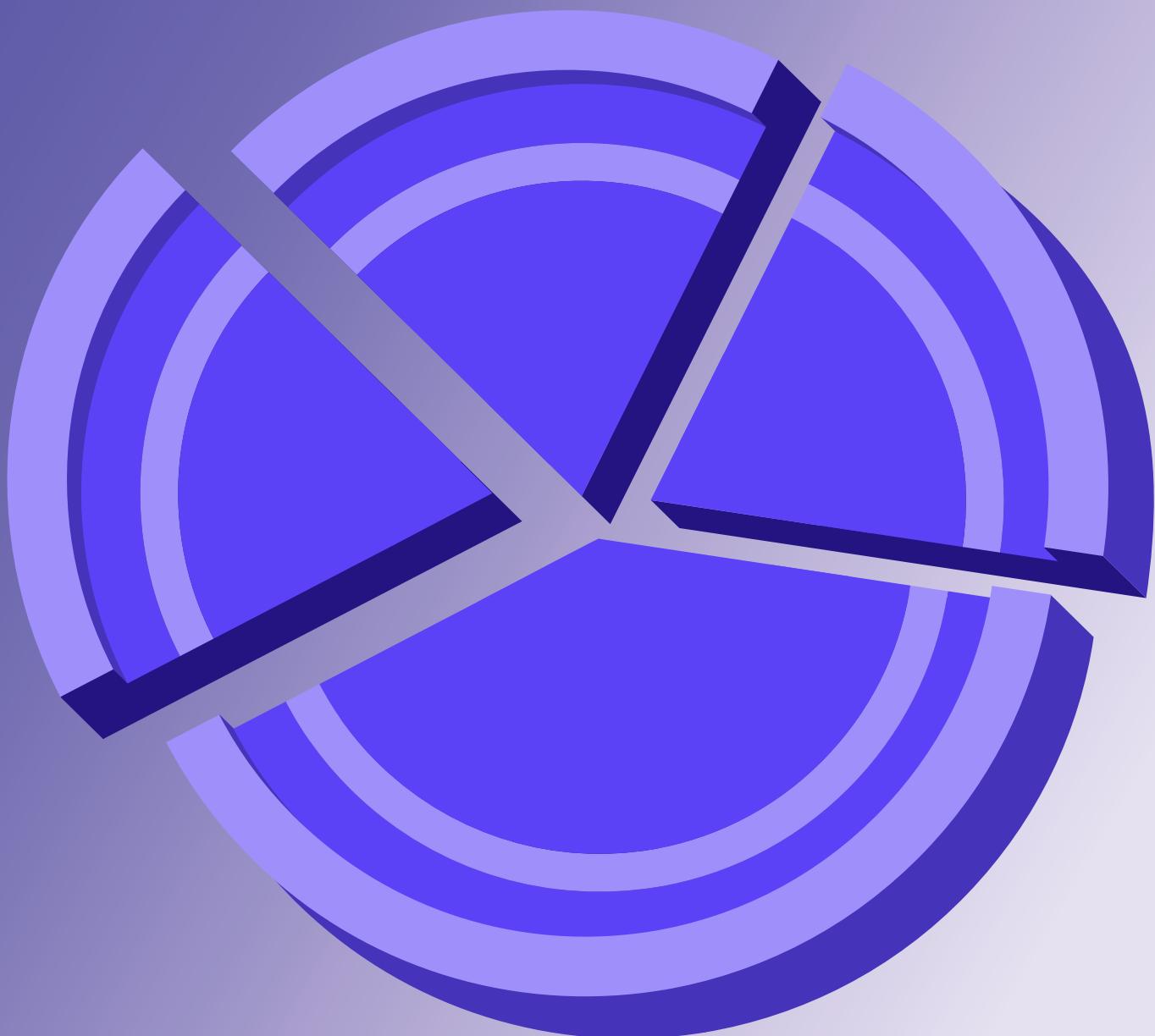


# Digital Rights Quarterly

JULY - OCTOBER 2025



Southern Africa  
Anglophone West Africa  
Francophone Africa  
East Africa



# Digital Rights Quarterly Q3 2025

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# East Africa

## Countries Covered



Kenya



Uganda



Tanzania



Djibouti



Rwanda

## Overview

In Q3, East Africa experienced continued modernisation of digital services and networks, while online civic space tightened. Kenya's reliance on security-oriented legal processes against digital activists and Rwanda's ongoing restrictions on digital participation illustrate this divergence. Laws and enforcement targeting 'misinformation' and 'hate speech' further chilled expression and oversight by journalists, activists, and youth organisers, which reveals a gap between service expansion and rights protection.

At the same time, governments advanced ambitious connectivity projects and engaged in data protection policy developments and implementation initiatives. Looking ahead, the region sits at an inflection point. Infrastructure gains and regulatory churn create opportunities for rights-respecting digital transformation, but enforcement trends around speech and surveillance pose real risks.

## Context Analysis

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### Freedom of Expression



#### Kenya

The national government has increasingly used anti-terrorism courts to prosecute protesters, charging over 75 individuals, mostly youth and digital activists, with terrorism-related offences. Human rights groups argue<sup>1</sup> that this suppresses free expression and dissent.<sup>2</sup>

#### Rwanda

Rwanda has expanded e-services and strengthened data protection measures, yet civil society observes<sup>3</sup> that civic space online remains constrained, with participation and expression tightly managed.<sup>4</sup>

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1 <https://www.amnestykenya.org/joint-statement-on-the-aftermath-of-the-saba-saba-demonstrations-and-ndong-investigative-findings>

2 <https://www.wsj.com/world/africa/terrorism-couffenses-kenya-protesters-7349e793>

3 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/rwanda/freedom-net/2024>

4 <https://ifex.org/rwandas-digital-rights-gains-shadowed-by-persistent-repression/>

### Digital Inclusion



#### Kenya

Plans are underway to establish 1,450 digital hubs across the country, part of Kenya's ambition to cement its role as Africa's digital hub.<sup>5</sup> When paired with USF investments, the initiative could lower access costs, increase skills and jobs, and improve rural inclusion.

#### Kenya and Tanzania

Both countries launched the Dar es Salaam–Mombasa Terrestrial Fibre Link, a cross-border initiative aimed at boosting digital trade, enhancing regional e-commerce, and bridging the digital divide in East Africa. This milestone project was delivered through a partnership between Kenya's Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Authority and Tanzania Telecommunications Corporation.<sup>6</sup>

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5 <https://zemmvm.clicks.mlsend.com/tf/cl/ey2ljoie1wiYVwiO-jEzNTcxNDgsXCJsXCI6MTY2ODEyODI0NTM2ODc2NjM3LFwiclwjOjE2NjgxM-jgzNTY3MTcwNDkxN30iLCzjjojOGlyYTZlOTc4ODFmNWZiMCJ9>

6 <https://x.com/MoICTKenya/status/1946219038113181880>

## Freedom of Expression



### East Africa Region

A new regional project aimed at achieving “digital sovereignty and integration” through a Partner States-owned communication satellite was announced. Its goals include extending connectivity to remote areas, improving affordability, and reducing the digital divide.<sup>7</sup>

#### Kenya/Tanzania/EAC

EAC Partner States are pushing to further reduce costs for mobile roaming and enhance cross-border connectivity under the One Network Area (ONA) framework. This could have knock-on effects for inclusion as it is expected to lower costs and narrow access gaps. (cheaper access across borders).<sup>8</sup>

#### Rwanda

On August 8, 2025, Rwanda introduced a unified digital ID system that includes biometric data and fingerprints, available as a physical card, digital version, or unique ID number. It will streamline access to services like banking, government programs, and mobile registration.<sup>9</sup>

7 <https://techafricanews.com/2025/09/16/east-africa-targets-digital-sovereignty-and-integration-through-shared-satellite-initiative/>

8 <https://www.eac.int/press-releases>

9 <https://zemmmv.clicks.mlsend.com/tb/cl/eyJ2ljoie1wiYVwiO-jEzNTcxNDgsXCJsXCI6MTYyMzM2Nzk5NjM5NzMzOTMyLFwiclwijE2MjM-2Mzl4NTI1MzkxNjQ5OH0iLCJzIjoiMjJINzRjZmRiZTkwZjg4YiJ9>

## Surveillance/Privacy



### Kenya

On 18 July 2025, the High Court of Kenya (Justice Chacha Mwita) in *Katiba Institute v Communications Authority of Kenya & Others* quashed the Communications Authority (CA) and the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) public notices mandating disclosure of mobile phone IMEI numbers, declaring them unconstitutional, unlawful, and null and void. The Court held that compulsory IMEI collection violated Article 31 (right to privacy) and failed the Article 24 proportionality test. The court issued orders of prohibition, thereby halting plans for a centralised device database tied to tax-compliance verification; the Communications Authority has since appealed the ruling.<sup>10</sup>

#### Uganda

Uganda recorded a milestone in data governance by securing its first criminal conviction under the Data

10 <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/ca-appeals-quashing-of-directive-on-imei-numbers-5197566>

## Surveillance/ Privacy



Protection and Privacy Act (Cap. 97). Ronald Mugulusi of Quickloan was convicted for unlawful data practices, following coordinated efforts by the PDPO, Criminal Investigation Department (CID), and Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP). This reinforces Uganda's stance on data accountability and citizen rights.<sup>11</sup>

### Rwanda

In Q3, despite the positive efforts to bolster cybersecurity and digital infrastructure in Rwanda, surveillance infrastructure is expanding, raising concerns about privacy and state oversight. For instance, SIM registration is being more tightly bound to the national ID (NIDA), with biometric checks that harden the link between a person's civil identity and their phone use; a new digital-ID programme is rolling out across sectors (banking, health, e-government), deepening cross-database linkage; Kigali continues to scale citywide CCTV under "smart/safe city" schemes, extending real-world tracking; and a maturing legal toolkit for cybercrime and lawful interception underpins greater network/device access. Alongside this infrastructure, authorities and aligned actors monitor social-media activity, while recent investigations build on earlier evidence of advanced spyware targeting, indicating the technical ability to penetrate devices.<sup>12</sup>

11 <https://iclg.com/news/22872-historic-data-privacy-conviction-se-cured-in-uganda>

12 <https://jsis.washington.edu/news/cybersecurity-profile-2025-rwanda>

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## Policy Developments



### Tanzania

The government is finalising its first national AI guideline to promote responsible adoption. Announced at the 3rd Advanced AI Short Course in Dodoma, the guideline is expected to shape national AI use while guiding innovation in education and beyond.<sup>13</sup>

### Djibouti

Djibouti has adopted a comprehensive Digital Code covering data protection, cybersecurity, e-commerce, cryptology, and digital innovation. The law is designed to enhance digital trust, structure public-private partnerships, and speed up the rollout of public tech initiatives like e-ID and e-Government. This move strengthens Djibouti's ambition to become a regional digital hub, aligning legal tools with the country's digital transformation roadmap.

### Uganda

13 <https://zemmmvm.clicks.mlsend.com/tf/cl/eyJ2ljoie1wiYVwiO-jEzNTcxNDgsXCJsXCI6MTY2ODEyODI0NTY0MTM5NjM2LFwiclwijOjE2Njgx-MjgzNTY3MTcwNDkxN30iLCJzIjoODI0YzI1MzNjMGE1ZDNiMSJ9>

The PDPO clarified<sup>14</sup> that data protection laws apply to all entities handling Ugandans' personal data, regardless of location. Cross-border transfers do not need prior approval, but controllers/processors must keep detailed records for

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14 <https://pdpo.go.ug/media/2025/07/Ssekamwa-Frank-3-Ors-vs-Google-LLC-PDPO-Decision-18th-July-2024.pdf>

## Policy Developments



audits.<sup>15</sup> The clarification was necessary because many companies, especially foreign platforms and regional service providers, were uncertain about whether Uganda's Data Protection and Privacy Act (DPPA 2019) applied extraterritorially and whether they needed prior approval from the PDPO for every cross-border data transfer. This ambiguity had caused compliance hesitancy, delays in partnerships, and unnecessary administrative requests.

### Kenya

The High Court rejected<sup>16</sup> Paradigm Initiative's bid to join a major data protection case against X Corp as amicus curiae, citing perceived partisanship. The application sought to compel X Corp to enforce strict identity verification and content moderation.<sup>17</sup>

The Office of the Data Protection Commissioner (ODPC) has launched a new 5-year strategic plan with key goals which include:<sup>18</sup>

- Continuous review of the Data Protection Act and regulations
- Institutional capacity-building for compliance enforcement
- Increased monitoring, surveillance, and public trust in Kenya's data governance ecosystem

The Kenya Revenue Authority has issued regulations<sup>19</sup> for the new Significant Economic Presence Tax, expanding taxation on all digital services consumed locally, regardless of provider location. This follows Nigeria's 2020 model.

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15 <https://zemmvm.clicks.mlsend.com/tb/cl/eyJ2ljoie1wiYVwiO-jEzNTcxNDgsXCJsXCI6MTYyMzM2Nzk5NjUzMzY1NDIzLFwiclwOjE2MjM-2MzI4NTI1MzkxNjQ5OH0iLCJzjoiN2E2NDFmMGMyZDBmM2RIYSJ9>

16 <https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2025/08/high-court-rejects-paradigm-initiatives-bid-to-join-data-protection-case-as-friend-of-the-court>

17 <https://zemmvm.clicks.mlsend.com/tb/cl/eyJ2ljoie1wiYVwiO-jEzNTcxNDgsXCJsXCI6MTYyMzM2Nzk5NjU4NjA4MzA1LFwiclwOjE2MjM-2MzI4NTI1MzkxNjQ5OH0iLCJzjoiMGIxNzY2YzMwMTA2ZDliNiJ9>

18 <https://www.odpc.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/ODPC-Strategic-Plan-2025-2029.pdf>

19 <https://www.kra.go.ke/news-center/public-notices/2299-draft-in-come-tax-significant-economic-presence-tax-regulations-2025>

## Policy Developments



### Tanzania

The Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) issued its first guidelines for Direct-to-Mobile (D2M) satellite services, setting the technical, regulatory, and commercial conditions for operators to deliver satellite-to-smartphone connectivity nationwide. This framework will guide the country's position ahead of the World Radiocommunication Conference 2027 (WRC-27).<sup>20</sup>

### Kenya

Kenya currently imposes a Digital Service Tax (DST) of 1.5% on gross turnover for non-resident digital service providers, effective since 2021. This tax applies to services such as streaming platforms and apps. The Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) is now proposing to replace the DST with a Significant Economic Presence (SEP) tax. Under the SEP model, 10% of a provider's gross revenue will be deemed profit and taxed at 30%, which translates to an effective rate of about 3% on gross turnover. This tax specifically targets platforms such as Netflix, ChatGPT, Airbnb, and ride-hailing services. It aligns Kenya's digital tax framework with Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) standards and is expected to increase government revenue, though it may also raise operational costs for affected firms.<sup>21</sup> This could have negative implications, such that platforms may pass part of the extra tax on to users, like subscription hikes, higher service fees, or reduced discounts.

## Other

### Kenya

Nairobi has been selected to host the GPA Annual Meeting in 2027, a milestone that positions Kenya and Africa at the centre of international data privacy dialogue.<sup>22</sup>

20 [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/tanzania-communications-regulatory-authority\\_tcratz-spectrum-tanzania-activity-7358779773143158785-9gbC/](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/tanzania-communications-regulatory-authority_tcratz-spectrum-tanzania-activity-7358779773143158785-9gbC/)

21 <https://www.kictanet.or.ke/kenya-to-transition-from-digital-service-tax-to-significant-economic-presence-tax/>

22 <https://www.odpc.go.ke/kenya-to-host-the-2027-global-privacy-assembly/#:~:text=NAIROBI%2C%20KENYA%20%E2%80%93%20The%20Office,of%20Kenya%20is%20proud%20to>

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## Recommendations

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**To  
Governments  
and  
Parliaments  
(EA region):**

- Amend overly broad free speech offences (e.g., “false information”, “annoyance”, undefined “hate speech”).
- Mandate Human Rights Impact Assessments (HRIAs) and Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) for national ID, surveillance, and satellite/connectivity projects.

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**To Platforms,  
Telcos/ISPs &  
Infrastructure  
Operators:**

- Clear notice, appeal, and community standards for content moderation and account actions.
- Invest in Kiswahili and regional language safety tooling.
- Compliance with UN Guiding principles on BHR and publishing of transparency reports on content takedowns and shutdown requests.

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# Francophone Africa

## Countries Covered



Togo



Senegal



Guinea



Côte d'Ivoire

## Overview

The third quarter of 2025 presented a stark contrast in digital governance within Francophone Africa, highlighting divergent priorities between state control, fiscal policy, and citizen rights. Guinea accelerated its digital sovereignty with the launch of a national data center and its '.gn' domain, aiming to reduce costs and increase inclusion. Conversely, Togo employed severe digital repression, using internet shutdowns and the criminalization of online speech to quell dissent. Meanwhile, Senegal pursued fiscal expansion by introducing taxes on mobile money and digital content creators, and Côte d'Ivoire advanced its digital inclusion efforts through the rollout of mandatory national digital ID applications.

## Context Analysis

### Guinea:

### Advancing Digital Sovereignty and Infrastructure



Guinea made landmark strides in its digital infrastructure, focusing on sovereignty and cost reduction.

- In a high-profile ceremony on 4th September, the government officially launched<sup>23</sup> the national top-level domain ".gn" and inaugurated the country's first Tier III<sup>24</sup> national data center. The management of the domain, previously handled from abroad<sup>25</sup>, has been repatriated to the National Agency for State Digitalization (ANDE). This move is designed to strengthen Guinea's digital sovereignty, enhance cybersecurity, and give greater online visibility and credibility to national institutions through sub-domains like [.com.gn<sup>26</sup>](https://www.101domain.com/com_gn-information-help.htm) for businesses and [.gov.gn](https://www.101domain.com/com_gn-information-help.htm) for government.
- **Reduced Connectivity Costs and Elevated Profile:** In a significant move for digital inclusion, authorities announced<sup>27</sup> a 25% reduction in internet tariffs by the provider Orange Guinea. Furthermore, Guinea's digital ambitions were recognised with the announcement that the capital city - Conakry - will host the Transform Africa Summit (TAS25) in November, focusing on Artificial Intelligence, making it the first West African capital and first Francophone African country to host this continental forum.

23 <https://www.wearetech.africa/en/fils-uk/news/tech/guinea-launches-national-gn-domain-asserting-digital-sovereignty>

24 <https://techafricanews.com/2025/09/05/guinea-launches-national-domain-gn-and-unveils-first-tier-iii-data-center/>

25 <https://techafricanews.com/2025/09/05/guinea-launches-national-domain-gn-and-unveils-first-tier-iii-data-center/>

26 [https://www.101domain.com/com\\_gn-information-help.htm](https://www.101domain.com/com_gn-information-help.htm)

27 <https://techafricanews.com/2025/09/05/guinea-launches-national-domain-gn-and-unveils-first-tier-iii-data-center/>

### Togo:



Togo experienced a severe crackdown on digital rights, particularly during a wave of anti-government protests on June 06 and July 7, 2025.

- **Targeted Internet Disruptions:** Throughout June and July, human rights defenders and citizens faced targeted restrictions on internet access<sup>28</sup>. Data

28 <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement-report/togo-internet-disruptions-undermine-work-human-rights-defenders-within-context>



analysed by ISOC<sup>29</sup> confirmed a steep deterioration in access to platforms like YouTube, and organisations documented widespread disruptions affecting mobile and fixed connections. The authorities restricted access to several communication platforms, including Facebook, Telegram, and Signal, and deliberately slowed down internet speeds via the main access providers.

- **Criminalisation of Online Activism:** These digital restrictions were part of a broader strategy to silence dissent. A prominent case is that of human rights defender Foly Satchivi, who was arrested on July 7, 2025. The charges against him, which include “spreading false news” and “inciting revolt,” are based on videos<sup>30</sup> he posted calling for peaceful protests<sup>31</sup>. His arrest and the internet shutdowns directly obstructed the ability of activists to monitor, document, and report human rights violations during a critical period of public mobilisation.

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29 <https://pulse.internetsociety.org/en/shutdowns/blocking-of-services-in-togo/>

30 <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/es/node/8994>

31 <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement-report/togo-internet-disruptions-undermine-work-human-rights-defenders-within-context>

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## Senegal



## Mobile Money and Content Creator Tax

### Digital Inclusion

- **Tariffs on mobile money transactions and taxation:** The Senegalese government has introduced new fiscal measures, including tariffs on mobile money transactions of **0.5% on money transfers, 1% on merchant payments**: and plans to tax digital content creators, as part of its 2025-2028 Economic and Social [Recovery Plan](#)<sup>32</sup>. This measure specifically targets transactions made through services like Orange Money, Wave, and Free Money. The government views this as a matter of fairness and tax justice, arguing that the digital sector should contribute to public funds like other industries. With mobile money accounts soaring from 7 million to 38 million in a decade, it represents a significant and growing revenue base.
- **Revenue of influencers and digital content creators:** This initiative is part of a wider reform to tax various digital revenue streams, which also includes online gaming, digital advertising, and international streaming platforms like Netflix.

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32 <https://www.igamingtoday.com/senegals-proposed-0-5-mobile-money-tax-alarms-online-gambling-sector/>

## Côte d'Ivoire:



The Ivorian government, through the National Office of Civil Status and Identification (ONECI), has launched mobile applications to modernise administrative services and provide citizens with a digital identity. The “Côte d'Ivoire Identity”<sup>33</sup> and “MyONECI+”<sup>34</sup> apps are central to this digital transformation, allowing citizens to store and use a digital version of their national identity card on their smartphones.

### Digital Inclusion

- Digital ID Integration: The apps are part of the National Registry of Natural Persons (RNPP) project, a biometric national ID system launched in 2020. This system provides a unique national identification number (NNI) intended to facilitate access to public and private services, including social insurance, healthcare, banking, and driver's license issuance<sup>35</sup>.
- Functionality: The “MyONECI+” application enables Ivorian citizens, both residents and those abroad, to carry their National Identity Card on their mobile phones for use in everyday activities.
- Data and Privacy: According to the official app store pages, the “Côte d'Ivoire Identity” app encrypts data in transit and enables users to request the deletion of their data. The “MyONECI+” app may allow users share their data, including personal information and photos/videos, with third parties<sup>36</sup>. The app encourages users to check the website they are sharing their data with.

33 [https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.asernum.ci\\_identite&hl=en\\_CA](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.asernum.ci_identite&hl=en_CA)

34 [https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=ci.oneci.myoneci\\_plus&hl=en\\_US](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=ci.oneci.myoneci_plus&hl=en_US)

35 <https://www.biometricupdate.com/202111/cote-divoire-ghana-share-digital-id-success-stories-in-id4africa-livecast>

36 <https://www.oneci.ci/privacy>

## Recommendations

### To the Government of Guinea:

1. Ensure Equitable Access: While investing in high-level infrastructure, parallel policies should focus on expanding affordable internet access and digital literacy programs to ensure all citizens benefit from digital transformation.
2. Build a Robust Data Protection Framework: The new data center handling public and private data must be underpinned by strong, transparent, and enforceable data protection laws to build public trust and prevent misuse.

**To the Government of Togo:**

1. Immediately Cease Internet Shutdowns: Lift all restrictions on internet access and digital communication platforms. These actions violate fundamental rights to freedom of expression and access to information.
2. Release Detained Activists: Drop all charges and immediately release human rights defender Foly Satchivi and others detained for their peaceful online activism and exercise of free speech.

**To the Government of Senegal:**

1. Adopt right mobile money tax models. Consider alternative approaches, such as taxing operator revenues instead of user transactions, to avoid stifling usage and compromising financial inclusion.
2. Conduct a transparent impact assessment to evaluate the social and economic consequences of the tax on low-income households and the informal sector.

**To the Government of Côte d'Ivoire (ONECI):**

1. Ensure Fee Transparency: Clearly and publicly communicate any costs associated with the digital ID ecosystem. Differentiate between fees for the physical card, the mobile app, and any premium services to prevent confusion and build public trust by safeguarding privacy and fostering digital Inclusion.
2. Strengthen Public Communication: Launch public awareness campaigns to educate citizens on the apps' benefits, how to use them, and the steps taken to protect their data. Clear communication is vital for public adoption.
3. Reinforce Data Privacy Safeguards: Given that the "MyONECI+" app may share data with third parties, it is crucial to ensure robust enforcement of the country's Data Protection Law (Law No. 18-07). Proactive measures to ensure user data is not misused are essential.
4. Promote Inclusivity: Ensure that the digital ID system does not marginalise citizens who lack smartphones, reliable internet, or digital literacy. Maintain and improve access to traditional, in-person services.



# Southern Africa

## Countries Covered



Eswatini



Botswana



Namibia



Zambia



Zimbabwe



Lesotho



Malawi

## Overview

During the third quarter of 2025, the prevailing digital rights events centred on threats to freedom of speech. In Lesotho, the government relied on a Sedition Proclamation to level charges against an opposition party member for his utterances against the royal family. However, some positive developments were observed in Malawi, where the country's High Court repealed the criminal defamation legislation, marking a decisive win for digital rights.

Southern Africa also witnessed great strides for digital inclusion with the launch of a new mobile network operator in Namibia, while Telekom Networks Malawi fully extended its 5G network in Lilongwe. In terms of key policy developments, Botswana's 13<sup>th</sup> Parliament passed both the Digital Services Bill, 2025 focused on providing the legal framework to support the country's digital transformation and digital inclusion<sup>37</sup>, as well as the Cybersecurity Bill 2025, focused on countering cyber threats in the country.

<sup>37</sup> [https://www.bocra.org.bw/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/documents/Preamble\\_for\\_the\\_Digital\\_Services\\_Bill\\_Revised.pdf](https://www.bocra.org.bw/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/documents/Preamble_for_the_Digital_Services_Bill_Revised.pdf)

## Context Analysis

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### Freedom of Expression



In August 2025, the South African Supreme Court of Appeal ruled that the country's Constitution which entrenches the right to freedom of expression cannot be relied on to protect an individual who posts defamatory material about another individual on social media. This ruling came in the case of Francois Harman, who appealed a previous court ruling after the latter's Facebook posts led to death threats against an individual.<sup>38</sup>

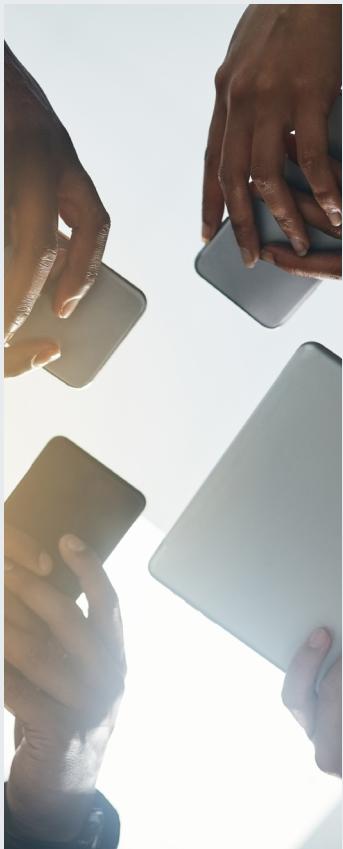
In July 2025, Tšepo Lipholo, the leader of Lesotho's opposition Basotho Covenant Movement, was arrested on charges including contravening the Sedition Proclamation No.44, 1938. The charge stems from comments he made about the royal family between April 2025 and June 2025.<sup>39</sup> Such actions are concerning as they risk infringing on individuals' rights to freedom of expression as well as violating international human rights standards.

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38 <https://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZASCA/2025/108.html>

39 <https://lestimes.com/lipholo-charged-with-sedition-remanded/>

### Digital Inclusion



In August 2025, the government of Lesotho and the United Nations Development Programme Lesotho launched a digital inclusion and digital literacy initiative at Lerotholi Polytechnic in the capital, Maseru. The initiative provides computer labs for high schools and connects universities to internet services.<sup>40</sup> This aims to promote students' access to digital learning platforms.

In July 2025, Telekom Networks Malawi fully extended its 5G network coverage in Lilongwe, following initial pilot phases in both Lilongwe and Blantyre.<sup>41</sup> This will provide upsides for Malawi's adoption of advanced internet services.

In July 2025, Paratus Eswatini, a joint venture between Paratus Group and local Internet solutions company Real Image Internet, launched services in the country, providing Starlink solutions and Paratus EduLINK, a connectivity solution designed for schools in underserved areas to enable them to gain access

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40 <https://www.gov.ls/economy/lesotho-moves-forward-with-digital-inclusion/>

41 <https://www.maravipost.com/tnm-fully-rolls-out-5g-network-coverage/>



to critical learning materials.<sup>42</sup>

In August 2025, Mozambique was one of the target countries for an infrastructure-sharing agreement entered into by Airtel Africa and Vodacom Group. The two mobile network operators will share fibre networks and tower infrastructure<sup>43</sup>, a move that will be beneficial for preventing the duplication of infrastructure and promoting network development in underserved areas.

In September 2025, Paratus Group launched Namibia's third mobile network operator, joining the state-owned MTC Namibia and Telecom Namibia. Paratus' network provides 4G LTE technology entirely. Paratus has invested over 1.42 billion Namibian dollars (USD82.0 million) in the network.<sup>44</sup>

In September 2025, Telecom Namibia announced the restoration of services in Tsumeb, Oshakati and surrounding areas following a significant network disruption, which began on 8 September 2025 and affected both fixed and mobile data connections.<sup>45</sup>

In September 2025, the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe expanded its nationwide Tower Relocation Project, focused on moving towers from urban to rural areas in order to bridge the rural-urban digital divide.<sup>46</sup>

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42 <https://paratus.africa/blog/paratus-eswatini-announces-plans-to-accelerate-digital-inclusion/>

43 <https://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/airtel-vodacom-sign-network-infrastructure-agreement-to-drive-digital-inclusion-2025-08-12>

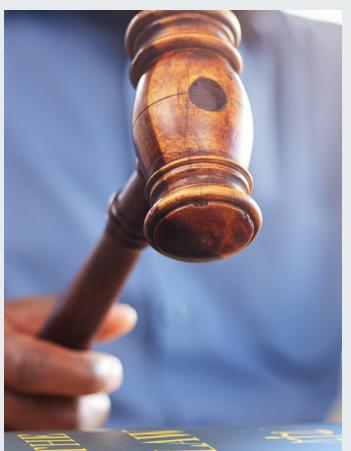
44 <https://telecom.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/news/industry/paratus-launches-namibias-first-private-mobile-network-disrupting-telecom-market/123688482>

45 <https://techafricanews.com/2025/09/09/telecom-namibia-restores-services-after-major-network-disruption/>

46 <https://technomag.co.zw/potrazs-tower-relocation-program-powers-rural-network-expansion/>

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## Policy Developments



In July, the Government of Lesotho, through the Ministry of Information, Communications, Science, Technology and Innovation, launched<sup>47</sup> a national data governance initiative, bringing together national stakeholders and regional experts to assess Lesotho's data governance readiness and align efforts with the African Union Data Policy Framework.

In August 2025, Botswana's 13<sup>th</sup> Parliament passed the Digital Services Bill, 2025, which was introduced by the Ministry of Communications and Innovation for the regulation and delivery of digital services in the country. The proposed law provides a framework for the expansion of access to digital platforms, improving

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47 <https://www.lena.gov.ls/lesotho-advances-digital-future/>



service regulation and promoting local innovation with the aim of closing the digital divide.<sup>48</sup> The country's Parliament also passed the Cybersecurity Bill 2025, providing the legal framework to address cyber threats facing the country.<sup>49</sup>

In July 2025, the High Court of Malawi, sitting as the Constitutional Court, ruled that section 200 of the Penal Code of Malawi, which criminalises defamation, is unconstitutional. The decision concluded a case brought by Joshua Chisa Mbele against the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Attorney General, in which the latter had leveled charges against Mbele for allegedly making defamatory statements regarding a public official in Malawi. In his defence, Mbele challenged the constitutionality of section 200 of the Penal Code of Malawi, which criminalised defamation, arguing that this provision infringed the right to freedom of expression as provided for under section 35 of the country's Constitution, as well as running counter to Malawi's obligations under regional and international human rights law.<sup>50</sup>

In August 2025, the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority announced plans to launch a Regulatory Sandbox focused on emerging technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), big data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI), and Over-the-Top (OTT) services. This controlled testing environment aims to enable innovators to safely develop and trial cutting-edge solutions employing these technologies in the country.<sup>51</sup>

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## Other

In August 2025, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) announced that it was experiencing technical challenges on its network, impacting the majority of its systems. This caused disruptions in some banking services across the country. individuals and

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48 <https://www.botswanayouth.com/botswana-unveils-digital-services-bill-to-boost-access-innovation-and-inclusion/>

49 <https://www.gov.bw/law-crime-and-justice/access-laws-botswana>

50 <https://atlasmalawi.com/court-decriminalizes-defamation-declares-section-200-of-penal-code-unconstitutional/>

51 <https://techafricanews.com/2025/08/11/macra-prepares-regulatory-sandbox-to-drive-malawis-digital-innovation/>

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## Recommendations

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businesses.<sup>52</sup>

- Implementing government ministries and institutions in countries undertaking digital inclusion initiatives should ensure they facilitate equitable access to digital technologies for the benefit of all citizens.
- The government of Lesotho should refrain from utilising Sedition laws to curb freedom of expression.
- Governments should collaborate with key stakeholders and civil society actors to ensure that the citizenry is well apprised of changes to laws that have been passed or Bills that are in the process of being read and debated in Parliament.

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<https://techunzipped.co.zw/2025/08/rbz-confirms-network-challenges-affecting-banking-services/>



# Anglophone West Africa

## Countries Covered



Ghana



Sierra Leone



Liberia



Nigeria



The Gambia

## Overview

In Q3 2025, Anglophone West Africa saw major digital rights and policy shifts. Nigeria and Ghana faced growing tensions over online expression, with prosecutions and arrests raising fears of censorship. Liberia and Sierra Leone advanced digital inclusion through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) free roaming initiative, boosting regional connectivity. Meanwhile, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia pursued key policy reforms on data protection and governance, aligning with global standards to strengthen privacy, security and trust in the digital space.

## Context Analysis

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### Freedom of Expression



#### Nigeria:

Following a post by activist-journalist<sup>53</sup> Omoyele Sowore, in which he labelled the country's president a criminal, Nigeria's secret police, the Department of State Services (DSS), demanded that social media platforms remove the post and threatened action against him. Sowore now faces charges under the Cybercrimes (Amendment) Act 2024, with the DSS pressing Meta and X Corp to remove the content. While authorities frame their actions as protecting national security and the president's reputation, critics view this as part of a growing pattern of using cybercrime laws to silence dissenting voices online. Sowore's counter-suit, alleging unconstitutional censorship, underscores broader concerns that the restrictive application of cybercrime legislation is chilling digital activism, weakening press freedom, and eroding citizens' rights to critique leadership in Nigeria's increasingly digital civic space.

#### Ghana:

The arrest of TikTok<sup>54</sup> creators Fante Comedy and Akosua Jollof in August 2025 for mocking victims of a tragic helicopter crash sparked debate in Ghana over the limits of online freedom of expression. While their comments were widely condemned as offensive and irresponsible, their detention and the heavy bail conditions imposed raise concerns about how far the state can go in policing speech on digital platforms. Ghana's 1992 Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, but this incident illustrates the growing tension between protecting public order and safeguarding digital rights. It also highlights the risk that punitive responses to offensive online content could create a chilling effect, discouraging citizens from expressing themselves freely in Ghana's increasingly vibrant digital space.

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<sup>53</sup> <https://punchng.com/dss-sues-sowore-x-meta-over-anti-tinubu-post/>

<sup>54</sup> <https://mfwa.org/country-highlights/ghana-police-arrest-tiktok-content-creators/>

## Freedom of Expression



### Liberia and Sierra Leone:

Liberia and Sierra Leone launched<sup>55</sup> the ECOWAS free roaming initiative, allowing citizens to use mobile services across both countries without international roaming charges starting 4 August 2025. Liberia also signed an Memorandum of Understanding with Côte d'Ivoire to expand the scheme. The rollout, discussed at a three-day conference hosted by the Liberia Telecommunications Authority (LTA) with Sierra Leone's National Communications Authority (NatCA) and Ivorian officials, builds on earlier bilateral deals Liberia signed with Sierra Leone and The Gambia. Part of ECOWAS's broader goal of fostering regional integration and economic self-sufficiency, the initiative marks a significant step toward reducing communication barriers, strengthening cross-border connectivity and advancing the creation of a single West African trade and economic bloc.

<sup>55</sup> [https://lta.gov.lr/liberia-and-sierra-leone-roll-out-free-roaming-agreement/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://lta.gov.lr/liberia-and-sierra-leone-roll-out-free-roaming-agreement/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

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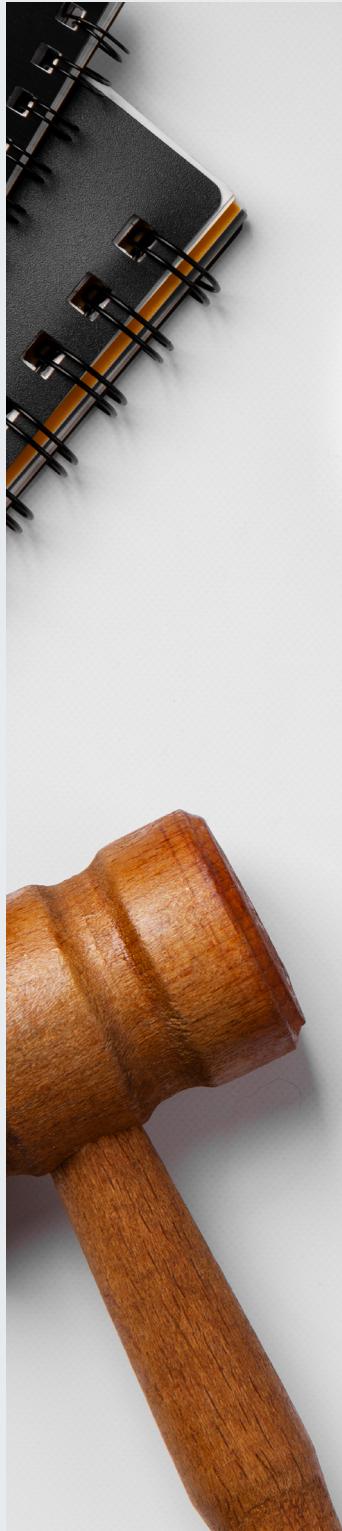
## Policy Development



### Nigeria:

Nigeria is entering a new phase of data governance with the General Application and Implementation Directive (GAID)<sup>56</sup>, which takes full effect on 19 September 2025. The GAID harmonises the country's data protection framework by repealing the 2019 Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR) and its 2020 Implementation Framework, consolidating their provisions under the Nigeria Data Protection Act (NDPA) 2023. It offers practical guidance on applying the NDPA, including how emerging technologies such as AI, blockchain and IoT should be used in processing personal data, and sets out requirements for Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs). With these changes, organisations must update existing policies and compliance processes to align with the NDPA-GAID, ensuring stronger privacy protections, clearer accountability and improved consistency in Nigeria's digital ecosystem.

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.dataguidance.com/news/nigeria-ndpa-gaid-takes-effect>



## Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone has launched nationwide consultations<sup>57</sup> on the draft *Right to Access Information and Data Protection Regulatory Commission Bill*,<sup>58</sup> a major step toward safeguarding personal data and strengthening the country's digital ecosystem. Developed with support from the Ministry of Communication, Technology and Innovation, the draft bill aligns with global standards as well as the African Union's Malabo Convention. The process, which will continue nationwide before final validation, aims to create one of the region's strongest data protection frameworks, ensuring both personal rights and national development are safeguarded.

## The Gambia:

The Gambia has validated its National Data Policy,<sup>59</sup> a milestone toward building a sustainable data economy that promotes secure, rights-based and innovative data governance across public and private sectors. The policy recognises data as a strategic asset for governance, business and social development, aligning with the African Union Data Policy Framework.<sup>60</sup> Developed through national-level consultations, the policy sets a roadmap for legal reforms, institutional strengthening, and capacity building to harness data for national development while fostering public trust and digital transformation.

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57 <https://moice.gov.sl/nationwide-consultations-begin-on-sierra-leones-first-data-protection-law/>

58 [https://moice.gov.sl/ministry-of-information-holds-pre-legislative-session-on-draft-data-protection-and-right-to-access-information-bill/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://moice.gov.sl/ministry-of-information-holds-pre-legislative-session-on-draft-data-protection-and-right-to-access-information-bill/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

59 <https://gambiadaily.gov.gm/gambia-gets-national-data-policy>

60 <https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/42078-doc-DATA-POLICY-FRAMEWORKS-2024-ENG-V2.pdf>

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## Recommendations

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### Government

- Review cybercrime and speech laws to prevent misuse against journalists and activists
- Issue prosecutorial and judicial guidance to balance security and free expression
- Prioritise education and restorative measures over arrests for non-criminal online behaviour
- Strengthen digital rights training for law enforcement, judiciary, and regulators
- Establish rapid-response mechanisms for online censorship and digital rights violations
- Expand ECOWAS roaming and invest in cross-border connectivity and affordability
- Ensure digital inclusion efforts prioritise women, rural communities, and persons with disabilities
- Support implementation of national data protection frameworks with capacity building for institutions and private sector
- Promote independent and well-resourced data protection authorities
- Encourage harmonised regional data governance and cooperation among regulators
- Improve transparency on government takedown requests and surveillance procedures

### Civil Society

- Advocate for the implementation of the initiatives outlined above through sustained engagement, monitoring, and public awareness campaigns.

