

Malawi internet freedom report

By [Gregory Gondwe](#)

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Internet and mobile phone services were first introduced in Malawi in the late 1990's, though after decades of flagging economic development, the impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has been limited for most Malawians compared to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa.



Penetration rates for digital media tools remain well below average for the region due primarily to poor infrastructure and the high cost of access. Nevertheless, the development of Malawi's ICT sector has become a government priority under President Joyce Banda, who in her inaugural state of the nation address in May 2012 set out a vision for deploying ICTs as a catalyst for economic development.(1)

Banda came to power in April 2012 following the death of former President Bingu wa Mutharika, who was known for his heavy-handed approach towards the opposition and restrictions against fundamental freedoms, including digital media freedoms.

"Spy machine"

In 2011, the Malawi Communication Regulatory Authority (MACRA) under the Mutharika government introduced a Consolidated ICT Regulatory Management System that became locally known as the "spy machine," which ostensibly aimed to monitor the performance of mobile phone companies to improve quality of service. The courts placed an injunction on the system in late 2012, but in June 2013, parliament gave MACRA its endorsement to install the machine, despite the court's ruling.

The government does not systematically block or filter internet content in Malawi; however, during violent anti-government protests in July 2011, MACRA reportedly ordered internet service providers (ISPs) to block certain opposition news and social media websites, among other media tools. No such blocks have occurred under President Banda, though a controversial E-Bill was introduced in October 2012 that aims to implement a legal framework for regulating ICTs. Criticized for its potential to limit internet freedom, the draft E-Bill would require editors of online public communications services to

reveal their personal information and allow the government to appoint "cyber inspectors" to monitor online activity in the public domain.(2)

For more, [download the full Freedom House Report report](#) (212KB).

(1) Cleopa Timon Otieno, "[President Banda Unveils Malawi's ICT Vision as Government Sets Up 7 Telecentres](#)," Telecentre, (blog), May 25, 2012.

(2) "[Malawi Alert: E-Bill Puts Freedom of Expression Online in Cross-hairs](#)", Nyasa Times, October 4, 2012.

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