from mild-to-moderate compliance (28 points) in the 2024 assessment to a considerably compliant status with a total of 35 points out of 60. This reflects substantial legal advancements, most

notably the Data Protection Act of 2024 (effective 14 January 2025), the Access to Information Act of 2024 (effective January 2025), and the Persons with Disability Act of 2024 (operational from December 2025) coupled with near-universal 4G coverage (~98%) and a consistent record of zero internet shutdowns. Yet these gains are tempered by persistent implementation gaps, including a stark urban-rural digital divide (household internet access at 79.2% urban versus ~20.8% rural), affordability barriers, underfunded inclusion efforts for persons with disabilities, weak surveillance oversight, and emerging risks from technology-facilitated gender-based violence and unregulated smart city traffic surveillance technology deployments.

Introduction

Since 2016, Botswana has evolved from a landscape marked by legislative silence, lacking dedicated data protection, freedom of information, or robust digital rights safeguards, into one of Southern Africa's quieter success stories. Early assessments highlighted self-censorship under vague laws, rising online harassment of women in public life, and limited household connectivity that marginalised rural communities and persons with disabilities. However, the period from 2020 to 2025 of the LONDA report series delivered a cascade of crucial reforms, including the landmark Access to Information Act of 2024 (effective January 2025) and the progressive Persons with Disability Act of 2024 (operational from December 2025). These legislative milestones, supported by an active Information and Data Protection Commission and expanded public participation in tech policy, have yielded tangible progress: minimal government content-takedown requests, strengthened privacy safeguards, and near-universal 4G population coverage (~98–99%).

Despite these gains, a persistent gap

remains between legal progress and everyday digital access. Rural household internet access stands at roughly 20.8%, far below urban levels, and affordability challenges continue to limit meaningful connectivity for low-income households. Emerging risks, such as the deployment of unregulated smart city traffic surveillance technology without comprehensive oversight, and the absence of dedicated child online safety and AI governance laws, underscore the need to consolidate recent legislative momentum with stronger implementation. Botswana's current phase is therefore defined not by the absence of reform, but by the need to translate rapid legislative progress into equitable outcomes for all citizens.

Internet Access And

Disruptions

Despite steady strides in national network coverage, Botswana contends with a persistent and stark urban-rural digital divide. This is quantified by Statistics Botswana's 2025 Household

Access and Individual Use of ICTs Survey, which reveals a national household internet access rate of 68.9%, buoyed by urban access at 79.2% but dragged down by significantly lower rates in rural households (around 20.8%).¹ In response, a concerted government initiative led by the Universal Access and Service Fund (UASF) under the Botswana Communications Regulatory Authority (BOCRA) has driven progress through broadband expansion and last-mile projects. These efforts are substantiated by major financial commitment, including the BWP1.2 billion (approximately US\$91.15 million) allocated in the 2024/25 national budget for ICT infrastructure. Consequently, near-universal 4G population coverage (~98–99%) has been achieved, though a core challenge remains: rural areas (25.8–26.2% of the population) still lack fixed-line options. The ongoing intent to narrow the gap is clear, however, from UASF initiatives targeting hundreds of

additional rural schools for connectivity in 2025.²

Affordability and

Quality

Beyond coverage, meaningful access is challenged by affordability and quality. As evidence of the affordability challenge, GSMA's State of Mobile Internet Connectivity 2025 report notes that 1GB of mobile data across Sub-Saharan Africa (including Botswana) averaged ~5.7% of monthly income in 2024–2025, with entry-level smartphones costing roughly 30% of income, modest gains that still exclude many low-income households.³ Nevertheless, Botswana is showing measured progress toward improved data affordability. According to BOCRA's May 2025 Pricing and Costing study, mobile operators have

1. Statistics Botswana (2025) <https://www.statsbots.org.bw/sites/default/files/press-releases/Press%20Release-Statistics%20Botswana%202024%20ICT%20Household%20Survey%20Results.pdf> (accessed on 10 January 2026)
2. BOCRA (2025) [https://www.bocra.org.bw/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/documents/BOCRA2025_ANNUAL_REPORT_\(WEB\)_compressed.pdf](https://www.bocra.org.bw/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/documents/BOCRA2025_ANNUAL_REPORT_(WEB)_compressed.pdf) (accessed on 10 January 2026)

introduced lower-priced, higher-volume bundles, with 1GB-equivalent data now retailing at approximately BWP 49–69 (approximately US\$3.72 – \$US5.24) for 30 days following the approved tariff reductions.⁴ This shift is driven by a September 2025 BOCRA directive that saw operators like Orange Botswana effectively slash data prices by 60%.⁵ While these price adjustments represent a downward shift, the cost of 1GB still translates to roughly 4–5% of GNI per capita in 2025, indicating that mobile data remains above the 2% affordability target despite recent regulatory interventions.

On the quality front, improvements have also been marked. For instance, Ookla Speedtest Global Index data for 2025 show Botswana maintaining strong mobile download speeds (often

second in Africa regionally), with fixed broadband median speeds rising sharply (e.g., +25–45% year-on-year in recent periods) thanks to 4G/5G expansion and fibre investments.⁶ Rural connections, however, continue to suffer instability from frequent power outages, a persistent issue that underscores that reliable electricity remains as essential as network infrastructure.

3. K Bahia “The State of Mobile Internet Connectivity 2025: Understanding Mobile Internet Use in Low- and Middle-Income Countries” (2025) <https://www.gsmainelligence.com/research/the-state-of-mobile-internet-connectivity-2025-understanding-mobile-internet-use-in-low-and-middle-income-countries> (accessed on 09 January 2026)
4. BOCRA “Press Release - Bocra Approves Reduced Data Prices For Orange Botswana” (2025) https://www.bocra.org.bw/sites/default/files/Press_Release_-_Reduction_in_Data_Charges_for_Orange.pdf (accessed on 10 December 2025)
5. L Timothy “BOCRA approves Orange data price cuts” (2025) <https://www.mmegi.bw/business/bocra-approves-orange-data-price-cuts/news> (accessed on 05 January 2026)
6. Speedtest “Ookla Speedtest Global Index – Botswana 2025 data” (2025) <https://www.speedtest.net/global-index/botswana> (accessed 05 December 2025)

Disruptions and the lingering Digital Divide

Deliberate internet shutdowns, one of the gravest threats to digital rights, remain absent in Botswana. However, non-governmental connectivity interruptions, primarily caused by rural power failures, remain a significant challenge, as noted in BOCRA's 2025 annual report.⁷ This infrastructural fragility compounds the structural inequalities of the digital divide. Key data exposes the gap: urban household internet access (79.2%) vastly outpaces rural access (20.8%), and usage among the wealthiest (85%) is nearly double that of the poorest (45%).⁸ An estimated 18.6% of the population remained offline in early 2025, a stagnation highlighting the need for more effective, targeted policy measures to translate national progress into equitable access.⁹

Online Freedom of Expression and Access to Information

Botswana's legal landscape for online expression starts strong with constitutional protections, but is quickly undercut by outdated, restrictive laws. Specifically, Article 12 of the Constitution of Botswana guarantees freedom of expression, which extends to digital spaces. However, this broad guarantee clashes with the Sedition Provisions (Sections 50-56) of the Penal Code and the broadly defined offences in the Cybercrime and Computer Related Crimes Act of 2018.¹⁰ Consequently, these laws create a chilling effect, as they are susceptible to being used to criminalise criticism of public officials. This framework therefore falls short of

7. *ibid*

8. Statistics Botswana "Statistics Botswana Releases 2025 ICT Household Survey Results" (2025) <https://www.statsbots.org.bw/sites/default/files/press-releases/Press%20Release-Statistics%20Botswana%202024%20ICT%20Household%20Survey%20Results.pdf> (accessed on 03 December 2025)

9. Data Reportal "Internet use in Botswana in 2025" (2025) <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-botswana> (accessed on 12 January 2026)

10. Cybercrime and Computer Related Crimes Act, 2018 (Act No. 18 of 2018): <https://www.bocra.org.bw/sites/default/files/documents/18%20Act%2029-06-2018%20Cybercrime%20and%20Computer%20Related%20Crimes.pdf>

full compliance with the principles of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Article 9),¹¹ as the threat of prosecution stifles open dialogue. On a more positive note, the Data Protection Act of 2024 strengthens privacy safeguards,¹² offering a better-aligned counterbalance to surveillance risks.

Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2025 report maintains Botswana's score at 3/4 for freedom of expression, noting reduced political pressure after the 2024 elections but repeating its call for repeal of sedition provisions.¹³ Botswana's Access to Information Act No. 16 of 2024 (effective November 2024) finally gives citizens a statutory right to public records without having to justify their request (Section 6), with presumptive disclosure and narrow exemptions (Section 17).¹⁴

To operationalise this right, public bodies are required to appoint information officers and submit compliance plans (Section 47). While the Act was passed, it lacked a formal commencement date in late 2025, meaning it had not yet come into use.

Botswana holds no record of direct request for content removal or request for user data. For instance, Meta's Transparency Report (January–June 2025) shows two government requests (both emergency disclosures, none via legal process), affecting eight users/accounts, with 0% compliance (no data produced).¹⁵ Similarly, Google received no user-data request in H1 2025 (and no content removal requests),¹⁶ while TikTok reported zero removal requests in its 2025 enforcement reports.¹⁷ No public information is available on any

11. African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) Declaration on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information (the Declaration) <https://achpr.au.int/en/node/902> (accessed on 11 January 2026)
12. Data Protection Act, 2024 (Act No. 18 of 2024): <https://www.studocu.com/row/document/botho-university/corporate-governance/botswana-data-protection-act-2024-government-gazette-extraordinary/127442966>
13. Freedom House 'Freedom in the World 2025: Botswana' (2025) <https://freedomhouse.org/country/botswana/freedom-world/2025> (accessed on 11 December 2025)
14. Access to Information Act, 2024 (Act No.16 2024): <https://botswanalaws.com/consolidated-statutes/acts-on-notice/2024/access-to-information-act>
15. Meta "Integrity Reports, Third Quarter 2025" (2025) <https://transparency.meta.com/reports/government-data-requests/country/BW/> (accessed 26 December 2025)
16. Google "Transparency Report on Government Request to Remove Content Section for Botswana" (2025) <https://transparencyreport.google.com/government-removals/government-requests/BW?hl=en> (accessed 11 December 2025)

direct government requests made to telecommunications operators (e.g., Orange, Mascom) for content restriction or user data during the year. The draft Digital Services Bill (still under consultation in late 2025) proposes clearer, more transparent takedown procedures with stronger appeal mechanisms.¹⁸

Despite this minimal direct censorship, fear of prosecution under sedition and defamation laws continues to drive significant self-censorship. This environment is reflected in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Sans Frontières, where Botswana's ranking dropped to 81 out of 180 countries (down from 79 in 2024).¹⁹ The report attributes this decline to a surge in intimidation and doxing incidents targeting journalists throughout 2024 and 2025. This intimidation has tangible effects, as the

Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Botswana condemns “emerging threats to media freedom” and harassment of journalists.²⁰ Regarding the most severe consequences, arbitrary arrests for online speech remained rare in 2025. This overall picture represents a continued low incidence of prosecution in the country for this period.

Gendered

Disinformation

Gendered disinformation has rapidly become one of the biggest barriers keeping women and girls out of the digital space. The severe pattern of similar issues documented during the 2024 election cycle persisted into 2025, transitioning from acute electioneering to a chronic feature of

17. Tiktok “Government Removal Requests Report” (2025) <https://www.tiktok.com/transparency/en/government-removal-request-2025-1> (accessed 15 December 2025)

18. Digital Services Bill, 2025 (Published On ,2025): <https://www.gov.bw/sites/default/files/2025-06/Digital%20Services%20Bill%20%28revised%20draft%29June2025.pdf>

19. Reporters Without Borders (2025) https://rsf.org/en/rsf-world-press-freedom-index-2025-economic-fragility-leading-threat-press-freedom?data_type=general&year=2025 (accessed 20 January 2026)

20. MISA “MISA Botswana Condemns Emerging Threats to Media Freedom” (2026) <https://misa.org/blog/misa-botswana-condemns-emerging-threats-to-media-freedom/> (accessed 29 January 2026)

the online environment. While no major new large-scale study quantified a further electoral drop in engagement, the UN Women's November 2025 report on digital violence in East and Southern Africa confirmed that women leaders, journalists, and human-rights defenders across these regions, notably in Botswana, continued to face coordinated online threats.²¹ This demonstrates a lack of enforcement of existing cybercrime-related legislation, most of which does not recognise the gender dimensions of digital abuse.

Currently, the Cyber Crime and Computer Related Crimes Act of 2018 criminalises harassment, stalking, and revenge pornography, while the Data Protection Act of 2024 strengthens privacy safeguards. However, no amendments specifically targeting deepfakes were passed in 2025, though discussions in the Ministry of Youth and Gender Affairs' 2025 '16 Days of Activism' campaign statements signal

intent to strengthen penalties and draft a Gender-Based Violence Bill as part of broader regional harmonisation, called for by UN Women.²²

Concerning platform governance, Meta and Google reported zero gender-specific removal requests from Botswana authorities in 2025. However, neither provides localised moderation guidelines tailored to Botswana's context, meaning reports of gendered abuse often rely on global policies that do not fully account for local cultural or political dynamics. By contrast, broader policy efforts are more promising: the National ICT Policy and SmartBots 4IR Strategy now embed gender targets for digital literacy.²³

The most significant development is the ongoing work on dedicated Gender-Based Violence legislation. The Ministry of Youth and Gender Affairs confirmed in December 2025 that drafting instructions for a comprehensive GBV

21. UN Women "Digital violence in East and Southern Africa: Urgent action needed to protect women and girls online" (2025) <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/stories/press-release/2025/11/digital-violence-in-east-and-southern-africa-urgent-action-needed-to-protect-women-and-girls-online> (accessed on 21 November 2025)
22. See Minister's Facebook Post: <https://www.facebook.com/100042906802765/posts/botswanas-first-gender-based-violence-bill-the-ministry-of-youth-and-gender-affa/1713059906800886/> (accessed on 04 January 2026)
23. Daily News "Strategy addresses gender inequality" (2025) <https://dailynews.gov.bw/news-detail/86439> (accessed on 05 January 2026)

Bill have been finalised and submitted to the Attorney General’s Chambers,²⁴ with a target presentation to Parliament set for July 2026. The Minister recognises that technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) silences women and girls, necessitating that the new legal frameworks move beyond solely addressing physical violence, representing a major leap from 2024’s fragmented approach. Crucially, its success depends first on passage into law (not yet achieved in 2025), and then on effective police enforcement and adequate resourcing. While the Ministry has not yet published a specific 2025 enforcement budget figure, the overall GBV response is tied to national planning. Ultimately, without sustained political will and funding, even strong legislation risks remaining on paper

Data Protection and

Cybersecurity

Botswana established a comprehensive data protection regime with the Data Protection Act No. 18 of 2024, effective 14 January 2025.²⁵ The Act consolidates earlier fragmented laws by recognising individual rights to access, rectifying, and erasing personal data, while imposing GDPR-aligned principles like data minimisation and accountability on controllers.²⁶ Furthermore, it applies extraterritorially, includes safeguards for cross-border transfers, and sets significant penalties of up to BWP50 million (approximately US\$3.80 million). While the law aligns well with the African Union Convention on Cyber-security and Personal Data Protection,²⁷ it lacks explicit protections for children’s data and automated decision-making gaps that 2025 amendment proposals aim to address.

24. Mmegi “Chombo announces GBV Bill drafting” (2025) <https://www.mmegi.bw/news/chombo-announces-gbv-bill-drafting/news> (accessed on 06 January 2026)

25. Data Protection Act, 2024 (Act No. 18 of 2024): <https://www.studocu.com/row/document/botho-university/corporate-governance/botswana-data-protection-act-2024-government-gazette-extraordinary/127442966>

26. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Art. 5 GDPR Principles relating to processing of personal data: <https://gdpr-info.eu/art-5-gdpr/> (accessed on 27 January 2026)

27. AUC ‘African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection’ <https://au.int/en/treaties/african-union-convention-cyber-security-and-personal-data-protection> (accessed on 08 January 2026)

The Information and Data Protection Commission (IDPC) of Botswana, established under the 2024 Act, now holds powers to investigate, audit, and impose these fines. Operationalising these powers, regulations require 72-hour breach notifications. While this research does not detail the specific mechanics of the breach reporting portal, the regulatory environment is now fully operational. Data regarding the number of complaints received or resolved by the IDPC in 2025 remains unavailable. Although enforcement efforts are underway, controller compliance is inconsistent; resource constraints continue to hinder the transition toward comprehensive oversight. To date, there have been no confirmed major data breaches or instances of data misuse. This could suggest that IDPC has focused on proactive compliance rather than reactive penalties.

The Cybersecurity Bill (No.24 of 2025),²⁸ gazetted on August 8, 2025, strengthens

national security by regulating critical infrastructure and establishing a Cybersecurity Commission and a 24/7 Cyber Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT). Operationally, a 2025 Cyble-BOCRA MoU will improve threat intelligence sharing.²⁹ However, a significant concern remains: Section 12 of the Bill grants broad interception powers without mandatory judicial oversight, and vague “national security” definitions risk abuse. Consequently, while awareness campaigns can reduce incidents, proportional safeguards and whistleblower protections are still absent.

The Omang biometric ID system, which captures fingerprints and facial images, had achieved 86.7% coverage among individuals aged 15 and over, according to the 2022 Population and Housing Census.³⁰ As a result, it has expanded access to essential services including voting, banking, health care, social assistance, land-title registration,

28. Cybersecurity Bill (No.24 of 2025): https://www.bocra.org.bw/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/documents/Draft_Cybersecurity_Bill_2025_AG_Comments.pdf (accessed 05 December 2025)

29. Cyble Inc “Cyble and Botswana Communications Regulatory Authority (BOCRA) Sign MoU to Advance National Cybersecurity in Botswana” (2025) <https://cyble.com/press/cyble-bocra-mou-botswana-cybersecurity/> (accessed 06 January 2026)

30. Statistics Botswana “Population and Housing Census 2022: Key Demographic and Socio-Economic Indicators” (2023) <https://www.statsbots.org.bw/sites/default/files/Population%20%20Housing%20Census%202022-%20Key%20Demographic%20and%20Socio-Economic%20Indicators.pdf> (accessed 18 December 2025)

and SIM-card registration. However, this widespread adoption creates a significant trade-off, as the centralised repository of sensitive biometric data poses major privacy and security risks, including potential identity theft and state surveillance if breached.

Notably, approximately 13.3% of the eligible population (~200,000 people) remain unregistered. This gap disproportionately affects Basarwa (San) communities, rural populations in remote western districts, persons with disabilities, economically disadvantaged groups, and youth who have just reached registration age.³¹ Consequently, without an Omang card, these individuals are excluded from exercising fundamental rights and accessing public services, thereby perpetuating cycles of marginalisation.

In terms of legal governance, the system is now subject to the Data Protection

Act 2024 (effective January 2025), which establishes IDPC as the supervisory authority and introduces modern principles for lawful data processing. Nevertheless, a critical challenge persists: the National Registration Act of 1986 (amended 1993),³² the primary legal foundation, predates modern digital-ID technologies and does not adequately address contemporary privacy and inclusion risks.

Privacy and

Surveillance

Botswana's primary law authorising surveillance is the Criminal Procedure and Evidence (Controlled Investigations) Act 2022.³³ This permits interception with a judicial warrant, but defines its scope by a broad and undefined term:

31. Institute of development Studies "Biometric Digital-ID in Africa: Progress and Challenges to Date – Ten Country Case Studies Botswana Country Report" (2025) https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/articles/book/Biometric_Digital-ID_in_Africa_Progress_and_Challenges_to_Date_Ten_Country_Case_Studies/30773789?file=60062471 (accessed on 28 December 2025)

32. National Registration Act, 1986 (amended 1993): <https://botswanalaws.com/StatutesActpdf/1993Actpdf/NA-TIONAL%20REGISTRATION%20%28AMENDMENT%29%20ACT%2C%2017%20OF%201993.pdf> (accessed on 20 January 2026)

33. Criminal Procedure and Evidence (Controlled Investigations) Act 2022: <https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/natlex2/files/download/113962/BTW113962.pdf> (accessed 14 January 2025)

“serious offences.” Consequently, this vagueness allows orders without clear necessity or proportionality, meaning the framework only partially meets the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACH PR) Article 9³⁴ and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Article 17 standards.³⁵

Subsequent legislation has added safeguards. The Data Protection Act of 2024 now requires impact assessments and a lawful basis for surveillance-related data processing, addressing earlier gaps. Similarly, the Act requires that any systematic monitoring or high-risk data processing be both necessary and proportionate to its purpose. Specific legislation dedicated to online harms is not included in the current legal framework. Importantly, no amendments addressed automated surveillance in 2025, leaving a regulatory gap.

The launch of Botswana’s Greater Gaborone Centralised Traffic Control

Centre introduces advanced smart city surveillance capabilities, utilising real-time camera networks and predictive data analytics for traffic management and infrastructure planning.³⁶ While enhancing urban efficiency, this integrated system is an evolution of the 2020 Safe City surveillance project. Currently, no specific legal framework publicly governs the operation, data retention, or oversight of this predictive system, highlighting a pressing regulatory gap as Botswana’s smart city infrastructure expands.

Oversight of surveillance remains limited. On one hand, the Data Protection Act empowers the IDPC to audit data processing and report to Parliament, and it resolved 30 surveillance-related complaints in early 2025. Also, the Criminal Procedure and Evidence (Controlled Investigations) Act of 2022 (CPE Act) requires the issuance of judicial warrants. However, a significant accountability gap exists,

34. African Commission on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR): <https://achpr.au.int/en/node/902> (accessed on 11 January 2026)

35. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Article 17: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights> (accessed on 11 January 2026).

36. Daily News “High-Tech Traffic Control Centre To Tackle Road Safety” (2025) <https://dailynews.gov.bw/news-detail/89428> (accessed on 18 December 2025)

as the Directorate of Intelligence and Security Services (DISS) is not subject to the same warrant or reporting requirements. In Botswana, primary legislative oversight of surveillance is conducted by the Intelligence and Security Parliamentary Committee and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC); however, there remains a critical gap as no independent body currently possesses investigative authority over intelligence surveillance activities.

Developments in

ICT and Emerging

Technologies

Botswana has not yet enacted a standalone AI law or formal national strategy, resulting in an indirect and foundational approach to AI governance. While policies like the Maitlamo ICT Policy and the SmartBots strategy promote digital innovation, UNESCO's

2025 AI Readiness Assessment notes that AI-specific regulation, risk-assessment, and oversight structures remain overshadowed by broader digital initiatives.³⁷ Plans to partner with European institutions, including Estonia and other donors, on a national AI strategy were initiated in 2024 and have since advanced from foundational discussions to high-level strategic engagement.³⁸ However, no confirmed progress has been made following these developments since the change in government, leaving Botswana's AI framework in 2025 as policy-driven and preparatory rather than legally binding.

Botswana's institutional readiness for AI remains mixed. According to the Oxford Insights Government AI Readiness Index 2025, Botswana scored 37.10 overall, ranking 109th globally and 9th in Sub-Saharan Africa, above the regional average score of 29.12. The country performs comparatively well in regulatory compliance (60.0) and e-government

37. UNESCO "Botswana Artificial Intelligence Readiness Assessment Report" (2025) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000396211/PDF/396211eng.pdf.multi> (access on 04 January 2026)

38. Daily News "Artificial Intelligence Policy in Final Stage" (2025) <https://dailynews.gov.bw/news-detail/88106> (accessed on 28 January 2026)

delivery (68.21).³⁹ While the data shows emerging strengths in AI sector maturity and technology diffusion relative to regional averages, this underscores that the country's AI ecosystem in 2025 remains foundational, with stronger infrastructure and governance readiness than strategic policy direction or skills development.

Alongside policy discussions, several 2025 developments signal Botswana's growing investment in AI-enabling infrastructure and capacity. The launch of BOTSAT-1, the country's first satellite, marks a significant step toward strengthening national digital infrastructure and expanding connectivity needed to support data centres, cloud services, and AI-driven industries.⁴⁰ At the institutional level, the Botswana Unified Revenue Service

(BURS) began exploring frameworks to integrate AI into tax administration, including proposals to use automated systems to improve audit efficiency, digital tax services, and voluntary compliance. Skills development is also receiving increased attention.⁴¹ Under Vision 2036 and through partnerships with UNESCO and other international actors, government and education stakeholders continued initiatives to expand STEM and digital-skills training, including school-level programmes such as BRASST aimed at preparing learners for participation in an AI-driven economy.⁴² Meanwhile, Botswana's broader digital ecosystem is expanding: the Internet of Things (IoT) market is projected to reach approximately US\$135.9 million by 2025 (Statista),⁴³ reflecting rising connectivity, mobile adoption, and digital-transformation investments.

39. Oxford Insights "Government AI Readiness Index" (2025) https://oxfordinsights.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/2025-Government-AI-Readiness-Index-Report_01_26.pdf (accessed 15 December 2026)

40. Africa Defence forum "Botswana's First Satellite Launch a Model for African Countries" (2025) <https://adf-magazine.com/2025/08/botswanas-first-satellite-launch-a-model-for-african-countries/> (accessed on 19 January 2026)

41. E Munjeyi and D Schutte "Development of an artificial intelligence framework to combat tax noncompliance in Botswana" (2025) <https://adf-magazine.com/2025/08/botswanas-first-satellite-launch-a-model-for-african-countries/> (accessed on 20 December 2025)

42. Human Resource Development Center "Introducing The Botswana Robotics & Automation Skills Transfer (Brast) Project" (2025) <https://www.hrdc.org.bw/case/introducing-botswana-robotics-automation-skills-transfer-brast-project> (accessed on 15 December 2025)

43. Statista "Internet of Things - Botswana" (2025) https://www.statista.com/outlook/tmo/internet-of-things/botswana?srsltid=AfmBOoaJZOAqPWX4yCdFP9U1WCtrdbGSPNWW74mnQzTCG63x2S9_72#revenue (accessed 05 January 2026)

Taken together, these developments indicate growing technological ambition; however, without parallel progress on dedicated AI governance and oversight, infrastructure and skills expansion continue to outpace the establishment of clear regulatory safeguards.

Digital Inclusion

The landmark Persons with Disability Act of 2024 officially came into force on December 4, 2025,⁴⁴ marking a significant legal milestone for digital and broader inclusion in Botswana. It established a National Disability Council to coordinate implementation, which became operational in 2025. Progress in the year focused on turning this framework into action; with UN agency support,

initiatives advanced digital inclusion and inclusive education.⁴⁵ For instance, UNICEF supported the finalisation of a National Functional Curriculum for learners with severe disabilities, aligning with SDG 4 goals.⁴⁶

However, implementation challenges persist, particularly a pronounced rural-urban divide in digital accessibility and resource gaps. Public engagement during International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) 2025 events highlighted these ongoing disparities, calling for sustained efforts to ensure the Act promises to translate into equal access.⁴⁷

In parallel, child online safety efforts advanced in 2025 through strengthened legal safeguards and operational programs. Botswana continued to align with the African Union's Child

44. Persons with Disability Act, 2024 (No.6 of 2024): [https://covid19portal.gov.bw/sites/default/files/2025-03/Act%20No%206%20of%202024%20PERSONS%20WITH%20DISABILITY%20\(1\).pdf](https://covid19portal.gov.bw/sites/default/files/2025-03/Act%20No%206%20of%202024%20PERSONS%20WITH%20DISABILITY%20(1).pdf) (accessed on 03 December 2025)

45. UNICEF Botswana "Giga and the Learning Passport are advancing Digital Learning in Botswana" (2025) <https://www.unicef.org/botswana/media/1161/file/Case%20Study%20Giga%20%20Learning%20Passport%20%20Botswana.pdf> (accessed on 15 January 2026)

46. UNICEF Botswana "Botswana has validated a national Functional Curriculum for learners with Severe to Profound Intellectual and Multiple Disabilities (SPIMD) - a major step toward" (2025) <https://www.facebook.com/100064662072875/videos/botswana-has-validated-a-national-functional-curriculum-for-learners-with-severe/785437827894220/> (accessed on 20 January 2026)

47. Facebook Post: Botswana Society for the Deaf (2025) Botswana Society for the Deaf (BSD) proudly joined the nation in Jwaneng yesterday for the commemoration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD).

Online Safety Policy,⁴⁸ while the Data Protection Act 2024 (effective January 2025) introduced critical protections for children’s data, requiring verifiable parental consent (Section 29). Operationally, UNICEF partnerships helped scale digital protection, including safer reporting tools and expanded child-friendly services.

Nevertheless, structural gaps remain. The country still lacks a standalone child online protection law, and critical issues like rural coverage and platform age verification are limited. Overall, 2025 was defined by foundational progress, from enacting key legislation to launching supportive programs, honouring commitments under the ACHPR and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Yet, uneven access persists underscoring that full digital inclusion requires accelerated scaling of resources and targeted rural interventions

Universal Service Fund

(USF)

The Universal Access and Service Fund (UASF), administered by the Botswana Communications Regulatory Authority (BOCRA), remained a central policy instrument for advancing equitable connectivity during the reporting period. Designed to subsidise infrastructure in commercially unviable areas, the Fund continued to support national broadband and universal access objectives by extending services to underserved communities and public institutions.⁴⁹

From a financial standpoint, the Fund maintained a stable revenue base derived from sector levies on telecommunications, broadcasting, and postal operators. Total collections for the year amounted to approximately

Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/100069342544215/posts/on-thursday-december-4th-2025-jwaneng-town-will-host-the-un-international-day-fo/1161225459532195/>

48. The African Union: Child Online Safety and Empowerment Policy (2024): https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/43798-doc-African_Union_Child_Online_Safety_and_Empowerment_Policy_Feb_2024.pdf (accessed on 10 January 2026)

49. BOCRA “BOCRA Advancing Communications Regulation For An AI World Annual Report 2025” (2025) https://www.bocra.org.bw/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/documents/BOCRA2025_ANNUAL_REPORT_%28WEB%29_compressed.pdf (accessed on 12 January 2026)

BWP44.6 million (approximately US\$3.39 million), with a surplus of around BWP37.6 million (approximately US\$2.86 million) transferred into the UASF trust to support ongoing and future projects.⁵⁰ Fuelled by these collections, the Fund retained reserves to finance targeted infrastructure expansion, although the scale of available resources remains modest relative to long-term universal access ambitions.³

To translate these funds into tangible outcomes, the reporting period saw continued expansion of connectivity and broadcasting infrastructure in underserved regions. LTE and mobile network deployments in remote villages contributed to maintaining national 4G population coverage of approximately 98%, significantly improving access to voice and data services in previously unserved areas.⁵¹ In parallel, new FM transmission sites expanded commercial radio coverage to 34 rural communities, increasing national reach to about 80% and improving access to information and public-interest broadcasting.⁵ These infrastructure investments supported connectivity for more than 50,000 residents, including students, educators,

and local service institutions.

Building on this momentum, the Fund also prioritised connectivity within educational institutions as a mechanism for strengthening long-term digital inclusion. Prefabricated computer laboratories and broadband connections were delivered to rural schools, enabling access to digital learning platforms and public e-services. Early usage indicators suggest that these interventions contributed to a measurable rise in rural internet adoption during the reporting period.⁵²

Despite these advancements, disparities persist between urban and rural connectivity levels and across income groups. Infrastructure expansion has not yet fully addressed affordability constraints or accessibility gaps for persons with disabilities. To address remaining connectivity deficits, the Fund is expected to prioritise further rural broadband rollout, expanded institutional connectivity, and strengthened monitoring of project outcomes in the coming year.

50. Ibid

51. Ibid

52. Ibid

Conclusion

Botswana in 2025 stands as a nation of quiet, consistent progress, rarely repressive, steadily advancing toward global standards, and ahead of many regional peers in freedom of expression, privacy restraint, and participatory policy-making on emerging technologies. This upward trajectory is evident in the dramatic year-on-year improvement on the LONDA index, yet the path to true leadership remains defined by the need to close the gap between ambitious legislation and lived realities for all citizens. Future success hinges on decisive action to reach higher ratings in coming years: enacting dedicated Child

Online Protection and AI Governance laws by 2026 with mandatory human rights impact assessments; strengthening independent oversight of surveillance through judicial warrants and transparent mechanisms; and scaling Universal Access and Service Fund resources by at least 50% to prioritise rural last-mile connectivity, affordability subsidies, and assistive technologies for persons with disabilities. Sustained multi-stakeholder commitment, pairing legislative energy with bold enforcement and funding, will determine whether Botswana fully realises its potential as the continent’s exemplary digital-rights success story.

Recommendations

The Government should:

- Enact a standalone Child Online Protection Act by 2027 to centralise safeguards for children’s

privacy and safety. The Act must mandate age-appropriate design standards, robust reporting mech

- anisms, and compulsory child-rights impact assessments for all digital service providers operating within the jurisdiction.
- Establish an AI Governance and Automated Surveillance Framework, requiring human-rights impact assessments, transparency, and independent oversight for high-risk technologies.
- Scale UASF investment and targeting, prioritising rural last-mile connectivity, affordability subsidies, and assistive technologies for persons with disabilities. Public reporting on fund allocation and impact should be strengthened.
- Strengthen independent surveillance oversight by requiring judicial authorisation for all interception activities. Establishing an independent review mechanism for intelligence surveillance and clarifying national-security exemptions in data-protection laws.
- Operationalise the Access to Information Act fully through implementation guidelines, trained information officers, and proactive disclosure obligations.

The Media should:

- Build and sustain dedicated fact-checking and digital-literacy desks to raise awareness of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV), providing a critical defence against the gendered disinformation that routinely targets women in public life.
- Protect their own personnel, news organisations must adopt and enforce gender-sensitive newsroom policies. These should include rapid-response protocols for online harassment, backed by legal-support funds and strong partnerships with the Statutory Press Council.
- Proactively partner with regulators like BOCRA and the Information Commission. By training reporters on using the Access to Information

Act proactively to strengthen investigative reporting on digital governance and public-interest technology.

Civil Society Organisations should:



- Amplify their voice, organisations should form a permanent Digital Rights Coalition to transition from passive observation to strategic advocacy. This coalition should prioritise strategic litigation to challenge unconstitutional practices, specifically aiming to close “national security” loopholes in the Data Protection Act and demanding a public registry of automated surveillance tools used by law enforcement to ensure transparency and accountability.
- This coalition should then systematically use the new Access to Information Act as a strategic tool, requesting and publishing detailed data on UASF spending.
- On the ground, CSOs must scale up community-based digital literacy programmes in rural and marginalised communities. Simultaneously, they should continue to push for mandatory representation of these communities in all future tech policy consultations, ensuring that the digital future is shaped by everyone it will affect.

Private Sector should:









- Before rolling out new technologies, companies should conduct and publish independent human rights impact assessments, especially for biometric systems like facial recognition. This builds public trust and mitigates potential harm.
- To directly tackle the affordability barrier, the private sector should actively contribute to the Universal Access Service Funds. Together, they can create subsidised bundles that include affordable assistive devices and adaptive software alongside standard data packages.
- Finally, platforms must take a stronger stand against online abuse by strengthening localised content-moderation teams and adopting clear, transparent guidelines on gender-based violence. Establishing direct, prioritised reporting channels for women in public life facing coordinated attacks is a critical step in making the digital space safer for all.







The Score Index



Botswana, 2025

1 = Totally non-compliant; 2 = Mildly compliant; 3 = Moderately compliant; 4 = Considerably compliant; 5 = Fully compliant

Indicator	ACHPR Principle	2024 Score	2025 Score	2025 Justification
Internet Shutdowns	P38(2)			Botswana maintained a perfect record of zero internet shutdowns in 2025, continuing its long-standing practice of non-interference with network access. No deliberate disruptions were recorded by regulators or platforms.
Inexistent laws, policies and other measures to promote universal, equitable, affordable and meaningful access to the internet	P37			National 4G population coverage reached ~98–99% and UASF projects expanded rural connectivity and school access. However, rural household internet access remains ~20.8% and data affordability still exceeds the global 2% income benchmark despite 2025 tariff reductions.
False News Criminalisation	P22(2)			False-news and cybercrime provisions remain in law and can be used to restrict expression. Although no prosecutions were recorded in 2025, the existence of these provisions continues to produce a chilling effect.

Indicator	ACHPR Principle	2024 Score	2024 Score	2025 Justification
Sedition Legislation	P22(2)			Sedition provisions under the Penal Code remain in force. While few or no prosecutions occurred in 2025, their continued presence creates legal uncertainty and risk for journalists and activists.
Arbitrary Arrests and Harassments of the Media, HRDs and Citizens	P20(1) & (2)			Arrests for online speech remain rare. The report notes limited incidents of harassment and intimidation, including doxxing threats against journalists, but no widespread arrests or enforced disappearances.
Data Protection Legislation.	P42			The Data Protection Act No.18 of 2024 (effective January 2025) established a comprehensive regime and created the Information and Data Protection Commission (IDPC) with enforcement powers, breach-notification rules, and penalties up to P50 million (~USD 370,000). Implementation capacity gaps remain.
States interfere and require the removal of online content by internet intermediaries	P38 and P39(4)			Platform transparency reports from Meta for 2025 shows a total of two government requests for content removal in Botswana. Meta received 2 emergency disclosure requests (no legal-process requests), affecting 8 users/accounts, but produced 0% data (no compliance). Google and TikTok reported no removal requests at all.
Invasion of Privacy of	P41			Surveillance laws require warrants under the Controlled Investigations

Indicator	ACHPR Principle	2024 Score	2024 Score	2025 Justification
Communications				Act (2022), but broad “national security” provisions and limited independent oversight of intelligence agencies remain. Smart-city surveillance expansion lacks a dedicated regulatory framework.
Failure by the government to proactively disclose and disseminate information digital technologies.	P29(3)			The Access to Information Act No.16 of 2024 provides a statutory right to information and requires public bodies to appoint information officers. Implementation has begun but full operationalisation and reporting remain ongoing.
AI and Emerging Technologies national strategies	P39(6)			Botswana completed a UNESCO AI Readiness Assessment (2025) and is developing a national AI strategy. Infrastructure investments (e.g., BOTSAT-1 satellite) and policy consultations are underway, but no binding AI law exists yet.
Adoption of specific child laws, policies and measures promoting children’s digital safety and privacy online	P39(6)			Child protections exist through the Data Protection Act (2024) and AU policy alignment, but Botswana still lacks a standalone Child Online Protection law and enforcement structures remain fragmented.

Indicator	ACHPR Principle	2024 Score	2024 Score	2025 Justification
Digital Inclusion	P37(3)			The Persons with Disability Act (2024) and UASF programmes support inclusion and school connectivity. However, implementation gaps persist, particularly for rural communities and persons with disabilities, and affordability barriers remain.
Total (out of 60):	2024: 28	2025 35		

Botswana records a solid improvement in the LONDA Score Index for 2025, rising from 28/60 in 2024 to 35/60. This 7-point increase reflects meaningful progress in several areas, particularly the entry into force of key legislation (Data Protection Act, Access to Information Act, Persons with Disability Act), strong connectivity expansion, and a stable environment free from shutdowns. Remaining gaps relate to rural access, affordability, surveillance oversight, and the absence of dedicated AI and child online safety laws. The trajectory is positive, but sustained implementation and funding are needed to close the remaining gaps and move toward the high 40s or above.



374 Borno Way, Yaba 101245, Lagos, Nigeria.
www.paradigmhq.org