

Impact Insight:

Senegal's 2023 Internet Shutdowns on Trust in Government, Institutions, and Democracy

The 2023 internet shutdowns in Senegal had profound repercussions on the perception of democratic institutions and citizen participation. By limiting access to information, freedom of expression, and public debate, these interruptions exposed significant vulnerabilities in the connection between governance and digital rights.

These events marked a turning point in how citizens perceived the government, challenging trust in democratic institutions and raising questions about the future stability of democracy in Senegal. Another central issue relates to restricted access to information and the limitations imposed on journalists' work, perceived as a direct attack on the fundamental rights of freedom of expression and access to information. Many participants expressed frustration

over what they saw as a “blatant restriction” of these rights, which are considered essential for the survival of democracy. These restrictions also fueled a sense of mistrust in the country's transparency and governance.

Despite this erosion of trust, some degree of democratic resilience seems to persist. Respondents expressed cautious hope for a better future under the leadership of the new government, even as the experience of the shutdowns heightened citizens' vigilance against authoritarian practices. This crisis deepened the feeling of abandonment among the population, compromising the government's ability to rally citizens around collective solutions—a crucial element for maintaining social cohesion and effectively addressing future challenges.

Key Findings

- **Erosion of trust in institutions**
 - The shutdowns intensified mistrust toward the outgoing government, with 76.2% of respondents stating that the measures were unjustified.
 - For 58.5% of respondents, uncertainty about the government's ability to manage political crises “significantly increased.”
 - This context heightened citizens' sense of abandonment, with many viewing the shutdowns as a form of authoritarian censorship.
- **Restrictions on freedom of expression and citizen participation**
 - 77.3% of respondents (35% “totally agree” and 42.3% “agree”) observed that the shutdowns significantly impacted their ability to participate in public debates.
 - Journalists, essential to democratic transparency, were particularly affected: 56.1% of respondents stated that these disruptions severely hindered journalists' ability to inform the public.
 - Respondents expressed frustration at the loss of their freedom of expression, with several describing these practices as a “blatant restriction of fundamental rights.”

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- **Impact on the perception of democracy**
 - Some participants described the shutdowns as “a [digital] coup against democracy,” highlighting their paralyzing effect on citizen participation.
 - The restriction of public debates and access to information reinforced the perception that such practices weaken the pillars of democracy, particularly transparency and citizen engagement.
- **Hope and skepticism toward the new government**
 - While some respondents, like “Khadija,” expressed “cautious hope” that the newly elected government would adopt a more respectful approach to digital rights, others, like “Cheikh,” noted that authoritarian practices, such as shutdowns, could persist.
 - 26.3% of respondents believed it “very likely” that future shutdowns would occur, while 22.8% remained “uncertain.”
- **Role of civil society**
 - A majority of participants affirmed that civil society is a key actor in defending digital rights and promoting democratic resilience. As one respondent noted, “Civil society is our strength, not the government.”



As well as limiting access to information, the internet shutdowns hampered my freedom of expression. By cutting myself off from public debates, I felt disconnected from political reality, which amplified my concerns about the country's transparency and governance. These interruptions have also cast doubt on citizens' ability to actively participate in the democratic process, which in the long term could weaken trust in democratic institutions.

Testimony shared in the survey

To learn more, read the full reports:

- [The Impact of Senegal's 2023 Internet Shutdowns on Society, the Economy, and Trust in Democracy](#)
- [The Price of Disruption: Evaluating the Economic Impact of Senegal's 2023 Internet Shutdowns](#)