

Togo uses Internet cuts to restrict protests

After 50 years of repressive rule by the same family, the people of Togo rebelled. More than 100 000 protesters filled the streets of the small West African nation over the past week. The regime responded with a strong-arm tactic that has become increasingly popular among the world's autocracies: It shut down the Internet, making it almost impossible for its opponents to use social media to organise. **Citizens have no access to Facebook, WhatsApp or any other Internet services on their mobile phones** – the main way in which Africans gain access to the Internet. A report on the [News24](#) site notes that the Internet Without Borders group said the shutdown was 'an attack on Togolese citizens' freedom of expression online'. Information Minister Gilbert Bawara told several local radio stations last Wednesday evening that the government reserved the right to impose restrictions on access to the Internet. A report on the [Globe and Mail](#) site notes that African governments have shut down the Internet at least 18 times so far this year. In some cases, including Ethiopia and the anglophone regions of Cameroon, the Internet has been shut down for months, inflicting a huge cost on the economy. Worldwide, the number of shutdowns is increasing dramatically. There have been 62 shutdowns of the Internet this year – mostly in Asia and Africa – compared with 55 in all of last year and fewer than 20 in the previous year, according to a database compiled by Access Now, a digital-rights organisation.