

A photograph of a person's hands holding a white smartphone. The phone screen shows a search bar with the text 'election results' and a refresh icon. Below the search bar, the screen displays an error message: 'Safari cannot open the page because your iPhone is not connected to the internet.' The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a person in a light-colored shirt.

Webinar on elections, internet shutdowns and access to information ARE INTERNET SHUTDOWNS THE NEW THREAT TO DEMOCRACY?

The Business and Human Rights Unit, the Democracy and Civic Engagement Unit and the Expression, Information and Digital Rights Unit at the Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, invite you to a webinar on elections, internet shutdowns and access to information to discuss how internet shutdowns are fast becoming a new threat to democracy in Africa.

Personality politics in Africa as with many authoritarian governments remains a huge threat to democracy. The lines between the government and other institutions, state or otherwise, tend to be blurred in one-party state regimes, which have been the main form of authoritarian rule on the African continent. The state and other institutions are mechanised against the citizens and the opposition in this type of authoritarian rule; this was typified in the most recent Ugandan elections where the incumbent even during an election cycle, mechanised the state and other institutions, including the army, corporate entities and the law through COVID-19 regulations to deeply entrench their power and remain in control.

WEBINAR

Elections, internet shutdowns and access to information: Are internet shutdowns the new threat to democracy?

Thursday 18 March 2021

11:00 – 13:00 SAST

[REGISTER ON ZOOM](#)



Objectives

The overall objective of the webinar is to interrogate personality politics in Africa and how internet shutdowns restrict political participation and threaten democracy.

Specifically, the webinar discussion will attempt to answer these key questions:

- To what extent does one party-ism contribute to incumbents holding onto power?
- What role can be played by non-state actors including civil society, business and the international community to protect the democratic processes in these situations and to prevent the unfettered control of authoritarian incumbents in manipulating electoral processes for their benefit?
- What is the role of access to information in elections?
- Are internet shutdowns a necessary, legitimate and proportional tool to ensure public safety and national security during elections?
- Are internet shutdowns a necessary, legitimate and proportional tool to manage hate speech and curb the spread of false news online?
- What responsibilities do telecom companies and other internet service providers have towards their users in the face of government orders on internet shutdowns?
- What recourse do internet users have against corporate entities especially telecom companies and other internet service providers for breaches of service agreements during these shutdowns?
- What is the lasting damage of internet shutdowns on democracy and political participation?

Speakers

Moderator:

Thomas White, Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria

Panellists:

- Dr Peter Mutesasira, Dean, Faculty of Law, Uganda Christian University
- Johnson Mayamba Banziyanga, Journalist
- Catherine Anite, Freedom of Xpression Hub, Uganda
- Ichumile Gqada, Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa

Event details

Thursday 18 March 2021

09:00 GMT / 10:00 WAT / 11:00 SAST / 12: 00 EAT

All participants are required to [register on Zoom](#).

Zoom Meeting ID: 974 5829 8378 (registration required)

Contacts

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