

INTERNET

2024-2025

CENSORSHIP
CENSORSHIP

REPORT

NEW NAME FOR CENSORSHIP

NATIONAL SECURITY



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INTERNET CENSORSHIP REPORT

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“NATIONAL SECURITY”**

M[]SA

2025

MEDIA AND LAW STUDIES ASSOCIATION (MLSA)

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December 2025

ABOUT MLSA AND FREEWEBTURKEY

Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA) is a human rights organization dedicated to protecting freedom of expression, press freedom, the right to assembly and demonstration, and access to information in Turkey. It functions as a platform where journalism and legal expertise come together to safeguard fundamental rights and freedoms, especially for journalists, lawyers, and human rights defenders who face increasing challenges.

As MLSA, through our Free Web Turkey project, which we have been carrying out since 2020 in the field of internet freedoms, we aim to provide guidance to websites, media organizations, citizens, and, more broadly, all content producers who face censorship in digital spaces on how to cope with censorship.

Additionally, our objectives include providing legal consultancy, offering the necessary tools to protect them from censorship, and supplying certain internet services that will facilitate their work. Moreover, we organize panels and roundtable discussions aimed at raising awareness against censorship by bringing together groups working in the fields of digital freedoms and freedom of expression. We also publish articles on these topics and conduct workshops for content creators. On the other hand, as part of the project, we monitor internet censorship and share data on internet censorship and digital rights violations in Turkey with the public through our annual internet censorship reports.

In doing all of this, we aim to protect the rights to freedom of expression, press freedom, and access to information as enshrined in law, the Constitution, and international conventions, and to ensure the effective exercise of these rights. Turkey is going through a particularly challenging period due to the significant increase in human rights violations and the frequent use of practices that restrict freedom of expression and press freedom.

FOREWORD

In Turkey, digital censorship has turned into a practice that threatens not only individual rights and freedoms but also collective memory, journalistic activities, and democratic participation. In this report, prepared as part of the work carried out by the FreeWeb platform under the Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA), we aimed to document and analyze access blocking decisions imposed particularly on journalists and news content during the first seven months of 2025. The report also includes developments from 2024 that affected internet freedom.

The report aims to present not only the numerical scope of access restrictions but also their legal, political, and social contexts. By presenting this report to the public, we aim to inform the public and stakeholders about the harm internet censorship causes to the right to access information in Turkey. We hope this report will contribute to all individuals and institutions advocating for the right to access information and freedom of expression. We would like to thank our team members who contributed to the preparation of this report, as well as the lawyers and journalists who support rights advocacy based on data.

INTRODUCTION: TOWARDS A NEW NORMAL OF CENSORSHIP

In Turkey, digital censorship has become not merely a form of technical intervention, but a field of practice that shapes political processes, restricts public access to information, and systematically curtails freedom of expression. In particular, the year 2025 stood out as a time when access bans targeting digital platforms became normalized under the pretext of “national security,” following the Constitutional Court’s annulment of Article 9 of the Internet Law, which had allowed access to be blocked due to violations of personal rights. Censorship intensified across a wide spectrum—from social media platforms to news websites, from individual journalists to civil society organizations.

This report examines access ban decisions imposed especially on news content, news websites, and journalists during the first seven months of 2025, presenting the current extent of internet censorship in Turkey through quantitative and concrete data. Thousands of pieces of content have been blocked through legally questionable regulations, particularly Article 8/A of Law No. 5651, which has frequently been criticized. Following the events of March 19, particularly targeting Ekrem İmamoğlu and the opposition, a period of near-total “information blackout” unfolded on digital platforms.

During the process that began with the detention of Ekrem İmamoğlu and several CHP-affiliated mayors, bandwidth throttling was imposed on social media, and the accounts of many journalists and student initiatives were blocked. Additionally, numerous social media accounts and websites related to boycott calls made by opposition parties and groups were also blocked.

Access bans were not limited to content alone—journalists’ social media accounts were shut down, and some journalists were detained or arrested. At the same time, interventions against independent media outlets, civil society institutions, and independent journalism significantly restricted not only the press’s right and duty to report news but also the public’s right to be informed.

Prepared by FreeWeb through the examination of publicly available rulings—some of which have been shared by press institutions—this report aims to present the legal basis, thematic distribution, targeted media types, and socio-political impacts of access bans through case studies. This work seeks to make visible the systematic threats faced by digital rights in Turkey, both for public awareness and for the actors engaged in advocacy for freedom of expression.

ARCHITECTURE OF DIGITAL CENSORSHIP: AN OVERVIEW OF ACCESS BLOCKING DECISIONS

In Turkey, access bans targeting news content, opposition journalists, and websites continued throughout 2025. During the first seven months of the year, access blocking decisions—particularly those that accelerated following the detention and subsequent arrest of CHP’s presidential candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu on March 19—severely affected freedom of expression and the right to access information. Most of these

decisions were based on Article 8/A of the Internet Law, which regulates access bans in “cases where delay would be prejudicial.”

Thousands of news articles, social media posts, and accounts were blocked by decisions issued by courts and the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK). FreeWeb analyzed 105 access ban decisions issued by a total of 70 different courts, targeting news, civil society, and journalists, based on publicly available documents and rulings shared by outlets such as BirGün, Anka News Agency, T24, and Medya Koridoru. A total of 3,330 URLs related to 1,306 pieces of content were blocked.

As in previous years, access bans developed in parallel with political processes and were concentrated particularly on social media and independent media—especially targeting Kurdish media outlets and journalist accounts.

Grounds for Blocking: “National Security” and Others

According to data gathered by FreeWeb from publicly available sources and content shared by journalists, in the first seven months of 2025, access was blocked to 1,306 pieces of content targeting news outlets, journalists, and civil society through 105 different court rulings. These pieces of content spanned a broad range—from news websites to social media accounts and individual posts.

When examining the legal justifications behind these decisions, the most frequently cited basis was Article 8/A of Law No. 5651. A total of 496 pieces of content (38%) were blocked under the justification of “protecting national security and public order.” This article was predominantly used as the legal basis for removing news items concerning public authorities, social media content, or critical commentary.

The second most common justification included vague reasons such as “violation of personal rights, trademark rights, and cases where delay would be prejudicial,” which often lacked concrete explanations. Under these grounds, 443 pieces of content (33.9%) were blocked.

Additionally, 41 pieces of content (3.1%) were blocked without any stated justification in the court rulings. This raises serious concerns regarding the transparency and accountability of judicial decisions. The right to privacy was cited as the reason for blocking in 29 cases (2.2%). Notably, a significant portion of these were based on Article 9 of the law, which had been annulled by the Constitutional Court in 2023.

There were also instances of access bans issued by regulatory bodies such as BTK (Information and Communication Technologies Authority) and SPK (Capital Markets Board). For example, one piece of content related to a “BTK Authorization Department decision” resulted in access restrictions concerning foreign mobile operators. A few other rulings also cited reasons such as “unlicensed broadcasting” or “license obligations” by RTÜK. Platformlara yönelik kısıtlamalar ve bant daraltma uygulamaları

During the years covered by the report—2024 and 2025—access bans and bandwidth throttling targeting internet platforms were widely implemented, particularly during events of public concern. In August 2024, Instagram was blocked, followed by bandwidth throttling measures imposed on social media platforms after the attack on TUSAŞ. These were later followed by further throttling measures after the detention of Ekrem İmamoğlu on March 19. Many platforms were blocked indefinitely, and among those that sparked the most public reaction was the gaming platform Roblox, which was also subjected to an access ban.

ACCESS TO INSTAGRAM BLOCKED, BAN LIFTED FOLLOWING AGREEMENT

On the morning of August 2, 2024, it became apparent that access to Instagram had been blocked, as the platform had been inaccessible since early hours. The access ban, imposed by the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK) due to “catalogue crimes,” was not accompanied by any official statement.

It was alleged that the reason behind the access restriction was Instagram’s censorship of condolence messages posted by several ministers and high-ranking public officials for Hamas Political Bureau Chief Ismail Haniyeh, who was killed by Israel on July 31, 2024.

Minister of Transport and Infrastructure Abdulkadir Uraloğlu commented on the matter, stating: “Our sensitivities are clearly defined. The shortcomings there are evident. As soon as they address those shortcomings—say, in an hour—we will lift the ban.” He indicated that there were several demands made to Instagram. Following negotiations between the government and META, Instagram’s parent company, Uraloğlu announced that “necessary progress has been made regarding the catalogue crimes,” and that the access ban on Instagram would be lifted at 9:30 p.m. on August 10, 2024. Thus, the eight-day ban on Instagram came to an end.

MLSA LEGAL UNIT TOOK INSTAGRAM ACCESS BAN TO COURT

On August 3, the MLSA Legal Unit filed a legal challenge against BTK’s access ban decision. Stating that the ban violated the freedoms of expression, press, access to information, and communication, MLSA requested the suspension and annulment of BTK’s action.

In its petition, MLSA emphasized that the access ban on Instagram violated not only freedom of the press and expression but also the freedoms of communication and access to information, arguing that the fundamental rights of 57 million people were disproportionately infringed upon without any justification.

The lawsuit filed by MLSA was concluded on September 6, 2024, by the 7th Administrative Court of Ankara. The court ruled that there was no need for a decision since the access ban had been lifted by BTK on August 10, 2024. However, the court ordered the Information and Communication Technologies Authority to pay attorney’s fees to MLSA on the grounds that its actions had necessitated legal proceedings.

ONLINE GAMING PLATFORM ROBLOX ALSO BLOCKED, MLSA TOOK THE BAN TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT

The online gaming platform Roblox, where users can develop and play games created by others, was blocked on August 7, 2024, by a ruling of the Adana 6th Criminal Judgeship of Peace upon the request of the Adana Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office. The decision was based on Article 8/A of the Internet Law, which allows access blocking in “cases where delay would be prejudicial,” on the grounds that the platform allegedly hosted content that could lead to child exploitation.

Roblox, which allows users to create their own games and play those made by others, has nine million players in Turkey. The country ranks as the fifth largest in the world in terms of active users of the game.

The decision was appealed by the MLSA Legal Unit on behalf of Barış Altıntaş on August 12, 2024. In the appeal, it was emphasized that Roblox is not merely a game but a platform where children can design their own games, enhance their creativity, socialize, and develop software skills.

The rejection of MLSA's appeal was officially notified in August 2025, one year later. In response, the MLSA Legal Unit filed an individual application with the Constitutional Court, arguing that the access ban violated the right to respect for private and family life, as well as the freedoms of expression and access to information.

BANDWIDTH THROTTLING PRACTICES

In Turkey, bandwidth throttling practices target mass communication tools and directly restrict not only the press but also citizens' right to access information. These practices are based on a regulation added to the Electronic Communications Law No. 5809 through Decree Law No. 671, enacted during the state of emergency following July 15. This regulation grants the Presidency the authority to restrict internet traffic via the BTK on the grounds of "national security and public order." However, the implementation lacks transparency entirely; since it is not publicly announced, citizens effectively have no opportunity to seek legal remedy.

The most striking example of bandwidth throttling occurred in 2023, when the BTK restricted access to X by throttling its bandwidth for 10 hours on February 8, just two days after the earthquake.

During that period, the social media platform was heavily used for search and rescue efforts, aid requests, and communication. Many earthquake victims—especially those trapped under the rubble—were trying to reach out to their loved ones and alert rescuers to their locations through the platform. However, with the throttling implemented, those voices were silenced.

Minister of Transport and Infrastructure Adil Karaosmanoğlu responded to the question of "why was bandwidth throttling implemented" by saying: "There must have been a necessary situation, that's why it was done. It was something that had to be done. If it were the wrong decision, it wouldn't have been taken in the first place. There was a technical explanation. It was an extraordinary disaster situation. Apparently, something like this had to be done in that context."

MLSA Took BTK's Bandwidth Throttling and Operators' Network Failure During the Earthquake to the Constitutional Court

After a decision of non-prosecution was issued regarding the GSM operators who failed to provide network service in the earthquake zone on February 6, 2023, and the BTK which throttled social media platforms, MLSA brought the matter before the Constitutional Court. The association's objection to the non-prosecution decision was rejected. In its application to the Court, MLSA stated that citizens' rights guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the Constitution were violated.

Following the February 6, 2023 earthquakes centered in Kahramanmaraş and Gaziantep, which resulted in the deaths of 50,000 people, GSM operators' services became inoperable in the affected region. Families unable to reach their loved ones and citizens trying to direct aid to the region had turned to social media. Many people trapped under the rubble had also used social media to request help. However, this became impossible due to the bandwidth throttling imposed by the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK) on platforms such as Twitter and TikTok.

In its application to the Constitutional Court, MLSA emphasized that the rights to life, a fair trial, respect for private and family life, and freedom of expression—guaranteed under the ECHR—had been violated. In addition, MLSA noted that the rights enshrined in the Constitution—right to life, privacy, freedom of communication, freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and the right to legal remedy—had also been violated. The application requested that 150,000 TL in compensation be awarded in consideration of the material and moral damages caused by these violations.

In response to the events, lawyer Veysele Ok filed a criminal complaint four days after the earthquake against the GSM operators who had not improved their services, on the grounds of “obstruction of communication,” “reckless homicide,” and “reckless injury.”

In the same petition, Ok also filed a criminal complaint against BTK officials for “obstruction of communication,” “reckless homicide,” “reckless injury,” and “misuse of public office,” stating that the bandwidth throttling had no legal or moral basis. With amendments made to the Internet Law in 2022, the President of BTK was granted authority to impose bandwidth restrictions

BANDWIDTH THROTTLING FOLLOWING THE TUSAŞ ATTACK

The developments following the attack on Turkish Aerospace Industries Inc. (TUSAŞ) in Ankara on October 23, 2024, serve as another example of bandwidth throttling and the implementation of broadcast bans. First, RTÜK imposed a broadcast ban on television channels through a court order. Immediately afterward, access to all major social media platforms—such as X [Twitter], Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Telegram—was blocked. No official statement was made by the authorities; however, NetBlocks, which monitors global internet access, reported that the measure was technically a case of bandwidth throttling.

BANDWIDTH THROTTLING FOLLOWING THE ARREST OF EKREM İMAMOĞLU

In 2025, access bans were not limited to individual content but extended to large-scale bandwidth throttling that affected the entire public. One of the most striking examples occurred on March 19, 2025, following the detention of Ekrem İmamoğlu in Istanbul. In the hours that followed, access to numerous platforms—including X, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Twitch, Telegram, Signal, and WhatsApp—was severely throttled for 42 hours. This disruption ended only on the morning of March 21.

THE COURSE OF CENSORSHIP IN THE FIRST SEVEN MONTHS OF 2025

THE MARCH 19 TURNING POINT: THE İMAMOĞLU OPERATION AND DIGITAL BLACKOUT

On March 19, 2025, with the launch of an investigation into Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, digital censorship policies became significantly harsher. During early morning house raids, numerous journalists were detained.

More than 700 accounts on the platform Twitter/X were blocked.

X announced that it had restricted access to over 700 accounts at the request of Turkish authorities. In a statement released in the evening, the platform said: “We are appealing numerous court orders from the Turkish Information and Communication Technologies Authority to block more than 700 accounts belonging to news organizations, journalists, political figures, students, and others in Turkey.”

Following İmamoğlu’s detention, access blocks began to be imposed on X accounts that shared information or posted criticism about the events, citing Article 8/A of Law No. 5651, under the justification of protecting national security and public order. Among the blocked accounts were those of women’s and youth organizations, media outlets, journalists, and advocacy groups, many of whom protested the decision by creating new user profiles.

Decisions made from this date onward targeted at least 234 separate pieces of content. The rulings issued in March primarily targeted social media platforms and were accompanied by direct access restrictions, including bandwidth throttling.

During this period, accounts belonging to youth organizations, women’s organizations, and journalists were also blocked. Among the 400 X accounts included in the access blocking decisions held by FreeWeb:

At least 53 accounts belonged to youth organizations,

At least 30 accounts belonged to journalists,

At least 8 accounts belonged to women’s organizations and NGOs.

A large portion of these accounts belonged to independent journalists, activists, lawyers, social media broadcasters, artists, and opposition figures. These accounts, which held significant political representation, were systematically blocked.

Digital censorship was also accompanied by arrests and judicial proceedings. During home raids carried out in Istanbul, several members of the press were detained, including NOW reporter Ali Onur Tosun, AFP journalist Yasin Akgül, photojournalist Bülent Kılıç, journalists Zeynep Kuray and Hayri Tunç, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality photojournalist Kurtuluş Arı, Sendika.org reporter Zişan Gür, and BirGün columnist Barış İnce. Among them, Zeynep Kuray, Ali Onur Tosun, Bülent Kılıç, Yasin Akgül, Kurtuluş Arı, Hayri Tunç, and Gökhan Kam were formally arrested and held in prison for two days.

TEMALARA GÖRE EN ÇOK ENGELLENEN HABER KONULARI

The content blocked in the first seven months of 2025 is not merely a matter of numbers. These include a wide range—from news sites informing the public and journalists’ personal posts, to social media accounts expressing opposition views and comments critical of the system. Censorship particularly targeted content

that criticized the government and held public power to account. Below, we present the five most frequently censored topics by theme, along with examples.

NEWS ABOUT AKP DEPUTIES AND MEMBERS

At the top of the list of blocked content were news reports concerning members of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). A total of 446 pieces of content—primarily involving allegations of corruption and debates over personal assets related to AKP deputies and members—were blocked from access.

For example, a video showing “election aid” distributed by an AKP deputy during the election period was removed on the grounds that it “disrupted public order.” In another case, news reports about public tenders awarded to companies owned by the family members of a minister were collectively blocked.

Although Article 9 of the Internet Law—which provided for access bans on the grounds of protecting “personal rights”—was annulled by the Constitutional Court and, as of the report date, is no longer in effect, it was observed that Judgeships continued to impose access bans based on Article 8/A of the same law, citing threats to national security and public order.

THE MARCH 19 PROCESS AND THE BOYCOTT

March 19, 2025, marked a turning point in the direction of digital censorship. The wave of censorship that began following the launch of an investigation into Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu targeted not only individual users but also the public’s right to access information..

Among the 218 pieces of content blocked during this period were İmamoğlu’s statements, footage of the protests held in Sarayhane, and messages of support from artists and academics who reacted to the process. For example, X (Twitter) accounts that shared numerous posts under the hashtag “Sarayhane Resistance” were completely suspended. Videos related to the “Rally in Support of İmamoğlu” were removed from YouTube.

In the first half of 2025, the same boycott website was shut down at least three times, while hundreds of X accounts and numerous youth organization accounts linked to the protests were blocked. Additionally, during the mass access restrictions connected to the Sarayhane demonstrations, a 42-hour nationwide bandwidth throttling was implemented across Turkey..

BOYCOTT WEBSITES AND CONSUMER PROTESTS

Following the arrest of Ekrem İmamoğlu, opposition parties and various dissident groups issued economic boycott calls targeting, in particular, companies affiliated with major capital groups, among others. Numerous social media accounts and websites that either listed these companies or monitored them were subjected to access bans..

- March 27, 2025 – The boycott list website created by the CHP was blocked by order of the Ankara 4th Criminal Judgeship of Peace under decision no. 2025/4129.
- April 2, 2025 – The same boycott website was blocked again, this time by the Istanbul 2nd Criminal

Judgeship of Peace under decision no. 2025/4204. Another website was also shut down under the same ruling.

- April 3, 2025 – In addition to the CHP's boycott site, the X (Twitter) accounts of well-known actors Berna Laçın, Rojda Demirel, and Alican Yücesoy were blocked on grounds of national security and public order.
- May 12, 2025 – The CHP's boycott website was blocked for a third time by order of the Küçükçekmece 3rd Criminal Judgeship of Peace under decision no. 2025/3481.

PROTEST BANS FOLLOWING MARCH 19, 2025

Following the detention of Ekrem İmamoğlu on March 19, nationwide protests erupted across Turkey, and related social media posts were subsequently blocked. Calls for rallies at Sarayhanı Square—where the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İBB) building is located—made upon the call of Özgür Özel, as well as protest announcements largely organized by university students, were also subjected to access restrictions..

- March 21, 2025 – During the protests that began after İmamoğlu's detention in Istanbul, access to X, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Twitch, Telegram, Signal, and WhatsApp was throttled or restricted for 42 hours.
- March 21, 2025 – In the same period, more than 20 X accounts belonging to youth organizations that shared information about student protests were blocked.
- March 22, 2025 – In the “third wave” of censorship, at least 85 accounts—ranging from small accounts with six followers to large ones with over 100,000—were blocked. Of these, 54 were accounts sharing information about street protests, and 31 belonged to youth organizations.
- March 22, 2025 – Additionally, more than 50 X accounts were blocked, including those of several prominent activists.
- March 23, 2025 – X announced that it had received court orders from Turkey requesting access blocks for over 700 accounts, including those of news organizations, journalists, politicians, and students.
- March 23, 2025 – On the same day, the X accounts of Alinteri Gazetesi and Sol Feminist Hareket were blocked and made inaccessible from within Turkey..

NEWS ABOUT GOVERNMENT-APPOINTED TRUSTEES

Another dominant theme of 2025 was the appointment of government trustees (kayyum). The removal of elected mayors and their replacement with trustees—particularly in provinces like Van, Mardin, and Hakkâri—sparked widespread public reaction. However, these responses did not remain visible in the digital sphere for long..

A total of 174 pieces of content were censored under this theme. For example, the statement “those who are elected should leave through elections” made by the Van Provincial Branch of the DEM Party was removed

from multiple platforms. Mezopotamya Agency's live broadcasts of trustee-related protests were blocked on the grounds of "national security." Several accounts used in social media campaigns concerning trustee appointments were also blocked within Turkey on the grounds that they were "provoking the public."

News About the Trustee Appointed to Van Municipality Blocked on Grounds of "National Security"

The Van 3rd Criminal Judgeship of Peace issued an access ban for 90 social media accounts following a request from the Cyber Crimes Investigation Bureau of the Van Chief Public Prosecutor's Office. The decision, dated February 18, 2025, was implemented on the grounds that posts related to the appointment of a trustee to Van Municipality "posed a threat to public security."

Among the blocked accounts were the X (Twitter) accounts of journalists Oktay Candemir and Ruşen Takva, as well as news outlets such as JinNews and Serhat News. Numerous Instagram and TikTok accounts that shared content about the trustee appointment process were also affected..

Notable blocked accounts include::

X (Twitter): @oktaycandemir, @RusenTakva, @serhat_news, @JinNews_turkce, @DemNews1, @ozgurvanhaber1

Instagram: @24saatvan, @brez.kurd, @vanbilsin, @vanduysun, @vaninkalbiburada

TikTok: @haberimvancomtr, @gundemvan, @govend.u.halay, @serkanda14, @ez.gerillame

In total, the court ordered access bans for 50 X accounts, 12 Instagram accounts, and 38 TikTok accounts..

Prosecutor's Request and Justification

In its application, the Van Chief Public Prosecutor's Office cited findings from the Cyber Crimes Department of the General Directorate of Security's online patrol operations. It was claimed that some social media accounts were sharing content aimed at "creating public panic, discrediting the state, and encouraging street protests." The Prosecutor's Office requested that these accounts be blocked..

The request was evaluated under Article 8/A of Law No. 5651 on the Regulation of Publications on the Internet and Combating Crimes Committed Through Such Publications. The judgeship ruled for access bans on the grounds of protecting national security and public order..

INDEPENDENT MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

Independent journalism became one of the most heavily targeted areas during this period. News portals producing content critical of the government, individual journalists with personal platforms, and social media influencers faced intense waves of access bans..

For example, the X (Twitter) account of independent journalist Berivan Kaya was permanently suspended on the grounds that she had published "critical analyses" regarding the post-election process. Similarly, the YouTube channel "Yurttaşın Sesi" had its video series on corruption files in municipalities taken down. In total, 152 pieces of content in this category were censored, reflecting a systematic effort to silence dissenting voices.

NEWS ABOUT MEMBERS OF THE JUDICIARY

News reports involving judges and prosecutors were also subject to access bans, often under the pretexts of “protection of personal rights” or “state security.”

Among the examples were articles discussing the illegality of continuing to apply Article 9 of the Internet Law despite Constitutional Court rulings, controversial social media posts by senior members of the judiciary, and criticisms concerning the lack of judicial independence. A total of 83 such pieces of content were either removed from platforms or blocked without any prior notice.

III. TARGETED PLATFORMS

WHICH TYPES OF MEDIA WERE TARGETED?

In the first seven months of 2025, social media platforms were by far the primary target of access blocking decisions. Content from these platforms accounted for approximately 46% of all blocks. Posts on X (formerly Twitter)—including news shares, protest calls, and political commentary—were largely silenced. Following X, other social networks such as Facebook and Instagram were also subjected to restrictions for various reasons..

Access bans on social media accounts affected not only individual users but also institutional accounts operated by news portals, journalists, and political organizations. For instance, both the main and backup accounts of media outlets like Mezopotamya Agency and Yeni Yaşam Newspaper on X were blocked. This demonstrated a systematic strategy to cut off digital access to news sources..

The second most targeted group was independent media outlets, whose blocked content accounted for approximately 28% of total cases. Content from platforms such as Bianet, Mezopotamya Agency, Sendika.org, and Gazete Duvar was frequently blocked—often on broadly interpreted grounds such as “national security,” “public order,” or “protection of personal rights.” Reports on trustee appointments, criticism of municipal administrations, and coverage of police practices made independent media a central target..

Video platforms, particularly YouTube and TikTok, ranked third. About 15% of blocked content fell into this category. Numerous channels featuring documentaries, street interviews, political analysis videos, and protest footage were either entirely removed or had specific videos restricted. The wide reach of content on these platforms made them a strategic target for censorship enforcers.

And Access to İmamoğlu’s X Account Was Blocked

On May 8, access to Ekrem İmamoğlu’s X account was blocked after he was arrested and removed from his position as Mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality..

In a statement regarding the issue, X (formerly Twitter) said: “While we are complying with the legal order issued by Turkey regarding the account, we strongly disagree with this decision and are appealing it.”.

The Disinformation Combat Center, affiliated with the Presidency's Directorate of Communications, stated that the reason for the access block was a post shared from the account on April 24..

According to the Center, the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into the post, assessing that it could constitute the offense of openly inciting to commit a crime..

SILENCING MECHANISMS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Unlike previous years, 2025 saw a shift toward blocking entire social media accounts rather than individual posts. This method was used more frequently, especially against independent news sources, Kurdish media, and journalists.

In 2025, there was a marked increase in access bans targeting social media accounts belonging to independent news sources, Kurdish media, and journalists. According to the rulings analyzed by FreeWeb, a total of 400 X (formerly Twitter) accounts were blocked.

This wave of censorship was particularly concentrated on news content in the period leading up to March 19, when Ekrem İmamoğlu was detained. In March, 74% of all blocked content consisted of news reports—up from 67% in the preceding months. During the Sarayane protests, account bans particularly targeted youth organizations and civil society groups.

MASS CENSORSHIP OF NEWS WEBSITES

One of the most striking aspects of access blocking decisions in 2025 was the mass censorship imposed on news websites. With a single ruling by Criminal Judgeships of Peace, dozens—and at times hundreds—of URLs were blocked. This practice indicated that not only specific reports, but the overall visibility of independent media was being systematically targeted.

According to FreeWeb's analysis, mass access blocking was identified in 105 out of 70 court decisions reviewed. As a result of these rulings, 3,330 URLs linked to 1,306 individual pieces of content were blocked. News sources considered oppositional or independent—such as BirGün, Evrensel, T24, Bianet, and Mezopotamya Agency—were systematically targeted. The most frequently blocked content included reports on trustee appointments, corruption investigations, police violence, and criticisms of government officials.

From the early months of the year: The Yeni Yaşam Newspaper's website was blocked three times, and its Instagram account was shut down on the grounds of “violating community guidelines related to dangerous individuals and organizations.” The domain of Siyasi Haber was rendered inaccessible by a ruling from the Ankara 10th Criminal Judgeship of Peace. Mezopotamya Agency was forced to switch to new domains multiple times, and its Instagram account was also blocked at the request of BTK. Jinnews' Instagram account was taken down twice in the same day. The X accounts of Artı Gerçek and Özgür TV were blocked under Article 8/A of Law No. 5651.

In addition, many news websites were directly targeted at the domain level. ETHA (Etkin News Agency), Gazete Patika, Mücadele Birliği, Kızıl Bayrak, Özgür Gelecek, Umut Gazetesi, and Yeni Demokrasi Gazetesi were all collectively blocked by a single ruling of the Ankara 10th Criminal Judgeship of Peace on January 8, 2025. Sur Ajans and Xwebûn Newspaper were blocked by decisions issued by the Adıyaman Criminal Judgeship of

Peace. Later in the year, the Kurdish Service of Voice of America (VoA) was also blocked on the grounds of “national security and public order.”.

These mass blocking decisions also pose serious legal concerns. Court rulings often did not specify which URL was blocked for what reason; instead, entire bundles of content were blocked without individual assessment. This practice not only violates the principle of proportionality but also stands in direct contradiction to the Constitutional Court’s rulings on freedom of expression. A potential rights violation in a single article was used as justification to block hundreds of URLs, including unrelated content.

The practical outcome of this approach was the complete erasure of independent media outlets from public visibility. For instance, when a news site reported on the appointment of a trustee, not only that specific article but also other unrelated content—such as reports on the municipal budget or social assistance—was blocked simultaneously. In this way, censorship was no longer limited to targeting individual articles but was transformed into a tool of pressure against entire editorial policies.

In April 2025, the Istanbul 5th Criminal Judgeship of Peace blocked 120 news links belonging to BirGün newspaper with a single decision. Most of the censored content involved allegations of irregularities in public tenders, cronyism in municipal appointments, and news about AKP politicians. The ruling did not include any details on which content was blocked for what reason..

SYSTEMATIC ACCESS BLOCKS AGAINST MEZOPOTAMYA AGENCY

In the first half of 2025, Mezopotamya Agency (MA) faced at least 15 separate mass access block decisions. The blocked content included coverage of trustee protests in Van, Mardin, and Hakkâri, harsh police interventions, and election violations in the region. The blocking of both the agency’s homepage and entire subcategories led to a significant portion of MA’s news archive becoming inaccessible..

BIANET AND TRUSTEE-RELATED REPORTS

The news portal Bianet.org, known for its reporting on women’s rights, LGBTI+ issues, and human rights, became a specific target after March 2025, particularly due to its coverage of trustee appointments. A court decision blocked not only a single article on a trustee but also other unrelated features and interviews published on the same day. This reveals how entirely independent content can be subjected to censorship as a “collateral” consequence of blocking a single report..

ACCESS BLOCK ON EVRENSEL DUE TO PROTEST COVERAGE

More than 90 news articles from Evrensel newspaper were collectively blocked on the grounds of “disturbing public order.” Most of the censored content consisted of reports on labor actions and street protests. The court ruling did not specify how each article allegedly disrupted public order, nor did it provide individual justifications.

ACCESS BANS ON T24’S CORRUPTION FILES

News reports by T24 covering public tenders awarded to companies owned by the family of an AKP minister were suppressed through mass access blocking. The censorship was not limited to tender-related content—other economic and political articles published under the same investigative file were also included in the ban.

In addition to mass URL bans, blocking entire domains became a frequent method in 2025. This practice effectively functioned as a de facto shutdown of entire news websites by eliminating access to all of their content, not just specific articles.

One of the most heavily targeted outlets was the Mezopotamya Agency (MA). Its homepage and subcategories were repeatedly blocked, forcing the agency to continuously register new domain names just to keep publishing. This represents one of the clearest examples of the systematic erasure of Kurdish media from public visibility.

Just like Mezopotamya Agency, Yeni Yaşam newspaper was also blocked entirely at the domain level on multiple occasions. Such rulings eliminate not only specific articles but also the entire archive, opinion columns, and all forms of independent journalism produced by the outlet.

CENSORSHIP TARGETING LGBTI+ CONTENT

In the first half of 2025, LGBTI+ content was subjected to targeted bans and shutdowns.

LGBTI+ organizations and news coverage in this field became one of the most visible targets of censorship in 2025. At the beginning of the year, Yeni Yaşam newspaper's Instagram account was shut down for allegedly violating "community guidelines related to dangerous individuals and organizations." Soon after, Jinnews's Instagram account was taken down twice in a single day, due to its coverage of a wide range of topics—from the anniversary of Gülistan Doku's disappearance to women's and LGBTI+ issues, including updates about İmralı meetings.

DURING PRIDE MONTH: ACCESS TO KAOS GL BLOCKED — MLSA TOOK THE CASE TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT

At the end of June, Kaos GL Association's official X account, which had 47,000 followers, was blocked. Shortly after, the domain KaosGL.org—which has been reporting on LGBTI+ issues since 2007—was also blocked by a ruling from the Istanbul 12th Criminal Judgeship of Peace. This decision rendered not only a civil society website invisible, but also one of Turkey's most extensive news and archive sources on LGBTI+ rights.

Access to Kaos GL's website was blocked entirely under Article 8/A of Law No. 5651, citing "national security and public order." This move is widely regarded as a clear example of censorship aimed at reducing the visibility of the LGBTI+ movement and restricting public access to information in this field. As a result of the decision, hundreds of articles, reports, and research pieces in Kaos GL's archive became inaccessible from within Turkey.

After its objections were rejected, the Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA) Legal Unit submitted a constitutional application regarding the access bans imposed on Kaos GL Association. In its application, MLSA emphasized the significance of Kaos GL for the LGBTI+ movement, stating that the access ban effectively eliminated the right to receive information, particularly for LGBTI+ individuals in Turkey, but also for many others.

AI System Grok Became a Target of Censorship

In 2025, censorship extended beyond journalists, social media accounts, and independent media platforms. AI-powered applications also became direct targets of censorship. Most notably, Grok, the artificial intelligence assistant developed by X, was for the first time publicly investigated in connection with political content.

In March, users reported that when they asked Grok about the detention and investigation process involving Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, the system refused to answer. X users documented that Grok had been filtered under the justification of “national security and public order”, and that questions about İmamoğlu were censored.

Following this, and upon a request from the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK), around 50 Grok outputs were blocked in Turkey—some were completely deleted, while others were rendered invisible from within the country.

SILENCING JOURNALISTS: ARRESTS AND ACCESS BLOCKS

In 2025, digital censorship escalated beyond merely blocking online content—it intensified through direct targeting of journalists. While social media accounts were systematically restricted, numerous journalists were also detained, arrested, or subjected to legal investigations..

Following the March 19 operation against Ekrem İmamoğlu, this wave of repression intensified. The personal accounts of journalists from Mezopotamya Agency, Sendika.org, and MLSA were collectively blocked. According to FreeWeb data, in March alone, more than 400 journalist, activist, and news platform accounts were subjected to access bans. Most of these accounts tried to continue reporting by opening new profiles, but repeated shutdowns led to what has been described as “digital exile.”.

In the first eight months of 2025, digital censorship, access bans, and account suspensions targeting journalists reached a new level. On platforms like X, YouTube, and Instagram, many journalists’ accounts were shut down—either by court orders or by platforms citing “community guidelines.” Abdurrahman Gök’s accounts on X, YouTube, and Instagram were blocked by order of the Ankara 6th Criminal Judgeship of Peace on grounds of national security. Erk Acarer’s X account was also blocked under Article 8/A. Fatih Altaylı’s YouTube channel, as well as channels run by journalists such as Cumhuriyet TV and Flu TV, faced licensing threats from RTÜK. Personal X accounts belonging to journalists such as Altan Sancar, Ali Macit, Umut Taştan, and Elif Çetiner were also blocked. Kurdish journalists were systematically targeted as well. The accounts of Amed Dicle, Beritan Canözer, Ruken Tuncel, Meltem Oktay, Özgür Paksoy, and many others were blocked by court rulings.

Access blocks were not limited to individual journalists; institutional media outlets were also targeted. The X and Instagram accounts of Mezopotamya Agency, Yeni Yaşam Newspaper, and Jinnews were blocked in Turkey. The X accounts of Artı Gerçek and Özgür TV were also shut down under Article 8/A. In addition, the X accounts of journalists such as Yavuz Baydar, Hayko Bağdat, Metin Cihan, Öznur Değer, İsmail Arı, and Ruşen Takva were blocked at different times. Journalist Furkan Karabay, who was arrested, had his X account blocked shortly after his detention.

Journalist Furkan Karabay Arrested, His Account Blocked the Next Day

Journalist Furkan Karabay was arrested on May 16, 2025, due to his reporting on the investigation regarding the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. Immediately after his arrest, the X account he used was blocked. The new account Karabay opened shortly after was also shut down on May 26 with the same justification, citing “protection of national security and public order.”

It should not be forgotten that the pressure on journalists was carried out simultaneously both physically and digitally. Karabay was both imprisoned and thereby distanced from news production, and his presence on digital platforms was also blocked.

AFP reporter Yasin Akgül, photojournalist Bülent Kılıç, journalists Zeynep Kuray, Hayri Tunç, Kurtuluş Arı, Ali Onur Tosun, and BirGün columnist Barış İnce, who were covering the protests after March 19, were taken into custody; seven of them were arrested and held in prison for one day..

News shared on social media was often used directly as evidence in prosecutions. Journalists' publication of reports in the public interest was deemed a criminal offense under the pretext of “national security” or “public order.” This practice amounts to the criminalization of journalism.

Broadcast License Requirement from RTÜK for Channels of Arrested Journalist Fatih Altaylı and Arrested Director İlker Canikligil

Director İlker Canikligil was taken into custody on the evening of Tuesday, March 25, 2025, due to remarks he made during a broadcast on his YouTube channel FluTV, and on March 27, 2025, he was arrested on charges of “openly inciting hatred and hostility among the public” and sent to Silivri Prison. On the day Canikligil was arrested, the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), with its decision dated 27.03.2025, imposed a broadcasting license requirement on the FluTV YouTube channel owned by İlker Canikligil.

A broadcasting license requirement was also imposed on the @fatihaltayli YouTube channel, founded by journalist Fatih Altaylı, by RTÜK's decision dated 27.03.2025. However, the decision, which must be published on RTÜK's website for it to be enforceable, was not made public for three months.

Altaylı was taken into custody on charges of “threatening the President” following remarks he made during a broadcast on his YouTube channel dated June 20, 2025, and on June 22, 2025, he was arrested and sent to Silivri Prison. Following this, the broadcasting license decision, which had not been published for three months, was made public by RTÜK, and a 72-hour deadline was set for Fatih Altaylı's channel to apply for a broadcasting license..

RTÜK'S GRIP ON DIGITAL MEDIA

- In 2025, RTÜK increased its oversight not only over television and radio broadcasting but also over digital platforms and independent content creators. The decisions made by RTÜK, especially on the grounds of unlicensed broadcasting, presented an alarming picture regarding the future of digital broadcasting.
- Live streaming and chat platforms like Bigo Live were not only blocked from access but also prevented from being downloaded via the App Store and Google Play.

- Internet radio platforms like KeepOne were blocked on the grounds of not having a RTÜK license.
- The YouTube channel of journalist Fatih Altaylı, who was arrested on charges of “threatening the President,” faced a RTÜK warning stating that if a license application was not submitted within 72 hours, access would be blocked. RTÜK similarly imposed licensing obligations on other digital channels.
- The continued ban on international radio applications like Tuneln based on old rulings shows that RTÜK has been maintaining long-term control over digital audio broadcasting in Turkey..

Although RTÜK’s decisions are made on the grounds of “providing content without a broadcasting license,” in practice, these regulations narrow the breathing space of independent content producers. Journalists who share news and commentary via YouTube, podcast creators, and digital media initiatives are now subjected to the same licensing requirements as television channels, which threatens their economic and legal sustainability..

As a result, RTÜK’s pressure on digital media clearly reveals an intention to bring the “audiovisual” space of the internet under state control in Turkey. This approach carries serious risks for freedom of expression, pluralism, and independent journalism.

THE LEGAL BASIS OF RTÜK’S PRESSURE: LICENSING OBLIGATION AND DEVELOPMENTS REGARDING THE RTÜK REGULATION

With an amendment made in 2018 through Law No. 7103, radio, television, and on-demand broadcasts over the internet were, for the first time, brought under the supervision of the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK). Under the newly added Article 29/A of Law No. 6112, internet broadcasters were required to obtain a license from RTÜK. In this scope, the regulation titled “Provision of Radio, Television, and On-Demand Broadcasts via Internet”, prepared by RTÜK and the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK), was published in the Official Gazette on August 1, 2019, and entered into force. The regulation introduced a comprehensive regulatory framework for internet broadcasting by imposing heavy administrative and financial conditions, such as high licensing fees, mandatory corporate structuring, and content archiving obligations..

There is no regulation specifying which broadcasters RTÜK will impose a licensing requirement on or what criteria it uses to make such determinations..

Broadcasters who are required to obtain a license from RTÜK must apply for a license within 72 hours; otherwise, access may be blocked by order of the Criminal Judgeship of Peace, upon RTÜK’s request. Once an online content producer obtains a broadcasting license, they fall under RTÜK’s regulatory authority. RTÜK does not differentiate between traditional TV and radio broadcasters and internet-based broadcasters when applying broadcasting principles..

MLSA's Lawsuit Against the RTÜK Regulation at the Council of State

In 2019, the MLSA Legal Unit filed a lawsuit at the Council of State requesting the annulment of the regulation that brought internet broadcasts under RTÜK's supervision and imposed heavy financial and administrative obligations, arguing that it harmed freedom of expression and freedom of the press. The case was only concluded six years later. The Council of State rejected the lawsuit, stating that the regulation was "predictable."

The MLSA Legal Unit appealed the Council of State's decision to the Board of Administrative Trial Chambers, emphasizing in its petition that the regulation contained unpredictable provisions, opened the door to arbitrary implementation, and imposed significant burdens on small-scale internet broadcasters. The appeal underlined that requirements such as mandatory incorporation as a joint-stock company, high license fees, and long-term content retention obligations specifically targeted independent journalists and alternative media outlets..

The association also pointed out that the lack of clear criteria for determining which broadcasters would be subject to licensing obligations violated the principle of equality. According to MLSA, the fact that Cumhuriyet newspaper's YouTube channel was the first broadcaster to be subjected to licensing obligations is one example of this arbitrariness..

According to data obtained from RTÜK through a freedom of information request, since 2020 alone, RTÜK has requested access bans for 196 internet addresses on the grounds that they did not have a broadcasting license. Among these were international media outlets such as Euronews, Deutsche Welle, and Voice of America..

MLSA demanded the reversal of the Council of State's dismissal decision, stating that the regulation had a restrictive impact on freedom of expression and press freedom. The appeal process is significant as a precedent for the judicial review of internet broadcasting regulations..

SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTUBE ALSO CAME UNDER RTÜK OVERSIGHT

RTÜK President Ebubekir Şahin, in a public statement, announced that they were working on placing "Street Interviews" broadcast on the video-sharing platform YouTube under RTÜK supervision, and that YouTube would also be subject to RTÜK regulation.

Following this, the expectation that many YouTube broadcasters would be required to obtain licenses finally materialized on January 6, 2025, when Cumhuriyet TV, the YouTube channel of Cumhuriyet newspaper, was required to apply for a broadcasting license.

In the lawsuit filed by the lawyers of Cumhuriyet newspaper against this decision, the request for a stay of execution was rejected, and Cumhuriyet subsequently submitted a license application for Cumhuriyet TV..

IV. LEGAL AND SYSTEMIC ISSUES

A NEW THREAT: THE CYBERSECURITY LAW

While access blocks on news content continued, the Cybersecurity Law, passed in the early months of 2025, caused great concern among civil society and digital rights advocates. The broad powers granted to the Cybersecurity Presidency are seen as creating an indirect mechanism of pressure on online freedom of expression and communication. There are concerns that oversight and investigation processes could be abused through arbitrary enforcement.

The draft law, submitted to Parliament on January 10, 2025, was passed on March 12 and came into force on March 19, 2025, the same day Ekrem İmamoğlu was detained, following its publication in the Official Gazette. The law grants extraordinary powers to the President of the Cybersecurity Authority, who is appointed directly by the President, and criminalizes reporting on data leaks. According to the MLSA Legal Unit, while the official justification of the law is the protection of cyberspace, its real aim is to censor journalists and deprive the public of access to information.

The law prescribes the same penalties for journalists reporting on data leaks as for those who carry out the leaks, while granting extraordinary powers to the Cybersecurity Presidency.

By decree published in the Official Gazette on January 8, 2025, a Cybersecurity Presidency was established within the Presidency of the Republic. Just two days after the publication of the decision appointing the President directly by the President himself, the AK Party parliamentary group submitted the Cybersecurity Law Proposal to Parliament on January 10, 2025..

PUBLISHING NEWS ON DATA LEAKS PUNISHED THE SAME AS THE LEAKER

According to paragraph 5 of Article 16 of the law, “those who carry out activities targeting institutions or individuals by creating the perception that a data leak has occurred” may face up to five years in prison.

Article 16: (5) Those who, despite knowing that no data leak occurred in cyberspace, create false content suggesting a cybersecurity-related data leak in order to create public fear, panic, or to target institutions or individuals, or disseminate such content for this purpose, shall be punished with two to five years of imprisonment..

Legal experts and journalists state that this provision aims to suppress recent reports by various media outlets on data leaks and to prevent journalists from working on this topic.

According to the same law, those who carry out data leaks, or sell or distribute such data, will also be sentenced to three to five years in prison. However, legal experts argue that punishing journalists who report on data leaks with the same severity as those who commit the leaks themselves contradicts legal reasoning..

EXTREMELY DANGEROUS IN TERMS OF DIGITAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In its current form, the draft law is considered not only a significant threat to fundamental rights and freedoms, particularly freedom of expression, but also contrary to the principle of legal predictability, including the principle of legality of the administration.

If the bill — which directly targets journalists working on data security — is passed in its current form, it is considered that it should be annulled by the Constitutional Court..

THE SHADOW OF THE REPEALED ARTICLE 9

Article 9 of the Internet Law, which was repealed, allowed individuals claiming a violation of their “personal rights” to directly apply to Criminal Judgeships of Peace to request access blocking. Using this provision, many politicians, public officials, and businesspeople were able to block negative news and posts about them by submitting applications.

Since it did not require filing a lawsuit, this provision was seen as cost-free, and thus, it was widely used to impose access bans on many news articles.

Decisions of Criminal Judgeships of Peace could only be appealed at the next-in-line Criminal Judgeship of Peace, and the access ban decisions would become final. Once the objection was rejected, no legal remedy remained, except for an individual application to the Constitutional Court.

In practice, the fact that these judgeships routinely accepted all applications without proper review, and that objections were rejected with standard reasoning, drew frequent criticism. Some courts imposed access bans on hundreds of web addresses in a single day.

With many applications — including that of MLSA — being brought before the Constitutional Court, the Court applied the pilot judgment procedure, which it uses in cases of systematic violations. In its decision dated 27/10/2021, titled “Keskin Kalem Publishing and Trade Inc. and Others” [Application No: 2018/14884], the Constitutional Court stated that the issue in the applications stemmed from Article 9 of the Internet Law, and called on the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) to amend the relevant legislation. The decision was published in the Official Gazette on 7/1/2022, and it was ruled that the law had to be amended within one year.

In its violation ruling, the Constitutional Court made various findings regarding Article 9 of the Law. The Court first stated that the law was unforeseeable, noting that there were no sufficient regulations to assess in which situations personal rights were violated, and that it should be applied only in cases where an urgent social need required it. In this context, the Court ruled that a regulation should be made to guide Criminal Judgeships of Peace..

The Court also stated that access blocking decisions were made without sufficient investigation by the Criminal Judgeships of Peace, and that no effective remedy was provided against the arbitrary use of this provision by the judgeships. Furthermore, the Court emphasized that Article 9 sets out a procedure meant to be used as a precautionary measure in emergency situations, and that after such a decision is made, it should be resolved in an adversarial judicial process. The Court concluded that indefinitely applied protective

measures constitute a disproportionately severe interference..

Despite the Constitutional Court's pilot judgment, no legislative amendment was made during the one-year period, and so the Court, in its decision dated 11/10/2023 (Case No: 2020/76, Decision No: 2023/172), annulled Article 9 of Law No. 5651 on the grounds that it was unconstitutional. The Court ruled that the annulment would come into effect nine months after its publication in the Official Gazette, to allow time for TBMM to draft new legislation. The decision was published in the Official Gazette on 10/01/2024. Since no new regulation was introduced by TBMM during the nine-month period, the decision officially entered into force on 10/10/2024, and Article 9 of the Internet Law was formally repealed.

With the repeal of Article 9 of the Internet Law, the legal basis for issuing access blocking decisions on the grounds of violation of personal rights ceased to exist. However, despite this, the practice of imposing access blocks based on alleged violations of personal rights continued through alternative legal avenues..

ARTICLE 8/A, WHICH IS SUPPOSED TO BE USED IN EMERGENCIES, BECAME THE NORM

Article 8/A of the Internet Law, which allows for access blocking in emergencies, has been frequently used as a justification in such cases. The provision titled "Removal of content and/or access blocking in cases where delay is prejudicial" grants the President of the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK) the authority to issue access blocking decisions for reasons such as the protection of the right to life, personal safety, national security, public order, or general health.

Removal of content and/or access blocking in cases where delay is prejudicial::

ARTICLE 8/A- (1) A decision for the removal of content and/or access blocking regarding a publication on the internet may be made by a judge, or in cases where delay is prejudicial, by the President upon the request of the Presidency or ministries related to the protection of national security and public order, the prevention of crime, or the protection of general health, based on one or more of the following reasons: protection of the right to life and personal safety, national security and public order, prevention of crime, or protection of general health..

In August 2024, the 8/A provision was cited as the justification for blocking access to Instagram; based on the decision of the BTK President, access to Facebook and Instagram platforms was blocked.

One of the most striking cases of Article 8/A being used in place of the repealed Article 9 was the decision by the Istanbul 8th Criminal Judgeship of Peace on 18.07.2025 to block access to news reports regarding the strike action taken by KRT (Culture Radio and Television) workers due to unpaid wages. Among the blocked news reports was an article written by journalist Rabia Çetin and published on MLSATurkey.com, titled "KRT Employees Halt Broadcast".

The Constitutional Court also addressed the unconstitutionality of Article 8/A on similar grounds in its decision dated 14/09/2023 regarding the Artı Media GMBH Application (Application No: 2019/40078), stating that the provision violates freedom of expression and freedom of the press. The Court ruled that a call should be made to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) for the amendment of Article 8/A. The decision was published in the Official Gazette on 8/11/2023, but no legislative regulation has yet been made by the TBMM regarding this issue..

A NEW JUDICIAL TACTIC: CENSORSHIP THROUGH PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES

Precautionary measures were also used during this period as a basis for access blocking decisions on the grounds of alleged violations of personal rights.

Following the annulment of Article 9 of the Internet Law, another method used to obtain access blocks on the grounds of violations of personal rights became the issuance of precautionary measures. A procedure applied in civil litigation, a precautionary measure is a type of decision that allows for protection before a lawsuit is filed if the right in question is in danger of disappearing or if irreversible harm may occur. It began to be used as a basis for imposing access blocks.

For example, Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) Mersin MP Levent Uysal applied to the Mersin 3rd Civil Court of First Instance on 27/05/2025 and blocked access to 402 news articles and social media posts about him. Among the blocked content were reports on issues such as the dismissal of academics and placing them on unpaid leave at Nişantaşı University, owned by Uysal. Also included was a report on MLSATurkey.com by MLSA Trial Monitoring Unit member Eylem Sonbahar, titled “Lawsuit against BirGün upon complaint of MHP MP Uysal and his wife: ‘There is no slander here’.” No decision has yet been made regarding MLSA Legal Unit’s objection to the access block.

Numerous applications related to access blocks are currently pending before the Constitutional Court. Violations arising from deficiencies in the legal framework and systematic issues in the objection process before Criminal Judgeships of Peace are resulting in mass violation rulings by the Constitutional Court..

It is possible to group the common issues arising from both the repealed Article 9 and the currently in force Articles 8 and 8/A under several headings::

1- Lack of clarity and foreseeability in legal regulation: In the regulations made, the absence of provisions specifying which content will be blocked and based on which criteria—especially lacking criteria aligned with the requirements of a democratic society—renders the current regulations unpredictable. As a result, many decisions violating freedom of expression and press are being made. The Court states that any regulation must have a narrow scope and include criteria regarding the nature and extent of the content subject to the alleged violation.

2- Lack of adequate investigation and assessment by Criminal Judgeships of Peace: In its evaluation of the Criminal Judgeships of Peace, the Constitutional Court stated that these judgeships—which both issue access blocking decisions and review objections—make decisions using boilerplate reasoning, without assessing the requirements of a democratic society or considering freedom of expression. The Court ruled that this violates the right to an effective remedy and that Criminal Judgeships of Peace do not constitute an effective legal remedy.

3- Imposition of indefinite access blocks: Legally, access blocking decisions are protective measures and thus should be temporary. However, under current legislation and practice, once an access block decision issued by the Criminal Judgeship of Peace is finalized upon appeal, the relevant internet content is indefinitely blocked in Turkey. No further legal remedy is provided against such access blocks.

4- Failure to provide necessary legal means and adversarial proceedings: Access block requests are reviewed on file by the Criminal Judgeships of Peace, and the resulting decisions are often not even notified to the individuals whose

content is being blocked. Objections are also reviewed on file, and decisions are rendered without holding a hearing..

From the perspective of the principle of adversarial proceedings—an essential component of the right to a fair trial—many guarantees provided by this principle are not applicable in access blocking cases. Those objecting to access blocks are generally not informed of the allegations related to the blocked content, nor are they given the opportunity to submit evidence or contest the evidence presented against them in a hearing.

Moreover, as mentioned above, no legal process is provided once an access block decision becomes final, and no adversarial trial is pursued. For example, when an access block is imposed due to an alleged violation of personal rights, there is no requirement to file a compensation lawsuit in civil court. This situation makes it impossible to subject the grounds of the access block decision to judicial scrutiny, depriving individuals of the protections afforded by the right to a fair trial.

The Constitutional Court, in this context, states that access block decisions may only be issued as protective measures in cases where there is a clear violation and a compelling social reason or urgent circumstance. Outside of such circumstances, access block requests must be subject to adversarial judicial proceedings, where the legal grounds for blocking access must be properly evaluated.

Despite the violation rulings mentioned above, the necessary legal amendments have not been made, and violations continue under current regulations. Due to the presence of systematic violations, the Constitutional Court continues to issue collective violation rulings..

NON-IMPLEMENTATION OF CONSTITUTIONAL COURT RULINGS AND OBSTRUCTION OF EFFECTIVE LEGAL REMEDIES

The Constitutional Court, which provides the highest level of domestic legal protection in the field of freedom of expression in Turkey, has issued numerous violation rulings regarding access bans. In particular, its decisions on the annulment of Article 9 of Law No. 5651 on “personal rights” and on the incompatibility of access bans with the principle of proportionality were critical turning points that should have curbed digital censorship. However, the failure to implement these decisions in practice has led to the systematic continuation of access bans. Instead of addressing the violations, the courts swiftly put Article 8/A into effect as a “general justification” in place of the annulled Article 9, effectively nullifying the impact of the Constitutional Court’s rulings.

The biggest issue in terms of effective legal remedies has been the transformation of the Criminal Judgeships of Peace into the sole authority. Objections to access bans on websites and social media accounts are referred to another Criminal Judgeship of Peace within the same court system. Thus, the objections are not subjected to an independent review process; decisions are almost automatically upheld. This situation eliminates both the right to legal remedies guaranteed under Article 36 of the Constitution and the right to an effective remedy regulated under Article 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

As a result, while the Constitutional Court’s violation rulings are disregarded, the closed-loop system created by the Criminal Judgeships of Peace blocks citizens’ access to legal remedies. In this way, digital censorship is institutionalized not only through court decisions but also through the absence of an effective judicial oversight mechanism.

Annulment of the Personal Rights Article (Article 9) and the Immediate Activation of Article 8/A

In 2023, the Constitutional Court annulled Article 9 of Law No. 5651 [access bans on the grounds of violation of personal rights]. In its decision, the Court ruled that the access bans issued by criminal judgeships of peace based on unilateral applications violated the principle of proportionality and infringed on freedom of expression. However, immediately after this ruling, the same content continued to be blocked, this time citing Article 8/A of Law No. 5651 as justification. Thus, the Constitutional Court's decision, which was supposed to remedy the violation, was effectively rendered ineffective by the administration's reflex to "generate a new justification."

Dysfunctionality of the Objection Mechanism in Criminal Judgeships of Peace

In the first half of 2025, numerous domain names belonging to Mezopotamya Agency (MA) were shut down by various criminal judgeships of peace. The objections filed by MA were reviewed by other criminal judgeships of peace and were consistently rejected without exception. During this process, not a single application was reviewed by an independent higher court. This situation revealed that, despite the Constitutional Court's previous rulings stating "the right to an effective remedy has been violated," the system of criminal judgeships of peace continues to function as a closed-loop approval mechanism.

THE VIRTUAL PATROL PRACTICE CONTINUES DESPITE THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT'S ANNULMENT DECISION

The "virtual patrol" practice, which was regulated by a decree law during the state of emergency and later enacted into law by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM), continued to be implemented during this period despite the Constitutional Court's annulment decision..

Under the virtual patrol practice, law enforcement officials unilaterally conduct investigations on social media platforms, examine accounts and posts deemed to contain "criminal elements," and report them to prosecutors, leading to investigations being initiated against various social media users. As part of this practice, many journalists were investigated and prosecuted..

The Constitutional Court, in its decision dated 19.02.2020 (Case No: 2018/91, Decision No: 2020/10), ruled that the "virtual patrol" practice violated the right to demand the protection of personal data and annulled the provision. Although the decision was published in the Official Gazette on 30.04.2020 and came into force, it continues to be implemented by law enforcement..

For example, the investigation file used as the basis for the access ban against KAOS GL was initiated following an examination of the Association's accounts under the virtual patrol practice. The MLSA Legal Unit stated that the evidence obtained as a result of this practice constitutes unlawful evidence and therefore cannot be used in judicial proceedings, and announced that they would take the matter to the Constitutional Court..

NEW TRENDS AND OUTCOMES

GOOGLE NEWS, BIG TECH, AND ALGORITHMIC CENSORSHIP

In Turkey, censorship deepens not only through direct access restriction decisions by the state but also via the algorithmic preferences of global technology companies. In 2024 and 2025, changes made by Google in its search and news algorithms directly affected independent media organizations.

The most dramatic development in this process was the closure of Gazete Duvar. The site, which had been publishing since 2016, announced on March 12, 2025, that it had ceased publication. The owner, Vedat Zencir, and editor-in-chief, Barış Avşar, cited Google's algorithm changes along with the economic crisis as the main reasons for the closure. According to the statement, Duvar derived the majority of its traffic—and therefore advertising revenue—from Google; after the algorithm updates, this source practically disappeared.

The day after Gazete Duvar's closure, nine media outlets, including T24 and BirGün, issued a joint statement declaring, "We protest Google's destructive embargo." These institutions announced that the two algorithm updates made in 2024 had cut their visitor numbers in half, resulting in a serious decline in advertising revenue. T24 also publicly disclosed its loss of readership for the same reason.

Google, in response to these criticisms, argued that the algorithm changes were made to "reduce low-quality content." The company claimed that it based its evaluations primarily on how long users stayed on the sites they reached via search, and that as a result, "low-quality content had decreased by 45%." However, according to Similar Web, not only independent sites but also large global publications such as GQ experienced traffic losses of up to 26% after the algorithm updates. In Turkey, these changes rendered independent media unable to meet the traffic criteria required for official advertisement revenue..

Sustainability Becomes Impossible

According to FreeWeb data, the impact of Google's algorithm updates was clearly visible in the organic search traffic data of media sites in Turkey. Between March 2023 and February 2024, Cumhuriyet lost 35%, Gazete Duvar 30%, Habertürk 28%, T24 15%, and BirGün 12% of their traffic. These declines made it impossible for independent news sites to meet the traffic criteria required to receive official advertisements from the Press Advertising Agency (BİK). In its closure statement, Gazete Duvar directly cited this situation as "economic unsustainability caused by Google's algorithm."

According to Banu Tuna, Secretary General of the Journalists' Union of Turkey (TGS), the closure of Gazete Duvar is the "tip of the iceberg." According to Tuna, when the strict criteria of the Press Advertising Agency and the impact of Google's algorithms are combined, the sustainability of independent media organizations becomes nearly impossible.

This situation shows that censorship is implemented not only through court decisions but also via the algorithmic policies of Big Tech. When the decisions of Google, Meta, X, and YouTube align with state pressure and combine with RTÜK's licensing threats toward YouTube, the space for digital media and independent journalism continues to shrink..

BLOCKING THE ESCAPE: CENSORSHIP OF ALTERNATIVE PLATFORMS

In Turkey, not only news websites and journalists' social media accounts but also alternative platforms and various types of content were targeted by access bans. New platforms, applications, and independent content creators seen by users as “escape zones” were systematically silenced.

For example, video chat and live streaming applications like Bigo Live and similar platforms were made inaccessible from Turkey not only via their websites but also by being removed from the App Store and Google Play through court orders. Similarly, applications like AnimeciX, used in online gaming and entertainment, or Porofessor, used for League of Legends, were also subjected to access bans.

International media was also targeted. The Kurdish service of Voice of America was completely blocked on the grounds of “national security and public order.” As seen in previous mass bans against Wikipedia, YouTube, and Twitter (X), the Bluesky platform faced a similar threat: between February and April 2025, at least 59 Bluesky accounts were blocked; although the platform made some accounts invisible from Turkey, pressure from the BTK and courts continues.

Censorship was not limited to political content. Websites, apps, and social media profiles with millions of followers belonging to accounts like Gıda Dedektifi, which provides consumer information, were shut down. Similarly, astrology and fortune-telling apps such as Binnaz and Faladdin were also blocked. The X account of Kaos GL's online newspaper was also blocked on grounds of “national security and public order,” showing that LGBTI+ content continued to be targeted..

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The access bans experienced in the first seven months of 2025 demonstrate that digital censorship in Turkey has now become more systematic, broader in scope, and more layered. Thousands of contents, social media accounts, news websites, and even artificial intelligence applications have been blocked based on vague and non-transparent legal grounds, primarily citing “national security” reasons. The main areas targeted by censorship include independent journalism, Kurdish media, opposition political actors, youth and women's organizations, and LGBTI+ organizations. In addition, international developments such as Google's algorithm changes have also directly impacted the sustainability of independent media..

CALL FOR LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Despite the annulment rulings of the Constitutional Court, Article 8/A of Law No. 5651 continues to be widely used. This situation results in serious violations of freedom of expression, the right to access information, and judicial transparency. A comprehensive legal reform is essential to align the access blocking mechanism in Turkey with the requirements of a democratic society. In particular::

- Article 8/A should be narrowed and limited strictly to emergency situations.

- Judicial oversight should be strengthened, and decisions by Criminal Judgeships of Peace based on template justifications should be prevented.
- Effective legal remedies against access bans should be ensured..

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PLATFORMS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Global platforms (X, Meta, Google, YouTube, etc.) should increase their transparency regarding censorship mechanisms implemented in Turkey, and publicly disclose through open reporting which content has been blocked and on what grounds. In addition, appeal mechanisms should be strengthened for users whose accounts are subject to restrictions.

Civil society organizations, on the other hand, should enhance cooperation in documenting, monitoring, and reporting censorship cases; and by strengthening international solidarity networks, they should work to bring practices in Turkey to the agenda of institutions such as the Council of Europe, the United Nations, and the European Union..

MONITORING AND DATA SHARING RECOMMENDATIONS

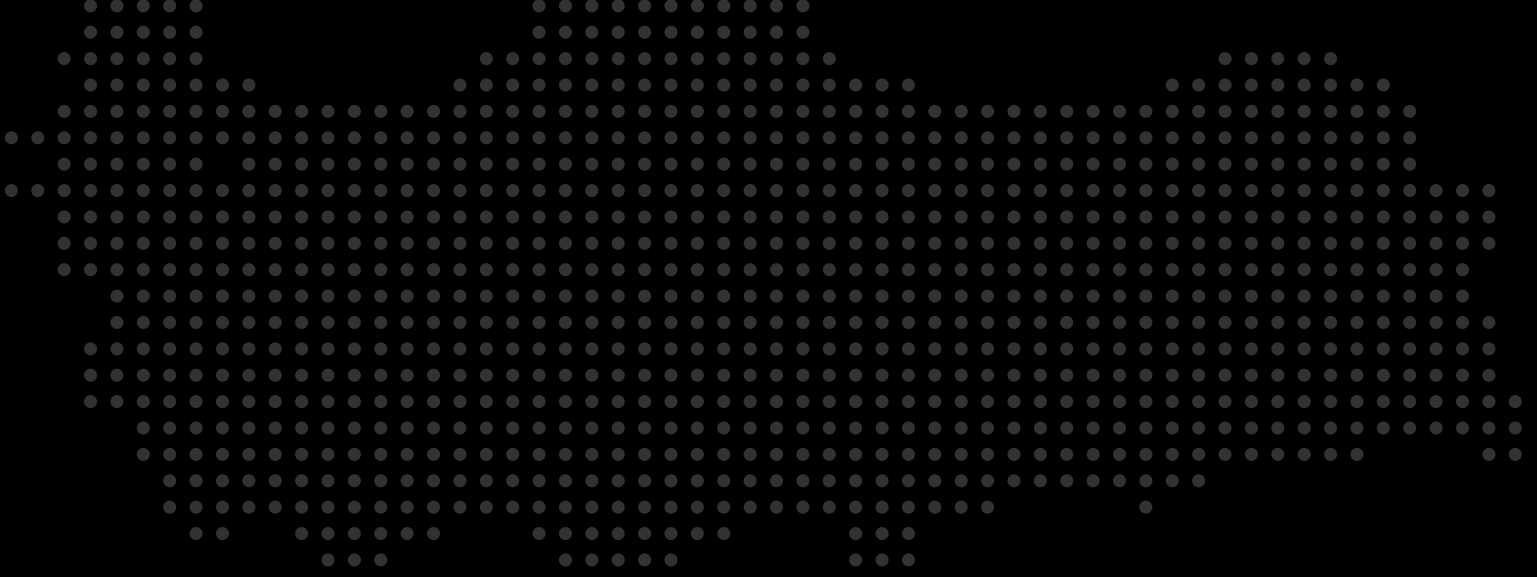
The systematic monitoring of censorship is a shared responsibility not only of human rights organizations but also of media institutions and academia. In this context::

- Regular and up-to-date access blocking databases should be created and shared with the public.
- Transparency reports obtained from platforms should be comparatively analyzed by independent organizations.
- Existing initiatives aimed at monitoring internet censorship should be supported and integrated with international data networks. In this regard, you can send access blocking decisions and related documents to info@freewebturkey.com
- Joint monitoring mechanisms should be developed among academic institutions, NGOs, and journalism organizations, and studies on the social and economic impacts of access blocks should be increased.

Call for Contribution

Comprehensive monitoring of access restrictions can only be made possible not just through the efforts of human rights organizations, but also with the contributions of newspapers, news websites, and content creators. Therefore, sharing the access restriction decisions you have witnessed or have been directly affected by will make our monitoring efforts stronger and more inclusive.

If you would like to share decision texts, notifications, or your observations with us, please send them to info@freewebturkey.com..



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