

1.3. State control over the internet and digital platforms

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According to Human Rights Watch, in 2024, the authorities increasingly used internet shutdowns during ‘peaceful protests, elections, or other political events’,60 including in the vicinity of Alexey Navalny’s funeral on 1 March 2024.61

Since early May 2025, mobile internet disruptions were reported across Russia, with regional authorities attributing them to efforts to prevent attacks by Ukrainian drones,62 which have reportedly relied on local mobile networks for navigation.63 However, the investigative media outlet The Insider and the Internet monitoring project *Na Svyazi* (‘In Touch’) found that only around 40 % out of the recorded 200 mobile internet shutdowns between 1 May 2025 and 18 June 2025 coincided with actual drone attacks.64 Some sources suggested that the authorities may be using anti-drone measures as a pretext to restrict information access, and particularly the access to messaging apps.65

According to *Na Svyazi*, internet disruptions were also reported in the regions far from Ukraine, such as Primorye, Sakhalin, and Kamchatka in Russia’s Far East,66 with nearly 2 100 internet shutdowns, most of which affected certain parts of the cities, recorded in July 2025.67 By October 2025, mobile internet shutdowns were reportedly ‘routine’, with regional authorities expanding public Wi-Fi networks instead.68 On 30 October 2025, according to NGO Runet Monitor which tracks daily internet connectivity in Russia,69 mobile internet shutdowns were reported in 65 regions,70 declining to 54 regions in mid-November 2025.71 On 11 November 2025, authorities of Ulyanovsk region in central Russia,72 which is ‘home to military-linked factories’,73 implemented Russia’s first permanent mobile internet shutdown, covering parts of the region. As noted by independent media outlet The Moscow Times, based on regional reports, the outage was ordered by the federal authorities and affected areas surrounding ‘sensitive government and military facilities.’74

The authorities have blocked access to major foreign social media platforms,75 such as Facebook and Instagram (blocked in March 2022)76 and several messaging applications (apps), such as Signal (blocked in August 2024) and Viber (blocked in December 2024).77 Streaming services, such as YouTube,78 have been slowed down.79 Internet users must rely on Virtual

Private Network (VPN) services to access blocked platforms80 and restricted news websites.81 Authorities have also restricted access to VPN services82 and, since March 2024, they made advertising of VPN services illegal. The use of VPN services is not penalised.83

In March 2025, messaging app Telegram was blocked in Dagestan and Chechnya after a warning by the law enforcement that it was 'often used by enemies',84 for example, during the 2023 anti-Israel riots at the Makhachkala airport, the capital of Dagestan.85 In August 2025, *Roskomnadzor* announced restrictions on voice calls via 'foreign' messaging apps WhatsApp and Telegram, citing claims from law enforcement that they were used for criminal purposes,86 such as making scam calls to extort money or inciting sabotage and terrorist activities.87

The announcement followed the launch of MAX, a multi-functional app developed by social media company VK (formerly *VKontakte*),88 which integrates messaging, government, payment, and other services.89 A new law requires preinstallation of MAX on all smartphones, tablets, computers, and smart TVs sold in Russia from 1 September 2025.90 According to media sources, the user terms of MAX explicitly permit the app to share user data with government institutions.91 According to VK, as of October 2025, more than 45 million users have registered MAX accounts, with 18 million people using it daily.92 On 30 October 2025, some Russian mobile carriers reportedly began preventing new user registrations on WhatsApp and Telegram by blocking verification SMS messages and voice calls.93

Moreover, the authorities reportedly increased oversight or control over domestic platforms, such as Yandex, VK, and Mail.ru.94 In an interview with the EUAA, a human rights lawyer who preferred to remain anonymous due to security reasons noted that law enforcement agencies have access to all social media platforms administered by Russian companies — such as VK, *Odnoklassniki*, and the new messenger MAX — as well as to email services like Yandex and Mail.ru. According to the source, there are numerous criminal cases in which private email correspondence has been used as evidence.95

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