

A joint statement by the Mauritius Internet Governance Forum and the Internet Society on social media blackout in Mauritius.

01 November, 2024

On November 10, 2024, Mauritius will head to the polls for its highly anticipated 2024 General Legislative Elections.

As with many elections worldwide, social media platforms are playing an unprecedented role in how politicians engage with the electorate. Social media has the power to democratize access to information and, at the same time, provide a platform for whistleblowers to share information with the masses that would otherwise have been impossible to broadcast on traditional channels.

In the last few days, leaked private conversations between politicians, journalists, and social activists have circulated widely, sowing confusion and distrust among the populace. We understand that, such revelations could be seen as attempts to sway public opinion or discredit political rivals, eroding public trust in the electoral process. It is paramount for the Mauritian government to take action to restore public trust and avoid a slippery slope that can harm the vibrant democracy that Mauritius is proud of. The government should ensure that such illegal actions, which harm not only individuals but the country at large, are stopped and but at the same time should ensure that the Internet remains openly accessible to all during this campaign season.

Many authoritarian governments restrict the Internet during elections. But we are confident that, as the [beacon of democracy in Africa](#), Mauritius will maintain the free flow of information which is vital in a democratic society. We are therefore deeply concerned about the latest [ICTA directives](#) to Internet Service Providers to shut down access to social media until November 11, 2024.

Moreover, Mauritius has a relatively small but thriving digital economy that depends on free and open access to the Internet. Businesses of all sizes rely on online platforms for marketing, sales, and communication. Interruptions to Internet access would disrupt business operations, potentially causing significant economic losses. The Internet Society Pulse [Netloss calculator](#) estimates a daily loss of at least 10M rupees in GDP, should there be an Internet shutdown in Mauritius.

The Mauritius IGF and the Internet Society strongly urge the Mauritian government not to resort to any form of Internet shutdown, platform throttling, or censorship. In our view, the dangers of shutting down the Internet far outweigh any perceived benefits. Curtailing access to digital platforms would not only stifle democratic processes but

also harm the economy, disrupt businesses, and restrict access to essential information and services.

We advocate for the free flow of information and the protection of digital rights, especially during election periods when transparency and open discourse are essential. The Internet is a fundamental enabler of democracy, and the government's role should be to protect this vital resource rather than restrict it.

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Register for our upcoming seminar on Internet Shutdowns

The Internet Society is hosting two one-hour, online seminars in English and French on 6 and 11 November discussing Internet shutdowns in Africa. During the seminars, participants will have the opportunity to:

- Better understand the motivations behind government-imposed Internet shutdowns
- Take a deep dive into the history and policy landscape of shutdowns
- Learn about the various forms of shutdowns and their technical nuances
- Explore the societal and economic impacts
- Learn strategies for circumventing Internet restrictions.

[Register now](#)

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About the Internet Society

Founded in 1992 by Internet pioneers, the Internet Society is a global charitable organization working to make sure the Internet remains a force for good for everyone. Through its community of members, special interest groups, and 120+ chapters worldwide, the organization defends and promotes Internet policies and technologies that keep the Internet open, globally connected, and secure. For more information, please visit <https://internetsociety.org>

About the Mauritius Internet Governance Forum

The Mauritius Internet Governance Forum (MIGF), organised annually by Halley Movement since 2017, serves as a vital platform for fostering dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders in the digital ecosystem. This includes government representatives, civil society, academia, and the private sector. The forum was established to address key issues related to Internet governance, providing a space for discussions on policies, regulations, and best practices that shape Mauritius's digital landscape.

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[Mauritius bans social media access until election ends | Business Insider Africa](https://africa.businessinsider.com/local/markets/mauritius-bans-social-media-access-until-election-ends/3z79fmb)

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...demand for 117 services on the weekend, compared to the daily average of 17 for the past 28 days.

However, civil society groups, including the Internet Governance Forum and the Internet Society, have strongly opposed the shutdown. In a joint statement, they argued that blocking digital access would "stifle democratic processes" and also harm the economy, disrupt businesses, and limit access to essential information and services. "The dangers of shutting down the internet far outweigh any perceived benefits," they emphasized.

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REUTERS

[Mauritius blocks social media until after election, opposition and civil society groups cry foul | Reuters](https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/mauritius-suspends-social-media-until-after-election-communications-regulator-2024-11-01/)

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Two civil society groups, the Internet Governance Forum and the Internet Society, warned in a joint statement that "curtailing access to digital platforms would not only stifle democratic processes but also harm the economy, disrupt businesses, and restrict access to essential information and services."

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