Rwanda

	2013	2014
Internet Freedom Status	Partly Free	Partly Free
Obstacles to Access (0-25)	12	12
Limits on Content (0-35)	18	19
Violations of User Rights (0-40)	18	19
TOTAL* (0-100)	**48**	**50**

* 0=most free, 100=least free

Population:	11.1 million
Internet Penetration 2013:	9 percent
Social Media/ICT Apps Blocked:	No
Political/Social Content Blocked:	Yes
Bloggers/ICT Users Arrested:	Yes
Press Freedom 2014 Status:	Not Free

Key Developments: May 2013 – May 2014

- While ICT development continued to expand access to the internet across the country, a growing number of independent online news outlets and opposition blogs were intermittently inaccessible in Rwanda (see **Obstacles to Access** and **Limits on Content**).

- News reports in early 2014 revealed that the Rwandan government may employ fake Twitter trolls to harass, discredit, and intimidate critical voices online (see **Limits on Content** and **Violations of User Rights**).

- The Law Relating to the Interception of Communications enacted in October authorized high-ranking security officials to monitor email and telephone conversations of individuals considered potential threats to "public security" (see **Violations of User Rights**).

- Stanley Gatera, the editor of the independent news website *Umusingi*, was arrested in April on trumped-up charges of attempted extortion. Upon release, he faced death threats that led him to flee the country in exile (see **Violations of User Rights**).

- Foreign journalists were harassed for their critical coverage of the Rwandan government, with some reports of online harassment tied to senior officials (see **Violations of User Rights**).

Introduction

In recent years, the government of Rwanda under President Paul Kagame has embarked on an ambitious economic development strategy that aims to create a vibrant industry for information and communication technologies (ICTs) and position Rwanda as a regional ICT hub. Although internet penetration remains low—hampered primarily by poverty and a lack of appropriate infrastructure, especially in rural areas—access is continually expanding due to public and private investments in broadband technology across the country, while mobile internet access is increasing at an impressive rate. Meanwhile, the proliferation of ICTs has contributed to progress in the country's governance, health, education, agriculture, and finance sectors.[1]

Though ICT development has been among the top priorities for the Rwandan government, the country's tenuous political environment and sensitive ethnic relations since the 1994 genocide has led the government to exert some controls over online content and expression. In the lead-up to the 20th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide in April 2014, a few critical news websites that had previously been blocked in 2010-2011 were intermittently inaccessible in Rwanda again throughout 2013 and 2014, while a number of critical blogs were unavailable altogether. In addition, worries remained that the government's firm restrictions on print and broadcast media—particularly on contentious content concerning the ruling party and the 1994 genocide—will cross over into the internet sphere, as occurred when the authorities blocked the online version of an independent newspaper in the lead-up to the 2010 presidential election.

Progressive amendments to the 2009 Media Law were adopted in March 2013, providing journalists with the "right to seek, receive, give and broadcast information and ideas through media;" the amendments also explicitly recognize freedom for online communications. Nonetheless, online journalists were targeted for harassment and arrest during the coverage period. In April 2014, the editor of the independent news website *Umusingi*, Stanley Gatera, was arrested on trumped-up charges of attempted extortion, which the journalist believed was linked to a critical interview he conducted on Al Jazeera's "People and Power" program—posted online and broadcast on television—in March 2014. Gatera was held for six hours and received death threats following his release, leading him to flee the country altogether.

Foreign journalists were also harassed for their critical coverage of the Rwandan government, with some reports of online harassment tied to senior officials. In early 2014, a journalist for *Radio France Internationale* was repeatedly harassed on Twitter by a user known as @RichardGoldston, which was later revealed to be an account operated by the president's office. The Kagame government has also been accused of targeting political dissidents living in exile for assassination. In February 2014, Andrew Muhanguzi, the brother of the exiled editor of the independent *Umuvugizi* news website, was reported missing. His family claims that Muhanguzi, living in exile in Uganda, was kidnapped by men in Ugandan police uniform outside their home on February 16.

Given the country's restrictive political environment, there is a strong sense that government surveillance over online communications has been increasing with little oversight. In October 2013, the Rwandan president promulgated the Law Relating to the Interception of Communications

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1   Ministry of Youth and ICT, "Measuring ICT sector performance and Tracking ICT for Development (ICT4D) towards Rwanda Socio-Economic Transformation," Rwanda ICT Sector Profile 2012, http://bit.ly/18lFhdJ.

that authorizes high-ranking security officials to monitor email and telephone conversations of individuals considered potential threats to "public security."

Obstacles to Access

Rwanda has made major strides in expanding access to ICTs across the country, though poverty continues to be the primary impediment to ICT uptake, especially the internet. Over 90 percent of the population lives in rural areas, with the majority practicing subsistence agriculture and approximately 45 percent still living below the poverty line.[2] Consequently, internet penetration in Rwanda is still low at 9 percent in 2013, up from 8 percent in 2012, according to estimates from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).[3] By contrast, official government statistics cite a penetration rate of 22 percent as of March 2014—up from less than 2 percent in 2009—though the rate includes internet subscriptions on mobile devices, which comprise over 99 percent of all internet subscriptions.[4] Fixed-broadband access reaches only a sliver of the population, at 0.02 percent according to the ITU.[5]

Meanwhile, mobile phone penetration is significantly higher than that for internet access, growing from 50 percent in 2012 to over 57 percent in 2013, according to the ITU, while government figures noted a penetration rate of 65 percent in March 2014.[6] This growth has been largely a result of increasing competition between the three main mobile phone operators—MTN, TIGO, and AIRTEL—whose respective market shares are 52 percent, 33 percent, and 15 percent.[7] Rural populations have a relatively high mobile phone usage rate compared to rural internet access rates, as access has been made easier by a well-developed mobile phone network that covers nearly 100 percent of the population.[8] Innovative initiatives targeting rural populations have further encouraged increased mobile phone and internet usage, such as the e-Soko ("e-market") program created by the Rwanda Development Board, which provides farmers with real-time information about market prices for their agricultural produce on their mobile devices.[9]

Internet access is still concentrated primarily in Kigali, the capital city, and remains beyond the economic reach of most citizens, particularly those in rural areas who are limited by low disposable incomes and do not have high levels of ICT awareness.[10] According to a 2013 Gallup study, the median annual per capital income in Rwanda is US$235, while median household income is

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2   Latest estimate from 2011. Central Intelligence Agency, "Rwanda," *The World Factbook*, accessed August 14, 2014, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rw.html.

3   International Telecommunication Union, "Percentage of Individuals Using the Internet, 2000-2013," http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx.

4   Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA), "Statistics and Tariff Information in Telecom Sector as of March 2014," accessed May 24, 2014, http://www.rura.rw/fileadmin/docs/Statistics_report_Q1_2014.pdf.

5   International Telecommunication Union, "Fixed (Wired)-Broadband Subscriptions, 2000-2013."

6   RURA, "Statistics and Tariff Information in Telecom Sector as of March 2014."

7   RURA, "Statistics and Tariff Information in Telecom Sector as of March 2014."

8   RURA, "Statistics and Tariff Information in Telecom Sector as of March 2014."

9   Ruth Kang'ong'oi, "Rwanda Telecenter Network Introduces Web 2.0 to Farmers," CIO East Africa, November 15, 2011, http://www.cio.co.ke/view-all-top-stories/4482-rwanda-telecenter-network-introduces-web-20-to-farmers.html.

10   Ministry of Youth and ICT, "Measuring ICT sector performance and Tracking ICT for Development (ICT4D)."

US$1,101.[11] In addition, only 11 percent of Rwandans are ICT literate,[12] and over 70 percent of the population speaks only Kinyarwanda, making internet content in English inaccessible to the majority of Rwandans.[13] Meanwhile, only 17 percent of Rwandan households have regular access to electricity.[14]

In the face of such challenges, the Rwandan government has made ICT development a high priority. In September 2013, for example, free wireless hotspots were implemented across the capital city through the "Smart Kigali" project, a public-private partnership with ISPs, hotels, restaurants, and government agencies.[15] In late 2013, the government contracted Korea Telecom in a deal that aims to deliver 4G LTE broadband services to 95 percent of Rwandans within three years.[16] Fixed-broadband internet services are also expanding across the country, though according to May 2014 data from Akamai's "State of the Internet" report, internet speeds are still slow, averaging 1.4 Mbps (compared to a global average of 3.9 Mbps).[17] In addition, broadband adoption in Rwanda (characterized by connection speeds greater than 4 Mbps) comprised only about 6 percent of internet users, while the country's narrowband adoption (connection speeds below 256 kbps) comprised 14 percent of internet users.[18]

As a result of Rwanda's commitment to ICT development, the cost of access is slowly decreasing. As of early 2014, a 128/64 Kbps package of wireless internet cost about RWF 64,900 (US$95).[19] While still prohibitively expensive for average citizens, the cost is a significant reduction from before the country's fiber-optic cable installation in 2011, when 1 megabyte of internet access reportedly cost US$2,000.[20] Meanwhile, the Broadband Systems Corporation, a local service provider, charges monthly fees of about US$30 for single users and $46 for multiple users, while the cost of using the internet in a cybercafe is approximately US$0.14 (RWF 100) for 1 hour.[21]

The cost of internet access via mobile phones has also declined, helping fuel the exponential growth of mobile internet users. As of March 2014, mobile internet tariffs range from RWF 30 to 50 per Mb (US$0.03 to $0.08 per Mb), and the three mobile internet companies—MTN, TIGO, and AIRTEL—

11   Glenn Phelps and Steve Crabtree, "Worldwide, Median Household Income About $10,000," Gallup World, December 16, 2013, http://www.gallup.com/poll/166211/worldwide-median-household-income-000.aspx#1.

12   Philippe Mwema Bahati, "Rwanda to develop a master plan for e-Government," The Rwanda Focus, September 10, 2013, http://focus.rw/wp/2013/09/rwanda-to-develop-a-master-plan-for-e-government/.

13   Beth Lewis Samuelson and Sarah Warshauer Freedman, "Language Policy, Multilingual Education, and Power in Rwanda," Language Policy 9, no. 3 (June 2010), http://bit.ly/1bmZW5X.

14   "Rwanda Signs a U.S. $40 Million Loan to Boost Electricity Rollout," The Independent, February 14, 2014, http://allafrica.com/stories/201402180157.html.

15   "Free Nationwide Internet Project To Boost Rwanda's Growth," Ventures Africa, October 22, 2013, http://www.ventures-africa.com/2013/10/free-internet-project-boost-rwandas-economic-growth/.

16   "Rwanda's ambitious 4G rollout begins, education cited as major beneficiary of technology," Balancing Act, November 1, 2013, http://www.balancingact-africa.com/news/en/issue-no-679/internet/rwandas-ambitious-4g/en.

17   Akamai, "Average Connection Speed: Rwanda," map visualization, The State of the Internet Q1 (2014), http://www.akamai.com/stateoftheinternet/soti-visualizations.html#stoi-map.

18   Akamai, "Broadband Adoption (connections to Akamai >4 Mbps): Rwanda," map visualization, The State of the Internet, Q1 2014; Akamai, "Narrowband Adoption (connections to Akamai <256 kbps): Rwanda," map visualization, The State of the Internet, Q1 2014, http://www.akamai.com/stateoftheinternet/soti-visualizations.html#stoi-map.

19   RURA, "Statistics and Tariff Information in Telecom Sector as of March 2014."

20   Frank Kanyesigye, "RURA, service providers to streamline internet access," The New Times, October 14, 2013, http://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/index.php?i=15510&a=71208.

21   Frank Kanyesigye, "Grwoth of Mobile Internet Spells Doom for Cyber Cafes," The New Times, October 11, 2013, http://allafrica.com/stories/201310110364.html?viewall=1.

offer their customers daily bundles at RWF 500, RWF 800, and RWF 500 (US$0.72, $1.15, and $0.72), respectively.[22] In addition, MTN Rwanda offers low-cost internet-enabled mobile phones for as cheap as RWF 9,500 (US$14).[23]

Following the country's market liberalization policies implemented in 2001,[24] the number of companies providing telephone and internet services increased from one—the state-run Rwandatel[25]—to nine ISPs and three mobile phone companies in 2014,[26] all of which are privately owned.

The Rwanda Internet Exchange (RINEX) was set up in 2009 to connect ISPs and enable the routing of local internet communications through a central exchange point without having to pass through international networks.[27] ISPs can also opt to connect via RINEX to the international internet. The aim, ostensibly, is to make intra-Rwandan internet communications cheaper and faster, though such control over internet traffic has the potential to facilitate efforts to systematically censor or monitor domestic online communications. As of the end of 2013, only five ISPs exchange internet traffic via RINEX.[28] According to the ITU, the level of competition for Rwanda's international gateway is characterized as "partial."[29]

The Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Agency (RURA) supervises the regulatory frameworks and implementation of the county's policies and strategies in the telecommunications sector.[30] Officially, RURA is a national body with autonomy in its administrative and financial management, though the government audits RURA's budget while the president nominates its seven board members, supervisory board, and director general who all work under full control of the government.[31] Nevertheless, RURA is generally viewed as independent in its operations.

Limits on Content

A growing number of independent online news outlets and opposition blogs were intermittently

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22   RURA, "Statistics and Tariff Information in Telecom Sector as of March 2014."

23   MTN, "Special Offers," accessed August 15, 2014, http://mtn.co.rw/Content/Pages/97/Special_Offers.

24   Albert Nsengiyumva and Emmanuel Habumuremyi, *A Review of Telecommunications Policy Development and Challenges in Rwanda*, Association for Progressive Communications (APC), September 2009, http://www.apc.org/en/system/files/CICEWARwanda_20090908.pdf.

25   In 2012, Rwandatel was liquidated; its assets were purchased by Tigo and Airtel, and the company was taken over by the Government of Rwanda. See, Shyaka Kanuma, "Bye Bye Rwandatel," *Rwanda Focus*, February 20, 2012, http://focus.rw/wp/2012/02/bye-bye-rwandatel/.

26   These include fixed-line providers (Liquid Telecom and MTN Rwanda), mobile phone providers (MTN Rwandacell, TIGO and AIRTEL), and internet service providers (MTN Rwanda, Liquid Telecom, TIGO Rwanda, New Artel, ISPA, 4G Networks, BSC, Airtel Rwanda, and AXOIM). See: RURA, "Statistics and Tariff Information in Telecom Sector as of March 2014."

27   RURA, *Guidelines for Rwanda Internet Exchange Point (RINEX) Management* (Kigali: RURA, 2009), http://bit.ly/16QXMD0.

28   RINEX, accessed April 13, 2013, http://www.rinex.org.rw/.

29   International Telecommunication Union, "Rwanda Profile (latest data available: 2013)," *ICT-Eye*, accessed August 1, 2014, http://www.itu.int/net4/itu-d/icteye/CountryProfileReport.aspx?countryID=8.

30   Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority, "About RURA," accessed August 15, 2014, http://www.rura.rw/index.php?id=3.

31   "Law N.09/2013 of 01/03/2013 Establishing Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA) and Determining its Mission, Powers, Organisation and Functioning," *Official Gazette n.14bis of 08/04/2013*, http://www.rura.rw/fileadmin/laws/Official_Gazette_no_14_bis_of_08_04_2013.pdf.

inaccessible during the coverage period. News reports revealed that the Rwandan government may employ fake Twitter trolls to harass, discredit, and intimidate critical voices online.

While the Rwandan government has demonstrated a commitment to expanding access to ICTs across the country, it has also simultaneously endeavored to restrict the types of content that users can access, particularly news content of oppositional nature. In early 2014, a test conducted by Freedom House found that a number of independent news outlets and opposition blogs were inaccessible;[32] however, it was uncertain whether those sites were taken down out of the owners' own accord or due to external pressure.

Throughout the coverage period, the website of the independent newspaper *Umuvugizi*—which was suspended for six months in 2010—was intermittently inaccessible.[33] A few opposition sites continued to be blocked on some ISPs but were available on others,[34] including *Umusingi* and *Inyenyeri News,* which were both first blocked in 2011. In early 2014, Leprophete, an opposition website based in France, was accessible on the MTN Internet ISP but blocked on AIRTEL Internet.[35] Content from *Umusingi, Umuvugizi*, and *Inyenyeri News* could still be accessed on their respective Facebook pages,[36] and other news sites that were sporadically blocked could be accessed through their associated blogs.

According to a 2010 law relating to electronic messages, signatures, and transactions, intermediaries and service providers are not held liable for the content transmitted through their networks.[37] In the past, however, the Media High Council was known to screen web content and reportedly contacted websites to request the removal of certain information on several occasions. Two online news websites, *Umusingi* and *Umurabyo*, had reported experiencing such requests to delete content related to local political affairs and ethnic relations in previous years, though no takedown requests were documented during the coverage period. Appeals on critical media issues can be made through the Rwanda Media Commission (RMC), the new media self-regulatory body created under the 2013 Media Law.

Social-networking sites such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and international blog-hosting services are freely available. Given the more limited space for press freedom in the traditional media sphere, Rwandan media outlets are increasingly going online to avoid government control or suspension as well as heavy production costs.[38] Nonetheless, the economic environment for online news websites remains a challenge for independent outlets, particularly in comparison to their state-run counterparts that receive income from government advertisements and direct subsidies.

32   Opposition blog websites that were unavailable as of May 2014 were: http://ww.iwacu1.com, http://ww.musabyimana.be, http://rwandarwabanyarwanda.over-blog.com, http://ww.banyarwandapoliticalparty.org.

33   Reporters Without Borders, "Persecution of Independent Newspapers Extended to Online Versions," news release, June 11, 2010, http://en.rsf.org/rwanda-persecution-of-independent-11-06-2010,37718.html.

34   Examples of these opposition sites include: http://inyenyerinews.org/, www.umuvugizi.com, www.umusingi.com, www.banyarwandapoliticalparty.org, http://leprophete.fr, www.therwandan.com.

35   Efforts to access the Leprophete website on the AIRTEL network yields the message, "The URL is not available."

36   *Umusingi Newspaper*'s Facebook page, accessed October 24, 2014, http://www.facebook.com/pages/Umusingi-Newspaper/122730681083696.

37   "Law No. 18/2010 of 12/05/2010, Relating to Electronic Messages, Electronic Signatures and Electronic Transactions," accessed October 24, 2014, http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=243157.

38   "Rwanda: Why We Went Online: Media Icons Speak Out," *Itangazamakuru*, March 2012, http://bit.ly/18GUIy1.

Another economic constraint on local web content presented itself in July 2013, when the Rwanda Information Communication Technology Association (RICTA)—the organization that oversees the .rw domain and represents the Rwandan internet community—announced that it would begin charging an annual subscription fee for a .rw domain name, which was previously free. Subscriptions for non-citizens now cost RWF 167,000 (US$235), while Rwandans pay RWF 30,000 (US$43)—rates that are more expensive than other domains, including the .com domain managed in the United States—though RICTA hopes to reduce the price as the number of .rw domains increase. The initiative aims to improve the accessibility of domain registration services and enhance internet access in the country.[39]

Given the lack of an independent press in Rwanda, online journalists based in the country are increasingly joining their print and broadcast colleagues in exercising self-censorship, particularly on topics that can be construed as disruptive to national unity and reconciliation.[40] In addition, issues related to the military and national security are highly sensitive and subject to restrictions regarding the right to access information.[41] In a *Rwanda Media Barometer* report published in August 2013 by the Rwanda Governance Board—a public body—in partnership with Transparency International Rwanda, a survey of 144 media practitioners found that nearly 50 percent of respondents practiced self-censorship "due to fear of consequences."[42] According to some journalists, self-censorship is viewed as a legitimate practice given the country's sensitive social and political environment, though others believe that the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) uses "repression, social pressure, and self-censorship" to determine what is politically correct and to shape public opinion.[43] During the September 2013 parliamentary elections, an international elections observer mission noted a perception among journalists that they would be targeted for critical reportage.[44]

Nevertheless, the spread of social media tools has empowered Rwandans to discuss issues that were formerly taboo and not open to public discussion due to fears of persecution. The expansion of internet access has also enabled the Rwandan blogosphere to evolve into a vibrant platform for expression, even though the websites and blogs of opposition activists both within and outside Rwanda are increasingly inaccessible.[45] While opposition supporters living outside Rwanda—mainly in Europe, the United States, and South Africa—are responsible for most of the criticism against the government on forums, websites, and blogs, local dissenting voices are increasingly heard in online news portals such as *Igihe,* especially via readers' comments. Despite the increasing number

39   Dias Nyesiga, "Rwanda to Charge Fees for .rw Use," *East African Business Week*, July 9, 2013, http://allafrica.com/stories/201307100085.html.

40   "The Ongoing Tension Between Free Media and Self-Censorshop," *RwandaPost*, May 10, 2013, http://www.rwandapost.org/2013/05/10/the-ongoing-tension-between-free-media-and-self-censorship/.

41   Rwanda Media Barometer (2013), page 49.

42   Rwanda Media Barometer (2013), page 42.

43   Kris Berwouts, "Elections are too important for Rwandan government to leave to the whims of voters," African Arguments (blog), September 18, 2013, http://africanarguments.org/2013/09/18/elections-are-too-important-for-rwandan-government-to-leave-to-the-whims-of-voters-by-kris-berwouts/.

44   The Commonwealth, "Rwanda Legislative Election (Chamber of Deputies)," Report of the Commonwealth Expert Team, 16-18 September 2013, http://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/press-release/documents/RWANDA%202013%20CET%20REPORT.pdf.

45   This includes the website of opposition leader Victoire Ingabire at http://www.victoire2010.com, as well as other sites at http://rwandaspeaks.com/tag/freedom-of-the-press/, and www.newsrwanda-nkunda.blogspot.com.

of media outlets, however, observers believe that the Rwandan media landscape represents less diversity in opinions than ever before, likely due to increasing levels of self-censorship.[46]

Facebook and Twitter also emerged as popular platforms for online interaction, in part as a result of the increasing use of internet-enabled phones.[47] In 2013, MTN Rwanda introduced an "SMS to Twitter" tool to facilitate use of the social media platform for people without easy access to the internet on computers.[48] The president is an active supporter of these social networks, occasionally using the platforms to engage in discussions with users and openly respond to issues concerning the current state of governance in the country. In 2013, Kagame and his foreign affairs minister were ranked by the "Twiplomacy" study as among the top five most conversational leaders worldwide.[49]

Twitter also offers Rwandans a new platform for protest and engagement with the government. For example, the Ministry of Health (@RwandaMoH and @agnesbinagwaho) regularly engaged in serious discussions with citizens and journalists over poor performance in hospitals and other health services. Nevertheless, news reports in early 2014 revealed that the Rwandan government may employ fake Twitter trolls to harass, discredit, and intimidate critical voices online (see "Violations of User Rights").[50]

With mobile phones more widely accessible than the internet, text messages have become another important channel for citizens to voice discontent with the authorities and expose abuses of power. For example, the live radio programs, "Good Morning Rwanda" and "Good Evening Rwanda," are significant venues for citizens to criticize government malpractices via SMS messages, which are broadcast on the radio. Most recently, citizens challenged the education ministry over the country's quality of education. However, the ability of citizens to use digital media for organizing large-scale street protests remained limited due to broader restrictions on freedom of assembly, particularly regarding politically sensitive topics.

Violations of User Rights

Stanley Gatera, the editor of the independent news website Umusingi, was arrested in April on trumped-up charges of attempted extortion. Upon release, he faced death threats that led him to flee the country in exile. Foreign journalists were harassed for their critical coverage of the Rwandan government, with some reports of online harassment tied to senior officials. The Law Relating to the Interception of Communications enacted in October 2013 authorized high-ranking security officials to monitor email and telephone conversations of individuals considered potential threats to public security.

Article 34 of the Rwandan constitution, adopted in May 2003, provides for freedom of the press and

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46   Steve Terrill, "Freedom of expression in Rwanda," Waza Online, April 7, 2014, http://www.rnw.nl/africa/article/freedom-expression-rwanda-20-years-after-genocide.

47   "Facebook Statistics: Rwanda," SocialBakers, accessed October 24, 2014, www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/rwanda.

48   MTN, "MTN Twitter SMS," accessed October 24, 2014, http://www.mtn.co.rw/Content/Pages/54/MTN_Twitter_SMS.

49   "Twiplomacy Study 2013," Burson-Marsteller, July 24, 2013, http://twiplomacy.com/twiplomacy-study-2013/; Allan Brian Ssenyonga, "Twitter: 2012 was a Very Interesting Year for 'RwOT,'" *New Times*, December 31, 2012, http://newtimes.co.rw/news/views/article_print.php?&a=13541&week=52&icon=Print.

50   Tom Rhodes, "Twitter war shines light on how Rwanda intimidates press," Committee to Project Journalists (blog), March 24, 2014, http://www.cpj.org/blog/2014/03/twitter-war-shines-light-on-how-rwanda-intimidates.php.

freedom of information, but in practice, the government maintains tight control over the media. In March 2013, the state adopted progressive amendments to the 2009 Media Law, granting journalists the "right to seek, receive, give and broadcast information and ideas through media," and explicitly provided for freedom of online communications in Section 3, Article 19.[51] The new law was also applauded for providing for media self-regulation under the new Rwanda Media Commission and was viewed favorably by local journalists, who hoped that its passage would spell the end of government interference in the work of journalists and boost media freedom in Rwanda.[52]

The passage of the Media Law also led to some fears of increasing government control over the internet,[53] with the freedom of expression organization Article 19 criticizing the law for containing "too many provisions which pose a threat to journalists and the independence of the media, including online media."[54] In particular, the new law gives the minister of ICTs unlimited powers to establish the conditions for both local and foreign media companies to operate in Rwanda.

A revised Access to Information Law was promulgated in March 3013 that allows journalists to conduct investigative journalism with more official and credible sources of information.[55] Nevertheless, the extent to which the media should have the unchecked right to free expression is often a matter of public debate in Rwanda, with some commentators suggesting that Rwanda's media practitioners should be cautious in their speech as long as the history of genocide continues to haunt the country.[56]

In July 2013, a data protection law was drafted with the aim of addressing the rising cybercrime risk in Rwanda. However, the draft law provides exceptions to user data protections in the unclearly defined interest of national sovereignty, national security, and public policy, which in the context of President Kagame's authoritarian governance, may pose a threat to individuals critical of the regime.[57]

While there are no laws that specifically restrict internet content or criminalize online expression, Rwanda's generally restrictive legal provisions governing the traditional media could be applied to the internet. For example, the decision to ban the online version of *Umuvugizi* in 2011 was based on charges of publishing "divisive language,"[58] a category of expression that is criminalized by the 2001

51   "Law Regulating Media, No. 02/2013 of 08/02/2013," Official Gazette 10, March 11, 2013, http://blog-tdas.s3.amazonaws.com/blog-tdas/2013/03/Official_Gazette_no_10_of_11.03.2013.pdf.

52   Eugene Kwibuka, "How Reforms Impacted on Media in 2013," *The New Times*, December 27, 2013, http://allafrica.com/stories/201312270354.html?page=2.

53   "Proposed Media Law Fails to Safeguard Free Press," IFEX, January 5, 2012, http://www.ifex.org/rwanda/2012/01/05/media_law/.

54   Article 19, "Rwanda: Media Law Does Not go Far Enough," press release, March 18, 2013, http://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/3665/en/rwanda:-media-law-does-not-go-far-enough.

55   Frank Kanyesigye, "Will Information Bill Change the Rwanda's Media Environment?" *Sunday Times*, February 17, 2013, http://allafrica.com/stories/201302180094.html.

56   David Kabuye, "Rwanda's Media – Cautious of Content," *New Times*, November 19, 2012, http://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/index.php?i=15181&a=60840; Daniella Waddoup, "Press Freedom in Rwanda," *Think Africa Press*, February 18, 2011, http://thinkafricapress.com/rwanda/press-freedom-rwanda.

57   "Rwandan ICT experts discuss draft data protection policy," *telecompaper*, July 16, 2013, http://www.telecompaper.com/news/rwandan-ict-experts-discuss-draft-data-protection-policy--955378.

58   Media Institute, "Tabloid Website Blocked," IFEX, June 8, 2010, http://ifex.org/rwanda/2010/06/08/umuvugizi_website_blocked/.

Law on Discrimination and Sectarianism.[59] Penalties for criminal defamation may also be applicable to the internet, with defamation of the president or other public officials carrying a penalty of up to five years in prison.[60]

A vague 2008 law against "genocide ideology" similarly threatens freedom of expression both online and off, prescribing heavy prison sentences and fines for any offender "...who disseminates genocide ideology in public through documents, speeches, pictures, media or any other means."[61] In response to criticisms of the law's overly broad nature, the minister of justice proposed amendments in November 2012 that aimed to make the law more definitive and easier to interpret.[62] Passed by both the lower and upper houses in July 2013 and promulgated in October,[63] the amended law reduces prison sentences from 25 years to a maximum of 9 years and requires proof of criminal intent behind an offending act that must be "characterized by thoughts based on ethnicity, religion, nationality or race to foment genocide [or] support genocide."[64] Nevertheless, the law still restricts freedom of expression by retaining the notion of "genocide ideology" as a criminal offense and by excluding a clear distinction between a private conversation and public speech.[65]

The Rwandan judiciary is not fully independent, and many traditional journalists view the threat of imprisonment as a key constraint on their work. Meanwhile, arrests and prosecutions of online journalists have increased in recent years. In April 2014, the editor of the independent news website *Umusingi*, Stanley Gatera, was arrested on trumped-up charges of attempted extortion. He was previously convicted and sentenced to one year in prison in November 2012 on charges of divisionism and sectarianism for an article he published in *Umusingi*.[66] He was released in July 2013 only to be targeted again for arrest less than a year later,[67] which the journalist believed was linked to an interview he conducted on Al Jazeera's "People and Power" program—posted online and broadcast on television—in March 2014 in which he spoke about the difficulties journalists face

59   "Law No. 47/2001 on Prevention, Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Discrimination and Sectarianism," http://www.adh-geneva.ch/RULAC/pdf_state/Law-47-2001-crime-discrimination-sectraianism.pdf; Jennie E. Burnet, "Rwanda," in *Countries at the Crossroads 2007* (New York: Freedom House; Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=140&edition=8&ccrpage=37&ccrcountry=167.

60   Freedom House, "Rwanda," *Freedom of the Press 2013*, http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2013/rwanda.

61   Article 8, "Law No. 18/2008 of 23/07/2008 Relating to the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide Ideology," http://www.refworld.org/docid/4acc9a4e2.html.

62   Jane Nishimwe, "Rwanda: Controversial 'Genocide Ideology' Law to Send More Rwandans Behind Bars," *Jambo News*, April 25, 2013, http://bit.ly/16DxMli.

63   Human Rights Watch, "Rwanda," *World Report 2014*, accessed August 1, 2014, http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/rwanda.

64   "Rwanda Parliament Votes to Amend Genocide Law," *Times Live*, July 17, 2013, http://www.timeslive.co.za/africa/2013/07/17/rwanda-parliament-votes-to-amend-genocide-law; "Rwandan senate approves genocide law," *Africa Review*, July 31, 2013, http://www.africareview.com/News/Rwandan-senate-approves-amended-anti-genocide-law/-/979180/1932950/-/ddevp9z/-/index.html.

65   Emmanuel R. Karake, "Gov't Seeks to Amend Genocide Ideology Law," *The New Times*, November 3, 2012, http://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/index.php?i=15165&a=60288.

66   "Rwandan journalist sentenced to one year in jail," Committee to Protect Journalists, news alert, November 12, 2012, http://www.cpj.org/2012/11/rwandan-journalist-sentenced-to-one-year-in-jail.php.

67   "Two journalists released from prison in Rwanda," Committee to Protect Journalists, news alert, August 9, 2013, https://cpj.org/2013/08/two-journalists-released-from-prison-in-rwanda.php.

while working in Rwanda.[68] Gatera was held for six hours in April and received death threats after his release, leading him to flee the country altogether.[69]

Perceptions of media freedom and freedom of expression remain grim. In the August 2013 *Rwanda Media Barometer* report (referenced above), the survey of 144 media practitioners found that over 30 percent of respondents had expressed that they had been prevented from their right to freedom of expression.[70] Among those respondents, over 48 percent reported that central government officials had deprived them of their right to expression, followed by police officers (19 percent), local government officials (14 percent), private companies (14 percent), and military agents (5 percent).[71] While the government-sponsored report presents a somewhat critical perspective of media freedom in Rwanda with respect to government abuse of freedom of expression, the report qualifies the criticism with the assertion that "the abuse of the right to freedom of expression of which the police are accused of is justified by their mission of protecting public order."[72]

The ability to communicate anonymously is compromised by SIM card registration requirements initiated in early 2013 to "decrease mobile phone related crimes across the country."[73] SIM card owners were given the deadline of July 31, 2013 to register their cards with service providers, after which point unregistered cards were disconnected.[74] Websites hosted on the local domain also need to register with RICTA.

Until recent years, government monitoring of online communications did not appear to be widespread, though there had been instances in past years of emails, phone calls, and text messages belonging to opposition activists being produced as evidence in trials.[75] The sophistication of the Rwandan authorities' surveillance capabilities is unknown, but there is growing suspicion that surveillance is pervasive, particularly after recent revelations of numerous exiled Rwandan dissidents being attacked and targeted for assassination by the Kagame regime, despite their efforts to protect their identities.[76]

Worryingly in October 2013, the Rwandan president promulgated the Law Relating to the Interception of Communications that authorizes high-ranking security officials to monitor email

68   "Wave of intimidation of Kigali media," Reporters Without Borders, April 28, 2014. http://en.rsf.org/rwanda-wave-of-intimidation-of-kigali-28-04-2014,46184.html.

69   "Breaking: Three senior journalists flee Rwanda," *Great Lakes Voice*, April 21, 2014, http://greatlakesvoice.com/breaking-four-senior-journalists-flee-rwanda/.

70   Rwanda Media Barometer (2013), page 40.

71   Rwanda Media Barometer (2013), page 41.

72   Rwanda Media Barometer (2013), page 42.

73   Nizon Segawa, "Rwanda Flags Off SIM Card Registration Exercise," *Chimp Reports*, February 4, 2013, http://www.chimpreports.com/index.php/news/news-as-it-happens-around-the-east-african-region/8072-rwanda-flags-off-sim-card-registration-exercise.html.

74   "Rwanda switches off 485,000 unregistered Sims," *telecompaper*, August 2, 2013, https://www.telecompaper.com/news/rwanda-switches-off-485000-unregistered-sims--958884.

75   This was the case in the trial of opposition leader, Victoire Ingabire, during which e-mails and proof of money transfer to FDLR (French acronym for the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) rebels were used as evidence. These were mostly obtained via low-tech methods of confiscating suspects' mobile phones and computers rather than via service providers. See: Didas Gasana and Ann Garrison, "Ingabire trial: Rwanda prosecution fails 'evidence test,'" Rwandinfo_ENG (blog), accessed February 10, 2012, http://rwandinfo.com/eng/ingabire-trial-rwanda-prosecution-fails-evidence-test/.

76   "Rwanda: Repression Across Borders," Human Rights Watch, January 28, 2014, http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/28/rwanda-repression-across-borders.

and telephone conversations of individuals considered potential threats to "public security."[77] Under the new law, communications service providers are required to ensure that their systems have the technical capability to intercept communications upon demand. According to a report from Privacy International, such interception technology may include the use of keyword scanning to identify certain topics of discussion.[78] While the law requires government officials to apply for an interception warrant, it also includes a provision that allows for a warrant to be issued verbally in urgent security matters, to be followed by a written warrant within 24 hours.[79]

Meanwhile, the government has been known to monitor and analyze all media content during the country's annual genocide mourning period every April with the aim of "highlighting the civic contribution of the media during the commemoration period and discerning the extent to which media abide by legal and professional standards while covering genocide related issues."[80] The monitoring of online media was incorporated for the first time during Rwanda's 18th commemoration period in April 2012, which has led to a growing sense that the authorities may be monitoring other online communications as well. The extent of the government's media monitoring activities during the 20 year commemoration of the genocide in April 2014 is unclear.

Journalists within the country frequently face violence and harassment when attempting to cover news stories, leading some to flee the country and report in exile.[81] According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Rwanda ranks among the top 10 countries from which journalists seek exile.[82] Online journalists and ordinary users, however, have not yet experienced the same level of intimidation as traditional media journalists to date, though instances of harassment and violence against online journalists increased in the past year.

In early 2014, Sonia Rolley, a journalist for *Radio France Internationale*, was repeatedly harassed on Twitter by a user known as @RichardGoldston.[83] Rolley had been reporting on the mysterious January 1, 2014 assassination of Patrick Karegeya, a former top intelligence official in Kagame's inner circle who had been living in exile in Johannesburg. It was later revealed on the official Twitter account of Paul Kagame's office (@UrugwiroVillage) that "@RichardGoldson was an unauthorized account run by an employee in the Presidency."[84] Another foreign correspondent, Steve Terrill, who

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77   "Law Relating to the Interception of Communications" Official Gazette nº 41 of 14/10/2013, accessed October 24, 2014, http://rema.gov.rw/rema_doc/Laws/Itegeko%20rishya%20rya%20REMA.pdf.

78   Carly Nyst, "Rwandan Government Expands Stranglehold on Privacy and Free Expression," Privacy International, August 25, 2012, https://www.privacyinternational.org/blog/rwandan-government-expands-stranglehold-on-privacy-and-free-expression#footnote2_4eosbda.

79   "Online Freedoms in Rwanda," OpenNet Africa, accessed June 15, 2013, http://opennetafrica.org/dev/policy-and-legislation/rwanda/#fn-210-6.

80   Media High Council, "Analysis of Media Coverage of the Eighteenth Commemoration of the Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda," December 2012, http://bit.ly/16DxN8T.

81   "Breaking: Three senior Journalists flee Rwanda," *Great Lakes Voice*, April 21, 2014, http://greatlakesvoice.com/breaking-four-senior-journalists-flee-rwanda/.

82   Committee to Protect Journalists, "404 Journalists Forced Into Exile Since 2009," accessed June 30, 2014, http://www.cpj.org/exile/.

83   Adam Taylor, "A stray tweet may have exposed Paul Kagame's Twitter ghostwriter, and maybe much more," *The Washington Post*, March 7, 2014, www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/03/07/a-stray-tweet-may-have-exposed-paul-kagames-twitter-ghostwriter-and-maybe-much-more/.

84   Twitter post by "Presidency | Rwanda" @UrugwiroVillage, March 8, 2013, 2:26 AM, https://twitter.com/UrugwiroVillage/statuses/442184647863443456.

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used Twitter to publicly call on @RichardGoldston to end the harassment, was subsequently barred from entering Kigali on March 15 to cover the 20th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide.[85]

In June 2013, Tom Malaba, a journalist with the online news outlet *Ugandan Radio Network*, was repeatedly followed by Rwandan agents and had his home raided after he attended a news conference in Kampala, during which he asked a question that ostensibly angered the Rwandan Ambassador to Uganda.[86] Malaba had been investigating the plight of Rwandan refugees and sought clarification on allegations that the ambassador was behind a scheme to target Rwandan exiles in Uganda.[87]

No Rwandan journalists have been killed since 2011, when the editor of the independent news website *Inyenyeri News*, Charles Ingabire, was gunned down in Kampala.[88] Worryingly, Andrew Muhanguzi, the brother of the editor of the *Umuvugizi* news website, John Bosco Gasasira, who lives in exile in Sweden, was reported missing in February 2014. His family claims that Muhanguzi was kidnapped by men in Ugandan police uniforms outside their home on February 16,[89] but the Ugandan police stated they have no record of his arrest.[90] Muhanguzi and his family had left Rwanda in 2012 to escape alleged harassment by the Rwandan authorities for their relationship to John Bosco Gasasira and the critical *Umuvugizi* online newspaper.[91]

Technical attacks against online news outlets and websites of human rights organizations are not common but have increased in recent years. In April 2014, the investigative news website, *Ireme*, experienced a seemingly targeted cyberattack, though the source of the attack was unknown.[92]

85   Tom Rhodes, "Twitter war shines light on how Rwanda intimidates press," Committee to Project Journalists (blog), March 24, 2014, http://www.cpj.org/blog/2014/03/twitter-war-shines-light-on-how-rwanda-intimidates.php.

86   "Authorities hound independent journalists at home and abroad," Reporters Without Borders, March 19, 2014, http://en.rsf.org/rwanda-authorities-hound-independent-19-03-2014,46016.html.

87   Tom Rhodes, "Twitter war exposes Rwanda Govts' media 'spin' and press intimidation," *Black Star News*, March 31, 2013, http://www.blackstarnews.com/global-politics/africa/twitter-war-exposes-rwanda-govts-media-spin-and-press-intimidation.html.

88   "Rwandan exile journalist gunned down in Kampala," Reporters Without Borders, December 2, 2011, http://en.rsf.org/uganda-rwandan-exile-journalist-gunned-02-12-2011,41504.html.

89   Risdel Kasasira & Solomon Arinaitwe, "Exiled Rwandan journalist brother feared kidnapped in Kampala," *Daily Monitor*, March 7, 2014, http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Exiled-Rwandan-journalist-brother-feared-kidnapped-in-Kampala/-/688334/2234962/-/589acu/-/index.html.

90   "Authorities hound independent journalists at home and abroad," Reporters Without Borders, March 19, 2014, http://en.rsf.org/rwanda-authorities-hound-independent-19-03-2014,46016.html.

91   Risdel Kasasira & Solomon Arinaitwe, "Exiled Rwandan journalist brother feared kidnapped in Kampala," *Daily Monitor*, March 7, 2014.

92   "Wave of intimidation of Kigali media," Reporters Without Borders, April 28, 2014, http://en.rsf.org/rwanda-wave-of-intimidation-of-kigali-28-04-2014,46184.html.