

# Legalizing control: the rise of restrictive internet regulation in sub-Saharan Africa

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## Restrictive Internet Regulations at a Glance

- Legislative acts that **create barriers to accessing, creating, or circulating digital media**.
- Create capacity to **limit privacy rights and freedom of speech online**, either through explicit provisions or vague language that enables selective interpretation and enforcement.

### Research Question

When do governments enshrine digital rights restrictions into law?



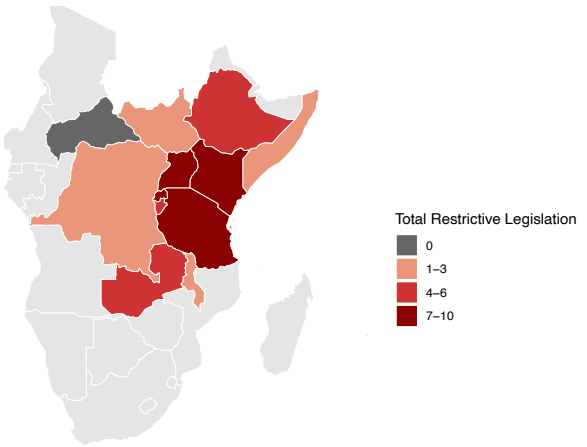
Internet user share (WB 2024) vs. number of restrictive internet regulations (original data) in sub-Saharan Africa.

## Data Collection

- Original** regulation-date-level **dataset** (N = 360) on **internet laws and regulations** across 44 sub-Saharan African states from 2000 to 2022.
- Provides general information on **internet-related laws and regulations** in the region.
- Records whether these laws have the **potential to infringe upon civil or political rights online**, based on reports by civil society organizations.
- In this study, the data is aggregated to the country-year level, using a binary variable indicating whether a potentially restrictive regulation was enacted in a given year.

## Analysis

- Research Design: regression analysis estimating the **effect of four different drivers (X) on the likelihood of restrictive internet regulation enactment (Y)**.
- Results: governments are more likely to enact restrictive internet regulation **when such legislation is widespread in their regional environment**. Domestic or regional unrest does not predict new restrictive regulation.
- Implications: **governments restrict digital rights** through national law preventively, **outside the spotlight of political events**.



Restrictive internet regulations in and around Uganda (950km radius) 2010 to 2022 .