Zimbabwe

Key Developments: June 2015 – May 2016

- The government increased its share of the ICT market in its acquisition of mobile provider Telecel, while infighting between the regulator and telecoms on various policy issues led to decreasing industry confidence in the regulatory environment (see ICT Market).

- The draft National Policy for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) introduced in late 2015 provides a framework for centralizing control over the country’s internet, which critics worry will establish a Chinese-style “Great Firewall” on Zimbabwe’s internet (see Restrictions on Connectivity).

- A YouTube video featuring a spoken word lament about Zimbabwe’s current state of affairs by Pastor Evan Mawarire in April 2016 sparked the large-scale #ThisFlag social media movement (see Digital Activism).

- In a landmark positive step, criminal defamation was ruled unconstitutional in February 2016 (see Legal Environment).

- Several individuals were arrested for their online activities during the coverage period, reflecting a marked increase compared to previous years (see Prosecutions and Detentions for Online Activities).
Introduction

Internet freedom in Zimbabwe remained tenuous over the past year, beleaguered by declining conditions for access, government efforts to exert greater control over the country’s ICT market and internet infrastructure, threats to shutdown social media, and increasing arrests for online activities.

In the midst of political infighting, economic instability, and uncertainty over who will eventually succeed President Robert Mugabe—the 92-year old authoritarian in power since 1987—Zimbabweans increasingly flocked to social media and communications apps to share critical news and information and to express discontent with the government’s failing policies. In May 2016, citizens were captivated by a YouTube video created by Pastor Evan Mawarire in which he criticized Zimbabwe’s current state of affairs in a spoken word piece titled, “This Flag – A Lament.”¹ The video launched the #ThisFlag social media movement which helped inspire anti-government protests in July.

Catching onto citizens’ increasing online engagement, government officials regularly decried the destabilizing effects of social media and reportedly blocked access to WhatsApp for several hours during the July protests. Meanwhile, several individuals were arrested for online activities throughout the year, including Pastor Evan Mawarire for his videos on social media that the authorities perceived as inciting public violence,² as well as several ordinary users for their WhatsApp messages that criticized aging President Mugabe.³

In the past year, the government took concrete steps to increase its control over the internet, though the efforts have yet to manifest. In January 2016, for example, the president announced that his government would engage the Chinese to help filter the internet and block social media.⁴ His announcement came shortly after the draft National Policy for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was introduced that provides a framework for centralizing control over the country’s internet, which critics worry will establish a Chinese-style “Great Firewall” on Zimbabwe’s internet. The Computer Crime and Cybercrime Bill was also introduced in August 2016, which threatens to penalize social media criticism.

In a positive step, the Constitutional Court struck down criminal defamation under the Criminal Law Codification and Reform Act (CODE) in February 2016,⁵ while another court spoke up in defense of the constitutional right to privacy in October, indicating that legislation impeding privacy and other rights may be challenged by Zimbabwe’s judiciary.⁶

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¹ YouTube video, “This Flag – A Lament,” posted April 19, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LubMilbHiPg
Obstacles to Access

The draft National Policy for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was introduced in late 2015 aims to centralize the country’s internet, raising deep concerns over the government’s desire to restrict access. The government increased its share of the ICT market in its acquisition of mobile provider Telecel, while infighting between the regulator and telecoms on various policy issues led to decreasing industry confidence in the regulatory environment.

Availability and Ease of Access

Access to the internet in Zimbabwe stood at 50 percent in March 2016, according to official government data from the telecoms regulator, which incorporates mobile broadband access. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) reported a much lower rate of 16 percent, decreasing from 20 percent in 2014. Mobile phone penetration was much higher at 85 percent as of December 2015 per ITU data, or 97 percent as of March 2016 per official government data, though millions of Zimbabweans remain virtually disconnected due to poor network coverage in remote areas or the lack of affordable services. According to the 2015/16 Affordability Report, the Alliance for Affordable Internet estimated that 500MB of mobile broadband costs nearly 30 percent of the country’s GNI per capita of US$840, which is well above the target of 5 percent or less set by the UN Broadband Commission in 2011 as a goal for broadband affordability.

A significant urban-rural divide exists among Zimbabwean internet users, as most base stations that facilitate access to the internet via mobile phones are in urban areas. Network quality and coverage are still poor, with only 88 percent and 54 percent of Zimbabwe’s population covered by 2G and 3G enabled base stations, respectively. Average broadband speeds improved incrementally from 3.1 Mbps in 2015 to 4.7 Mbps in 2016, though Zimbabwe still performs below the global average of 6.3 Mbps, according to Akamai.

Flagging internet access rates in the past year could be attributed to the country’s economic crisis and falling household incomes, which have decreased the profits of telecommunications companies, resulting in reduced investments in the ICT sector. In October 2015, Zimbabwe’s leading telecoms provider Econet announced a 17.7 percent drop in profit as compared to the past year’s revenue, which the company blamed on a floundering economy and new regulations, such as a

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10 POTRAZ, Postal and Telecommunications Sector Performance Report, First Quarter 2016.
13 According to the first quarter 2016 report from Potraz: “The total number of base stations in rural areas was 1,940 versus 4,780 base stations in urban areas. A comparison with the fourth quarter shows that base stations in rural areas increased by 11% from 1,748 to reach 1,940 base stations. However the increase was mostly in 2G technology.” See, POTRAZ, Postal and Telecommunications Sector Performance Report, First Quarter 2016.
35 percent reduction on the costs of voice calls in 2014.\textsuperscript{16} Other adverse regulations included a 5 percent tax on airtime and a 40 percent duty on imported mobile phone handsets, computers, and laptops, which were introduced by the government in 2014. This unfavorable operating environment has forced telecom companies to reduce investments in infrastructure.\textsuperscript{17}

In January 2016, the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority reduced a traveler rebate for the value of goods that individuals can import without paying duties from US$300 to $200,\textsuperscript{18} which may have a negative impact on small IT businesses that use this duty-free rebate to import ICT gadgets for resale.

### Restrictions on Connectivity

No cases of deliberate disruptions in mobile phone or broadband internet networks were recorded during the June 2015 to May 2016 coverage period, though WhatsApp was inaccessible for several hours during widespread anti-government protests in July (see Blocking and Filtering). Separately, the internet research firm Renesys documented outages on 31 percent of the country’s networks on the same day.\textsuperscript{19} Observers have noted that private ownership of the majority of the country’s international gateways makes it difficult for the government to shutdown the entire internet.\textsuperscript{20} Two of Zimbabwe’s five international gateways for internet and voice traffic are operated by the state-owned fixed network, TelOne, and mobile network, NetOne. The private mobile operators—Econet, TeleCel, and Africom—operate the other three international gateways.\textsuperscript{21}

In late 2015, the Ministry of ICT introduced the draft National Policy for Information and Communications Technology (ICT), which put forth an ambitious set of policies that, if implemented, would dramatically change Zimbabwean’s internet freedom landscape through centralized control over the country’s internet. Section 5 of the document on “ICT Infrastructure” details plans to establish a single national ICT backbone to be owned by various public and private shareholders but ultimately controlled by the government.\textsuperscript{22} The section also mandates infrastructure sharing among telecoms, which private telecoms who have invested heavily in their own infrastructure have decried as a form of “backdoor nationalization.”\textsuperscript{23} Most troublingly, Section 21.3 creates “The National Backbone Company,” defined by the document as “one Super Gateway which shall be the entry and exit point for all international traffic.”\textsuperscript{24} The policy had not been implemented as of October 2016.

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\textsuperscript{17} POTRAZ, Postal and Telecommunications Sector Performance Report, First Quarter 2016.

\textsuperscript{18} Thupeyo Muleya, “Govt slashes travellers’ rebate,” The Herald, January 5, 2016, \url{http://bit.ly/2eGbXcA}

\textsuperscript{19} “60 networks out in Zimbabwe,” Dyn Events, July 6, 2016, \url{http://bit.ly/2JUFDF4}

\textsuperscript{20} Munya Bloggo, “‘We really believe social media will drive change in Mugabe’s Zimbabwe,’” Quartz Africa, August 2, 2016, \url{http://qz.com/748132/we-really-believe-social-media-will-drive-change-in-mugabes-zimbabwe/}

\textsuperscript{21} POTRAZ, Postal and Telecommunications Sector Performance Report, First Quarter 2016.

\textsuperscript{22} Zimbabwe National Policy for Information and Communications Technology (ICT), 2015, Section 5.1, \url{http://www.techzim.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Zimbabwe-Draft-National-ICT-Policy-2015-.pdf?x97092}

\textsuperscript{23} POTRAZ, “POTRAZ Embarks on Infrastructure Sharing Drive,” accessed October 1, 2016, \url{http://www.potraz.gov.zw/index.php/categorylinks/103-potraz-embarks-on-an-infrastructure-sharing-drive}

\textsuperscript{24} Zimbabwe National Policy for Information and Communications Technology (ICT), 2015, Section 21.3.
ICT Market

The ICT market in Zimbabwe is diverse, with 15 licensed internet service providers (ISPs) registered with the Zimbabwe Internet Service Providers Association (ZISPA) in 2016, one of which is the government-owned Zarnet, which provides IT products and services as well as internet service.25 As set by the regulator, license fees for ISPs range from US$2-4 million, depending on the type of service, and must be vetted and approved by the regulator prior to installation.26 Providers must also pay 3.5 percent of their annual gross income to the regulator.

There are five mobile service providers in the country: state-owned TelOne and NetOne, partially state-owned Telecel, and privately owned Econet and Africom. License fees for operating mobile phone services in Zimbabwe are steep, increasing from US$100 million to $137.5 million in 2013.27 Only one mobile service provider, privately-owned Econet, had paid this fee in full by 2016, while the second largest network, Telecel, had paid a deposit. Telecel’s future also hangs in the balance after a hostile government takeover in late 2015. The Zimbabwean government reportedly forced Dutch company VimpelCom to sell 60 percent of its shares in Telecel to government-owned Zarnet for US$40 million in November 2015,28 forcing VimpelCom out of the Zimbabwe market and increasing the government’s share. Telecel lost clients as a result of the takeover, forcing the company to cut down on staff and salaries.29

The state-owned telecom companies NetOne and TelOne were embroiled in accusations of mismanagement and corruption in the past year, with NetOne reportedly losing millions of USD through misappropriation and saddled with a US$330 million debt that the government has taken over.30 Observers believe the proposed centralization of the country’s internet backbone and gateway in the draft National Policy for ICT (see Restrictions on Connectivity) is partially motivated by the government’s desire to bolster the flagging profits of its telecom providers.

Regulatory Bodies

ISPs and mobile phone companies are regulated by the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ), whose leaders are appointed by the president in consultation with the minister of transport and communication.31 POTRAZ is expected to operate independently but has increasingly become subsumed by the ICT Ministry in recent years; it previously fell under the...
President's Office. In July 2015, ICT Minister Supa Mandiwanzira dismissed the POTRAZ board over alleged corruption in what observers believe was a politically motivated move.

Industry confidence in the regulator is low, resulting in public spats between POTRAZ and telecoms on various policy issues, as exemplified by Econet's legal suit launched against POTRAZ in January 2016, which seeks USD 132 million in damages from POTRAZ for revenue losses incurred after the firm was ordered to reduce its tariffs in 2014. The privately-owned telecom alleges that the playing field was made uneven by the directive to reduce tariffs, as well as a demand that Econet pay USD 137.5 million in license renewal fees while allowing its competitors Telecel and NetOne to continue operating without paying. In its court papers, Econet is seeking the High Court to compel both Telecel and NetOne to pay license fees as well as POTRAZ to restore tariffs set out in Econet's license issued in 2013.

Limits on Content

WhatsApp was inaccessible for several hours during anti-government protests in July 2016 (outside the coverage period for FOTN scores), which were inspired by the #ThisFlag social media movement launched by Pastor Evan Mawawire's YouTube video in May. The draft National Policy for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) introduced in late 2015, if implemented, will seek to expand the government's reach on social media and potentially manipulate the online information landscape.

Blocking and Filtering

During this report's coverage period, no websites were blocked or filtered in Zimbabwe and access to social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube and international blog-hosting platforms were all freely available. However, on July 6, 2016, WhatsApp was reportedly inaccessible for nearly 5 hours during anti-government protests, leading to strong suspicions of government interference given the platform's widespread use by citizens to organize the protests. While the government denied that it had blocked the service, sources in the telecoms sector confirmed that they had received instructions from the government to shut down WhatsApp.

The WhatsApp outage followed months of threats made by government officials to restrict social media, including President Mugabe who stated in early 2016 that his government would engage the
Chinese government for assistance with filtering the internet and blocking social media. The ICT minister later stated in July 2016 that social media would not be regulated unless the need arose.

Meanwhile, bulk text messages with political content are subject to censorship. Originally implemented in the lead-up to the 2013 elections, a ban on bulk SMS services continues to obstruct the ability of civil society groups to send SMS messages on important issues or to mobilize, and there are no mechanisms in place for appeal.

Content Removal

There were no reported incidents of forced content removal of online content during the coverage period, though Zimbabwean government authorities have been known to pressure users and content producers to delete content from social media platforms. Most notably, the government is suspected of being behind the removal of the anonymous whistleblower Baba Jukwa’s Facebook page in July 2014, but the manner in which it was removed remains shrouded in mystery.

Media, Diversity, and Content Manipulation

Zimbabwe’s online landscape is vibrant, with Facebook, Google, Yahoo, and YouTube among the most popular websites with Zimbabwean internet users. Citizen journalism outlets such as @263 have become popular in informing citizen about important public affairs. Youth activism groups include Magamba Network that fuses online activism with artistic expression and an online political satire show, Zambezi News. Zambezi News broadcasts on YouTube and distributes its news content on compact discs (CDs).

The growth in social media use has prompted newspapers to work on integrating online platforms and developing social media strategies. For example, ALPHA media group publisher of The Standard, Newsday, Southern Times and Zimbabwe Independent have partnered with the telecom Econet to provide Mobinews, a mobile based news service for US$0.80 per week. A source in ALPHA media noted the platform has brought more revenue to the firm than print advertisements, indicating a shift in the media model.

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43 According to Freedom House consultant interviews, May 2016.
44 One such ICT based Civic network Kubatana.net issued a statement stating that, “...in the run-up to Zimbabwe’s 2013 election, our ability to send bulk text messages has been blocked. We have been informed by Econet that their regulator, Potraz, has issued a directive blocking the delivery of bulk messages from international gateways. “Potraz Bans Bulk SMSs,” News Day, July 26, 2013, http://bit.ly/1Ga9G3k; See also, Brandon Gregory, “Zimbabwe Authorities Block Award Winning SMS Service for ‘Political Reasons;’” Humanipo, July 30, 2013, http://bit.ly/1Gq9k0k; Gareth van Zyl, “Zimbabwean regulator ‘blocks’ bulk SMS as election nears;” ITWeb Africa, July 29, 2013, http://bit.ly/1QgzwzB
45 @263Chat’s Twitter page: https://twitter.com/263Chat
46 Magamba Network blog: http://www.povo.co.zw/blogs/magamba-network and YouTube page: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wvbQNWTu5yw
Despite the increasing diversity of local content, independent news websites and other digital media outlets based outside Zimbabwe continue to provide the most critical news and information, especially on sensitive topics that local media groups are afraid of covering. By contrast, local media outlets reporting on controversial issues are often met with attacks from state officials who threaten to arrest or further legislate media operations. Popular online news sites include Newzimbabwe.com and NehandaRadio.com, which are used by local journalists and citizens to report on sensitive issues, often under the cover of pseudonyms.

Online self-censorship among Zimbabwean internet users remains high. Users even began to censor themselves on private messaging platforms such as WhatsApp following the arrest of several individuals for messages and images shared on the WhatsApp platform (see Prosecutions and Detentions for Online Activities).47

The draft National Policy for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) introduced in late 2015, if implemented, will seek to expand the government’s reach on social media and potentially manipulate the online information landscape. In particular, section 18 of the draft on social networks includes a policy to “ensure availability of local capacity to snuff out undesirable social content.”48

**Digital Activism**

Social media tools became a new political battle ground in Zimbabwe in the past year due to their wide availability and relative low cost of use on internet-enabled smart phones, which has allowed citizens to express themselves and criticize poor governance freely and easily. In particular, the communications platform WhatsApp became citizens’ platform of choice for organizing and sharing information during the #ShutDownZim protests beginning in July 2016, leading the government to reportedly restrict access to WhatsApp for several hours and ramp up its threats to restrict social media in general. The protests were inspired by the #ThisFlag social media movement launched by Pastor Evan Mawarire49 through his spoken word commentary that criticized Zimbabwe’s current state of affairs in a YouTube video posted in April 2016.50

WhatsApp has also served as an important tool enabling organized civic activism, giving space for political activists and citizen journalists through private encrypted WhatsApp groups to share community information and strategies to influence local government decisions. Residents’ associations have also adopted WhatsApp as their key mobilizing platform on service delivery issues.

**Violations of User Rights**

Several individuals were arrested for online activities, particularly for WhatsApp messages that criticized aging President Mugabe. Intimidation and harassment was also prevalent. A draft cyber-crime law introduced in August 2016 threatens to impede citizens’ privacy and increase government surveillance.

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48 Zimbabwe National Policy for Information and Communications Technology (ICT), 2015, Section 18.1.
49 #ThisFlag E Mawarire Twitter page, https://twitter.com/PastorEvanLive
50 Dominic Mhiripiri, “Joining #ThisFlag? Use this App to Overlay Your FB Profile Picture,” TechZim, May 13, 2016, http://www.techzim.co.zw/2016/05/thisflag-fb-profile/#V4QH6ITV6x
Legal Environment

Zimbabwe's existing media laws remain undemocratic, contradicting constitutional protections for the media, free expression, and access to information. In a landmark positive step, however, criminal defamation under the Criminal Law Codification and Reform Act (CODE) was ruled unconstitutional on February 3, 2016, indicating a judiciary with some level of independence and willingness to balance executive overreach.

A draft Computer Crime and Cybercrime Bill introduced in August 2016 raised alarms about potential new restrictions on Zimbabwe’s internet freedom, particularly given its timing following widespread anti-government protests that were largely mobilized via social media and communications platforms in July. The current draft prohibits the publication and dissemination of pornography as well as racist and xenophobic material and penalizes the use of “electronic communication, with intent to coerce, intimidate, harass, or cause substantial emotional distress to a person” with a fine, prison of up to five years, or both, which observers believe will be used to penalize government criticism on social media. Provisions in the draft also intrude on citizens’ right to privacy by authorizing interception, search, and seizure of electronic gadgets without sufficient oversight to prevent abuse, which would further strengthen the government’s surveillance capabilities (see Surveillance, Privacy, and Anonymity).

Prosecutions and Detentions for Online Activities

Several individuals were arrested for their online activities during the coverage period, reflecting a marked increase compared to previous years. In October 2015, opposition party councilor in rural Bubi, Nduna Matshazi, was arrested for allegedly demeaning President Mugabe in a WhatsApp message to a private chat group with other regional councilors. One of the councilors belonging to the ruling ZANU-PF party reported his message to the police. His case remains open as of October 2016.

In April 2016, Ernest Matsapa, a government employee in Nyanga, was also arrested for his WhatsApp messages, in particular audio and images that allegedly depicted President Mugabe as too old and a burden to the people in a private chat group called “Nyanga Free Range.” Matsapa was accused of denigrating Mugabe and charged with “criminal nuisance” under the Criminal Codification Act. If convicted, he faces up to six months in prison; his trial is ongoing as of October 2016.

On April 7, 2016 Media Centre Director Earnest Mudzengi was detained for 8 hours and questioned

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52 Computer Crime and Cybercrime Bill (July 2013 draft), Sections 15, 17, 18, 23.
over an online story published by *Zimbabwe Sentinel* news website run by the Media Centre that reported about a plot to bomb President Robert Mugabe’s dairy farm and factory.\(^{58}\) The following day, *Zimbabwe Sentinel* writers Malvern Mkudu and Mlondolozi Ndlovu were also questioned for hours about the same story, though no charges were pressed on the three journalists.

During the July 2016 anti-government protests, the government became more brazen and open about its disdain for social media activities. On July 6, the telecoms regulator POTRAZ issued a statement threatening to arrest individuals for “social media abuse,” indicating that since mobile phone cards are registered with the regulator, security agents could easily track those sharing protest messages.\(^{59}\)

Shortly after, police arrested Pastor Evan Mawarire on July 12, whose #ThisFlag social media movement inspired the widespread protests, on allegations of inciting public violence, but his charge was amended to subversion when he appeared before the courts.\(^{60}\) The courts dismissed his case on July 13 over a technicality, though widespread international attention and the popular #FreePastorEvan social media campaign may have played a role.\(^{61}\) At the time of writing, the police were reportedly still interested in arresting and charging Mawarire, though he had left the country shortly after his release, reportedly out of concerns for his safety.\(^{62}\)

Meanwhile, in June 2015, the government withdrew charges against University of Zimbabwe student Romeo Musemburi who was arrested in June 2014 based on accusations of running the Facebook page of the anonymous whistleblower Baba Jukwa and charged with “attempting acts of insurrection, banditry, and sabotage.”\(^{63}\) The withdrawal put an end to the saga surrounding Baba Jukwa, who had captivated Zimbabwe in 2013-2014 and marked the government’s first confrontation with social media activism, though the affair left a chilling effect on critical speech online.

An interesting/positive development saw a perpetrator of sexual crimes in Zimbabwe arrested after the images had gone viral on WhatsApp.\(^{64}\)

### Surveillance, Privacy, and Anonymity

Unchecked government surveillance has been a persistent concern in Zimbabwe, and several legal provisions may allow the government to conduct surveillance without respect for the Necessary
and Proportionate Principles—international guidelines that apply human rights law to monitoring technologies.\textsuperscript{65}

The Post and Telecommunications Act of 2000 allows the government to intercept suspicious communications and requires a telecommunications licensee, such as an ISP, to supply information to government officials upon request.\textsuperscript{66} The act also obligates telecoms to report any communications with “offensive” or “threatening” content.

The Interception of Communications Act of 2007 established a Monitoring of Interception of Communications Center that has the power to oversee traffic in all telecommunications services and to intercept phone calls, emails, and faxes under the pretext of national security, though it is uncertain whether the center is operating.\textsuperscript{67} Section 9 of the act requires telecommunications operators and ISPs to install necessary surveillance technology at their own expense and to intercept information on the state’s behalf.\textsuperscript{68} Failure to comply is punishable with a fine and sentence of up to three years in prison. Warrants allowing the monitoring and interception of communications are issued by the minister of information at his/her discretion; consequently, there is no adequate judicial oversight or other independent safeguard against abuse,\textsuperscript{69} and the extent and frequency of monitoring remains unknown.

The draft National Policy for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) introduced in late 2015 put forth an ambitious set of policies that, if implemented, would provide the government with the ability to shut down networks or block websites as well as strengthen its surveillance capabilities through centralized control over the country’s internet (see Restrictions on Connectivity). In October 2015, Portnet Software—an IT company that provides security solutions for various sectors and in which the government has a 51 percent share—reportedly upgraded its capacity to help the government intercept and analyze ICT communications.\textsuperscript{70} IT experts saw the move as part of efforts to facilitate the implementation of the draft National Policy.\textsuperscript{71}

Anonymous communication and user data are compromised by SIM card registration regulations implemented in 2011, which require mobile phone users to submit personal identity details to mobile operators, ostensibly to combat crime and curtail threatening or obscene communications.\textsuperscript{72}

Under the 2013 Postal and Telecommunications (Subscriber Registration) Regulations, subscribers are required to register with all telecommunications service providers with details including a full name, permanent residential address, nationality, gender, subscriber ID number, and national ID or

\textsuperscript{65} Necessary and Proportionate principles: https://necessaryandproportionate.org/about
\textsuperscript{68} Interception of Communications Act, No. 6/2007, Section 9, “Assistance by service providers.”
\textsuperscript{69} Interception of Communications Act, No. 6/2007, Section 6, “Issue of warrant.”
\textsuperscript{70} Ndebele. H. “Gvt hones spying tools,” Zimbabwe Independent, October 9, 2015, http://www.theindependent.co.zw/2015/10/09/govt-hones-spying-tools/
\textsuperscript{71} Ndebele, H. “Gvt sharpens spying tools,” Zimbabwe Independent, January 8, 2016, http://www.theindependent.co.zw/2016/01/08/govt-sharpens-spying-tools/
Network operators are then required to retain such personal information for five years after either the subscriber or operator, has discontinued service. The subscriber registration regulations also require ISPs to provide POTRAZ with copies of their subscriber registers to be stored in a Central Subscriber Information Database to enable POTRAZ to “assist law enforcement agencies on safeguarding national security,” among other aims.

A 2014 amendment to the regulations requires law enforcement agents to obtain a court order or a warrant to request information from the central database, which some analysts worry falls short of judicial oversight since a warrant “can be issued by police officers who have been designated as justices of the peace.” Following the law’s enactment in April 2015, the Zimbabwe Internet Services Providers Association released a statement stating that none of its members would participate in email surveillance, though penalties for breaching the new law include both fines and imprisonment.

To comply with the SIM card registration requirements, Econet disconnected one million of its subscribers in November 2015. During the registration process, the telecom was reportedly pressured to verify subscriber details with the government Registrar General’s office.

Intimidation and Violence

Online journalists and ICT users often faced harassment, intimidation, and violence for their online activities in the past year. During the July 2016 anti-government protests, journalists were reportedly arrested and forced to delete images covering the demonstrations as part of an effort to suppress reporting and sharing of information via social media.

WhatsApp group conversations became the subject of increasing scrutiny for critical content. In January 2016, 20 junior police officers were questioned and suspended over a WhatsApp group they had created to discuss concerns over the delayed payment of their salaries and end of year bonuses, which was reportedly leaked to the police authorities. Alongside increasing arrests for WhatsApp messages (see Prosecutions and Detentions for Online Activities), the suspension resulted in a chilling effect among users of the platform.

In an unfortunate case, journalist/cum activist Itai Dzamara, who was abducted in March 2015 near his home in Harare, remains missing as of October 2016. Dzamara was known for his leadership

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73 Garikai Dzoma, “Zimbabwe’s new online spying law,” TechZim, October 9, 2013, [http://www.techzim.co.zw/2013/10/zimbabwes-new-online-spying-law/](http://www.techzim.co.zw/2013/10/zimbabwes-new-online-spying-law/); Postal and Telecommunications (Subscriber Registration) Regulations, 2013, (Statutory Instrument 142/2013), [https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B006T_7m0f19NTR2b1BszZJZa2s/edit](https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B006T_7m0f19NTR2b1BszZJZa2s/edit).
74 Postal and Telecommunications (Subscriber Registration) Regulations, 2013, (Statutory Instrument 142/2013), Section 8 (1) and (2).
79 Privilege Musvanhiri, Twitter post, July 6, 2016, [https://twitter.com/Musvanhiri/status/750673802716119040](https://twitter.com/Musvanhiri/status/750673802716119040).
82 About Itai Dzamara, Pindula, [http://www.pindula.co.zw/Itai_Dzamara](http://www.pindula.co.zw/Itai_Dzamara).
of the anti-government “Occupy Africa Unity Square” protest group organized on Facebook and had received numerous threats from state security agents for his activism prior to his disappearance.83

Technical Attacks

There were no technical attacks against government critics, online news outlets, or human rights organizations reported during the coverage period. In February 2016, a hacktivist group identifying itself as Anon hacked Zimbabwe’s parliament website.84 The ruling party ZANU PF also had its website hacked and pulled down twice in 2016,85 while the state broadcaster Zimbabwe Broadcast Corporation (ZBC) and the regulator POTRAZ had their websites shutdown by hackers in July 2016, apparently as retribution for the government’s alleged blocking of WhatsApp amid antigovernment protests (see Blocking and Filtering).86

83 Occupy Africa Unity Square, Facebook Page, http://on.fb.me/1OznpUe