

Internet shutdown: When a State is afraid of its own citizens

In politics, never believe anything until it's officially denied. An old saying. First, the government came out swiftly and issued a lengthy, categorical denial that it was going to shut down the Internet during election week, as earlier proclaimed in a statement (on Uganda Communication Commission (UCC) letterhead) that had gone viral on social media. Then, as the citizens relaxed, secure in the knowledge that all was well, UCC came out and announced, a couple of hours to the cut-off point, that the Internet would actually be shut down. And it was shut down, with lots of lame excuses. Big problem here.

This is not 1926...heck, we're in 2026! And in 2026, the Internet rules, connects, and drives the world. It's the engine of the world, the wind beneath our wings. The Internet is not some optional accessory to life; it is its very infrastructure, its central nervous system. Shutting it down during an election is, therefore, not regulation—it is the suspension of civic oxygen. Commerce stalls, economies fail, jobs are lost, and people make huge losses! Politically, scrutiny disappears, rumour replaces fact, and power operates unobserved. In an age where the Internet is the alpha and omega of public life, pulling the plug is not a neutral act; it is the disablement of a country's central nervous system.

Anaesthesia is meant to preserve life during surgery. But when a State shuts down the Internet and then conducts an election, it is not sedating the patient—it has already killed him and is now pretending to operate. You cannot anaesthetise democracy by suffocating it. A blanket Internet shutdown—indiscriminate, nationwide, and timed precisely to an election—is not a surgical in-

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Objection



strument. It is a sledgehammer. It punishes millions for the benefit of the few rulers, cripples businesses to silence critics, and suffocates speech in order to preserve a narrative. Some people will claim this shows that the government is powerful and can do what it wants, whyever, whenever, however, and wherever.

I don't agree. I will put it to y'all that states confident in their legitimacy will talk to citizens; only frightened regimes silence them. A government that claims it enjoys overwhelming popular support ('mass party' ring a bell?) need not fear Wi-Fi and Internet bundles. This Internet blackout was, therefore, not about order—it was about fear of what the people might say, show, and remember. And it had nothing to do with national security being at stake. Naah! No ruler afraid of foreign armies or enemies of whatever description, shuts down his own people's voices. This was not defence against enemies; it was the fear of citizens who no longer believe in their government.

I argue, therefore, that shutting down the Internet is not a display of strength; it is an

admission of fear, and a descent into panic.

It is the moment a brutal regime exposes its soft underbelly—terrified not of guns or crowds, but of light, memory, and the permanence of record. Internet blackouts are not signs of a regime flexing its muscle; they're evidence of a regime betraying nerves.

What's more painful, though, is the sheer disrespect for the people of Uganda that the NRM government has displayed in all this. Civilised power is anchored in respect. It understands that authority is not self-generated but derived and borrowed from the people, and that leadership is not entitlement but permission—granted temporarily, and always revocable.

Such power governs with humility, conscious that it exists to serve, not to dominate. And beyond disrespect, shutting down the Internet during an election is not merely a security measure; it is an act of contempt of the citizenry—a declaration that citizens do not deserve information, participation, or dignity. Put simply, in Kampala speak, *'tebatubazeemu magezi'*. You can't translate that without diluting it.

Was the shutdown a brilliant move? Nope. Interesting – and incriminating – photographs will turn up. Videos too. The stories will be told—if not today, then tomorrow, if not online, then in books, courtrooms, and history lectures. History has always been unkind to governments that confuse silence with stability. Only a regime terribly afraid of its people needs Darkness at Noon.

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