Freedom House

FREEDOM ON THE NET 2022

Cambodia

PARTLY FREE

43 /100

A. Obstacles to Access	13 /25
B. Limits on Content	18 /35
C. Violations of User Rights	12 /40

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

43 /100 Partly Free

Scores are based on a scale of 0 (least free) to 100 (most free). See the research methodology and report acknowledgements.

Overview

Internet freedom remains under threat in Cambodia. Internet users often face arrest for online activity, perpetuating an environment that is characterized by fear and self-censorship.

Authorities have sought to establish a single internet gateway in the country that would facilitate greater censorship and surveillance. Former members of the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), an opposition party that was dissolved by court order in 2017 and has since operated in exile, continue to face monitoring, harassment, and imprisonment for their online activities.

Cambodia's political system has been dominated by Prime Minister Hun Sen and the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) for more than three decades. While the country conducted semicompetitive elections in the past, the 2018 elections were held in a severely repressive environment. Since then, Hun Sen's government has maintained pressure on opposition party members, independent press outlets, and demonstrators with intimidation, politically motivated prosecutions, and violence.

Key Developments, June 1, 2021 - May 31, 2022

- In February 2022, the government announced a delay in the implementation of the National Internet Gateway (NIG), which would centralize internet traffic, enable the government to force internet service providers (ISPs) to block or restrict content, increase the government's ability to conduct surveillance of users' online activity, and require operators to collect and store bulk data (see A3, B3, C2, C5, and C6).
- Government officials reported that its efforts to monitor "fake news" were increasing, sometimes responding with website blocks, content removals, or delicensing of media outlets (see B2 and B6).
- Prime Minister Hun Sen joined a Zoom call of CNRP members and warned that he was monitoring them (see B8).
- Former CNRP members faced prison sentences of five to eight years for their activism, including for criticism of the government on social media, as mass trials continued (see C3).
- Journalists, activists, and other internet users continued to face physical and online harassment for their online posts, with numerous journalists and activists arrested or threatened over their legitimate reporting (see C3 and C7).

A. Obstacles to Access

A1 0-6 pts

Do infrastructural limitations restrict access to the internet or the speed and quality of internet connections?	4/6

Internet usage and smartphone adoption in Cambodia has boomed in recent years and continued to increase during the coverage period. As of January 2022, Cambodia's internet penetration rate was 78.8 percent, a 26.2 percent increase from previous year. [1] Ookla recorded Cambodia's median mobile internet download speed at 16 megabytes per second (Mbps) in May 2022; Cambodia ranked 112th globally for mobile internet download speeds. The country's median fixed-line broadband download speed was 20.2 Mbps; it ranked 125th globally in this category. [2] Telecommunications companies have attributed the increase in penetration rate to the heightened use of social media, with 73.9 percent of Cambodians actively using social networks. [3]

Internet access, however, is constrained by poor infrastructure. Nationwide power outages pose a challenge to telecommunications companies and impose additional constraints on computer and internet use. [4] In 2021, the Electricity Authority of Cambodia announced plans to repair and replace electrical equipment, [5] causing planned blackouts that lasted as long as eight hours in some areas throughout 2021 and 2022. [6]

Some other infrastructure improvements, such as the rollout of a "smart-grid" electrical system in the last 10 percent of households in remote villages living without electricity, started in December 2020. [7] However, internet connections can still be extremely slow, especially in remote and rural areas (see A2). Broadband internet services depend on fixed-line networks that are not as easily available in rural areas, thus inhibiting wider internet penetration. As a result, in 2018, ISPs constructed two submarine fiber-optic internet networks connecting to high-speed international connections, the Malaysia-Cambodia-Thailand (MCT) cable and the Asia-Africa-Europe 1 (AAE-1) cable, covering over 23,000 miles. [8] In February 2020, Telecom Cambodia signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Cambodia Fiber-Optic Communication Network (CFOCN) to construct a metropolitan and regional fiber-optic backbone network. [9]

The Cambodian government has demonstrated its commitment to introduce fifth-generation (5G) technology for mobile networks across the country. [10] In April 2020, it signed a MoU with the Chinese firm Huawei to build a 5G network in Cambodia. [11] Several mobile service providers have also aimed to introduce 5G services, including Cellcard, Smart Axiata, and Metfone. [12] In 2020, Cellcard launched a telemedicine service through 5G networks to improve hospital's pandemic response coordination. [13] However, the 5G rollout stalled as the

government has yet to issue its 5G policy, roadmap, and approvals to permit the operation of 5G networks. [14]

A2 0-3 pts	
Is access to the internet prohibitively expensive or beyond the reach of certain segments of the population for geographical, social, or other reasons?	**1** / 3

While internet service remains relatively expensive in Cambodia, it has become more affordable over time, though a gap in access remains between urban and rural areas. A typical 4 gigabyte (GB) package of mobile data costs between $2 and $5, [15] and fixed-line connections cost at least $12 per month. [16] These costs are expensive for many Cambodians; 17.8 percent of the population is under the poverty line. [17] In 2022, the monthly minimum wage was set at $194 for workers in the formal economy. [18] Some 85 percent of Cambodians work in the informal sector with no minimum wage or protections, often earning far less than $194 per month. [19] ISPs have sought to make their services more affordable, though the introduction of 5G services is expected to increase prices. [20]

Those living in urban areas are considerably more likely to have mobile internet access than those in rural areas. [21] In December 2019, Prime Minister Hun Sen met with the president of Axiata Group Berhad, the Malaysian firm that operates Smart Axiata, and called on the firm to expand services in rural regions, schools, libraries, and hospitals. [22] Despite infrastructure improvements, the geographical digital divide has led to rural Cambodians being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19-related remote-learning and -working policies. Some two million children living in the countryside were unable to access online education programs used for distance learning because they did not have access to smartphones or satellite dishes. [23]

A gender gap in internet usage persists in Cambodia. In 2018, 52 percent of men owned a smartphone, representing 45 percent of internet users in the country, and 46 percent of women owned a smartphone, representing 30 percent of Cambodia's internet users. [24] As of February 2022, women represented 44.8 percent of social media users but 51 percent of the population. [25]

Internet use also varies based on education. In 2016, 27 percent of people with no formal education owned a smartphone; that figure stood at 82 percent for those with a university degree or studying at a university. [26] The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the inequalities of smartphone ownership and internet access. [27] A government study revealed that over 80

percent of students reported having no access to a smartphone or tablet and lacking sufficient internet bandwidth at home. [28]

A3 0-6 pts	
Does the government exercise technical or legal control over internet infrastructure for the purposes of restricting connectivity?	**4** / 6

No government shutdowns of internet or mobile access have been documented in Cambodia, although broad provisions in the laws governing the telecommunications sector could provide the government with the power to do so.

In October 2019, Prime Minister Hun Sen instructed the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MPTC) to address the need for Cambodia to gain direct access to the international internet gateway without relying on Vietnam or Thailand, for national security reasons. [29] Three operators constitute Cambodia's backbone network: Telecom Cambodia, Viettel Cambodia, and Cambodia Fiber Optic Communication Network Co., Ltd (CFOCN). [30] These operators interconnect with smaller networks, allowing exchanges of information through Wi-Fi, LAN lines, or other means. Telecom Cambodia operates under the jurisdiction of the MPTC and the Ministry of Finance. [31]

In February 2022, the government announced a delay in the implementation of the highly controversial sub-decree on the Establishment of the National Internet Gateway (NIG subdecree), which was adopted in February 2021 (see B3, C2, C5, and C6). [32] The NIG subdecree seeks to centralize the government's control over all incoming and outgoing domestic and international web traffic through a single internet gateway. The government appointed NIG operators and regulatory authorities, specifically the MPTC and the Telecommunication Regulator Cambodia (TRC), were given monitoring powers. [33] The government was expected to have implemented the NIG in early 2022 and attributed the delay to concerns of pandemic-related traffic disruption. [34]

Under Article 7 of the 2015 Law on Telecommunications, the MPTC or other relevant ministries have the authority to order telecommunications providers to "take necessary measures" in undefined circumstances of force majeure. The law separately established an enforcement body of "telecommunications inspection officials" to investigate alleged offenses under the law, with the authority to call in support from the armed forces. [35] Under the law, these officials can temporarily suspend telecommunications firms' services and "suspend or fire their staff." [36]

A4 0-6 pts	
Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers?	**4** / 6

There has been an increasing diversity of service providers in Cambodia, although some obstacles restricting entry into the market persist. The telecommunications market has become increasingly competitive since it opened to private investment in 2006. [37] As of December 2021, there were 43 ISPs and 5 mobile service providers. [38]

By 2017, the rivalry between the six most prominent mobile operators—Smart Axiata, CamGSM, Viettel, Seatel, Xinwei, and Cadcomms—developed into a race to satisfy the growing market for internet consumption at the lowest possible cost. [39] Prices have dropped in recent years, with companies such as Smart Axiata and Cellcard offering more than $100 worth of mobile services for $1 as of 2020. [40] The price war potentially impacts new and small operators seeking to enter the market. However, experts speculate the competition may end with the rollout of 5G services, which could increase costs for customers, but is not expected to be implemented until sometime in 2022. [41]

In October 2020, the MPTC suspended or revoked the licenses of 17 telecommunications operators for allegedly inaccurately reporting their revenue figures. [42] In May 2021, the MPTC's new leadership levied heavy tax penalties against Cambodian ISPs over purported miscalculation of tax revenues since 2017. Some of these penalties are projected to cost millions of dollars, resulting in deterred investment, higher prices for consumers, and the possible collapse of smaller firms. [43] In February 2022, the MPTC and the TRC suspended the license of King Technologies, which operates the ISP Opennet, and forbade them from signing up new customers over the company's purported failure to pay $6.6 million owed to the government. [44]

A5 0-4 pts	
Do national regulatory bodies that oversee service providers and digital technology fail to operate in a free, fair, and independent manner?	**0** / 4

Cambodia's regulatory body lacks independence, notably due to provisions contained in the 2015 Law on Telecommunications and the NIG subdecree.

The TRC is the main regulatory body for the telecommunications sector in Cambodia. Its objective is ostensibly to regulate the operations of telecommunications networks and services in order to "promote fair, efficient, and transparent competition" in Cambodia. [45] Although the TRC proclaims itself to be an autonomous public entity, the telecommunications law significantly undermined its independence by granting the MPTC ultimate authority over the regulator, in a relationship that lacks transparency. [46] The TRC's lack of independence was demonstrated in 2017 when it followed the MPTC's order to block access to the *Cambodia Daily* and other news sites in the run-up to the general election in July 2018 (see B1).

B. Limits on Content

B1 0-6 pts	
Does the state block or filter, or compel service providers to block or filter, internet content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards?	**4**/6

News and other websites are periodically blocked in Cambodia, particularly those that disseminate information that could be perceived as a threat to the ruling government. The NIG increases the risk that more websites and content will be blocked in the future (see A3 and B3).

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Cambodian government has reportedly blocked access to news sites. In March 2020, Monoroom.info, a Khmer-language news website based in France, was blocked after it published numerous articles on the impact of the coronavirus in Cambodia. [47] The site was accessible as of April 2021. [48] The TRC blocked two websites owned by news outlet TVFB in April 2020 after the outlet's media license was cancelled and its editor was arrested (see B2); [49] the websites appeared to be inactive at the end of the coverage period.

In July 2018, the government ordered the temporary blocking of 17 websites, including the *Phnom Penh Post,* Voice of America (VOA), and Voice of Democracy (VOD), for 48 hours before that month's general election. [50] The authorities justified the decision by invoking the electoral law that mandates a silent period before the election, in which campaigning is prohibited in the 24 hours before the polls open. [51] However, news outlets perceived as less critical of the government were not blocked.

Websites hosting pornography or sexually explicit images are subject to blocking in Cambodia under the Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation. [52] The government banned online gambling in 2019, citing concerns that the industry was being used for criminal extortion. [53] The TRC blocked 79 online gambling websites in November 2021 and 123 such websites in January 2022. [54]

Social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter were freely available during the coverage period.

B2 0-4 pts	
Do state or nonstate actors employ legal, administrative, or other means to force publishers, content hosts, or digital platforms to delete content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards?	**1** / 4

The amount of online content removed at the behest of state or nonstate actors remains difficult to assess, as the process is unofficial and nontransparent. Content was removed following government pressure or user complaints during the coverage period, and the government revoked the licenses of online media outlets in apparent retaliation for their content (see B2).

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, "fake news" allegations became the standard for cracking down on dissent or criticism of the government. In December 2021, the Ministry of Information announced that its Fake News Monitoring Committee recorded 1,938 instances that year, including 1,023 that it said were meant to provoke criticism of the government, 809 cases of insults to King Norodom Sihamoni and political leaders, and 106 deemed to cause social chaos. Most of this content was posted to social platforms. [55] In July 2022, the committee said it had investigated 1,376 cases in the first half of the year. [56] The committee reportedly responds to reports by warning people of misconduct, filing lawsuits, revoking or suspending media licenses, and seeking to restrict content or accounts responsible. [57] The government reported documenting 1,343 cases of purportedly false or "objectionable" news from social media posts throughout all of 2020. [58]

The government regularly revokes the licenses of online news outlets following their reporting, sometimes also requiring the news sites to remove online content (see B6). In April 2021, during the previous coverage period, the Ministry of Information also revoked the media license of online news outlet Ko1 TV after it posted several videos that allegedly criticized the

government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The prime minister then asked the outlet to delete the videos and forced the publishers to issue an apology. [59]

Arresting and subsequently forcing individuals to make public apologies in lieu of criminal charges is a common tactic the government uses in response to dissent or opinions it considers unfavorable. For instance, in September 2021, a TikTok user was arrested and forced to film a videotaped apology for allegedly insulting traffic police in Phnom Penh in a video that has since been removed. [60]

The Cambodian authorities also regularly attempt to prevent content from being published online by threatening anyone who take pictures or videos of incidents to raise awareness of government wrongdoing or human rights abuses. [61]

B3 0-4 pts	
Do restrictions on the internet and digital content lack transparency, proportionality to the stated aims, or an independent appeals process?	**1** / 4

The government's restrictions on internet content lack transparency, are vaguely defined, and lack adequate judicial oversight. The MPTC can order ISPs to block websites at the request of other government departments. Implementation of censorship is nontransparent, apparently based on informal communications between government officials and service providers, with limited avenue for appeal.

The NIG subdecree, adopted in February 2021, grants the government sweeping powers to restrict and block access to digital content (see A3). NIG operators are obligated to collaborate with the MPTC to block or disconnect network connections that affect "safety, social order, dignity, culture, or traditions." If NIG operators or ISPs fail to comply with these broad conditions, they could incur a range of steep financial penalties and even have their licenses suspended or revoked. [62] Although the implementation of the infrastructure for the NIG was delayed, the government still plans on moving forward with its installation (see A3).

In February 2020, the Ministry of Information confirmed that a government "commission" monitors Cambodian media, including social media platforms. The commission operates under the legal authorization of a May 2018 interministerial *Prakas* (Proclamation) on Website and Social Media Control. If the commission deems online content to be unfit for publication or to contain false information, it will either force the publisher to remove the post or take legal action.

In August 2019, the government threatened to revoke the licenses of or shut down online news outlets purportedly spreading false information that threatened national security. [63] Those that the government deems violate their license conditions can be ordered to remove offending content or to post corrections. The process is not transparent, there is no clear appeal process, and the Ministry of Information is the sole authority for allocating and revoking media licenses. Several news outlets have already had licenses revoked (see B2).

In April 2020, about a month after Prime Minister Hun Sen delivered a speech warning against harming the reputation of Khmer culture, [64] the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts created the Disciplinary and Accolade Council to track "illicit content" online.

B4 0-4 pts	
Do online journalists, commentators, and ordinary users practice self-censorship?	**1** / 4

Self-censorship online among journalists, activists, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), unionists, and ordinary users is widespread and has reportedly increased in recent years. A clampdown on civil society has created an environment in which NGOs have increasingly self-censored, restricted, or even completely ceased their activities online. Arrests under COVID-19 legislation have only exacerbated self-censorship, with many Cambodians fearful for their safety if they express opinions about the coronavirus pandemic online (see C3). [65]

A poll of journalists and media outlets conducted by the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM) and released in March 2022 noted that journalists fear reporting on sensitive issues because of repressive laws and regulations in the country. The poll found that 72 percent of respondents are concerned with reporting on political issues, 64 percent of respondents are concerned about reporting on human rights abuses, and 61 percent of respondents are concerned about reporting on impunity cases. [66] Additionally, 64 percent of respondents reported that they practiced self-censorship due to the political environment. [67]

The government's continued repression of dissenting voices and focus on the spread of purportedly false news [68] was accompanied by an increase in online surveillance, as well as a rise in prosecutions linked to online speech. These factors contributed to a rise in self-censorship. According to a 2021 survey conducted by the Cambodia Fundamental Freedoms Monitor Project (FFMP), 41 percent of respondents felt "somewhat unfree" to speak on social media and 4 percent felt "very unfree"; only 6 percent felt "very free." [69] Additionally, 36

percent of NGOs and trade union leaders polled felt unsafe sharing information through social media. [70] In the FFMP public poll, 10 percent of respondents reported they "always" avoided saying what they wanted to in public or online for fear of retaliation and 17 percent stated they "regularly" felt like they need to self-censor, while 32 percent stated they "sometimes" felt this way. [71]

B5 0-4 pts	
Are online sources of information controlled or manipulated by the government or other powerful actors to advance a particular political interest?	**2** / 4

The spread of disinformation and misinformation has been a growing concern in recent years. A 2020 report from the Oxford Internet Institute noted the presence of coordinated cybertroop teams that manipulate information on social media on behalf of government agencies, politicians and parties, and citizens and influencers. [72] The teams work to support progovernment messaging, attack the opposition, and spread disinformation.

In August 2020, the *New York Times* reported on a government-directed smear campaign conducted over Facebook which targeted Luon Sovath, a monk and human rights activist who has criticized the government. [73] For instance, a Facebook page shared videos and other disparaging content of the monk allegedly participating in sexual activity. An analysis of the video revealed that the video was created by two government employees who worked for the Press and Quick Reaction Unit, which manufactures and circulates propaganda, suggesting that the video was inauthentic.

In December 2021, when over 1,000 union members began their weekslong protest after losing employment with the prominent casino company Nagaworld, suspicious Facebook accounts surfaced and were used to accuse the protesters of staging a "color revolution" and of having foreign influence. One of the Facebook accounts, known as "Brave Women Volunteers," had only 100 friends and a single post from the day before the accusations were disseminated. These claims were also shared by progovernment media outlets and an Interior Ministry official. [74] The day after the Facebook posts surfaced, the Brave Women Volunteers account disappeared. [75]

Prime Minister Hun Sen, who has more than 10 million followers on Facebook, has been accused of manipulating his page to create an exaggerated perception of his popularity. [76] The *Phnom Penh Post* alleged that only 20 percent of Hun Sen's new "likes" in February and

March 2016 came from within the country, with the rest reportedly coming from "click farms" based abroad, in which low-paid workers were employed to like his page. [77]

The owner of the *Phnom Penh Post,* a Malaysian businessman, has reportedly interfered with the paper's editorial independence by demanding the removal of an article detailing his links to the Cambodian government from its website. The incident compelled 13 journalists and editors to resign and led to the firing of the paper's chief editor in 2018. [78]

The government has also conducted disinformation campaigns against the CNRP. In November 2019, for example, online news outlet Coda Story reported that opposition supporters were forced to make videos "confessing" that they helped Sam Rainsy, the party's former leader, attempt to return from self-imposed exile. [79] In at least one case, a video was shared by progovernment news outlet Fresh News to its Facebook page.

B6 0-3 pts	
Are there economic or regulatory constraints that negatively affect users' ability to publish content online?	**2**/3

Although economic and regulatory constraints generally do not prevent the publication of online content, a number of media outlets with an online presence have shut down due to high taxes. Separately, online outlets are required to obtain licenses, and several of these licenses were revoked due to the outlets' reporting during the coverage period, which led to the removal of their content (see B2).

The government regularly revokes the licenses of online news outlets following their reporting. During the coverage period, the Ministry of Information revoked the media licenses of three news outlets that primarily operated online: the Bayong Times, KCTV, and Cambodia Today. The Ministry of Information claimed that the outlets publications violated "journalistic ethics" but the outlets' directors believe the revocation is due to their reporting on government corruption. [80]

Between September 2020 and August 2021, the Ministry of Information revoked seven media licenses. [81] In March 2021, two online news outlets, Youth Techo and Stoeng Charl, had their licenses revoked because the government claimed they had spread false information that would cause social unrest. [82] A Ministry of Information employee also had his media license revoked after he uploaded a picture on his Facebook page of what he erroneously thought was a body of a deceased COVID-19 patient. He took the post down but was later fired. [83] Also in March 2021, a popular social media publisher lost his media license after posting a

video exposing monks in Siem Reap physically beating junior monks. [84] Beginning in June 2020, the Ministry of Information has been reviewing the media license of the *Khmer Nation* newspaper, after its publisher, Ros Sokhet, was arrested for Facebook posts criticizing Prime Minister Hun Sen's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and the debt crisis (see C3); [85] the outlet's license had not been revoked by the end of the coverage period.

In May 2018, Cambodia's last remaining independent English– and Khmer-language daily newspaper, the *Phnom Penh Post*, changed ownership in a sale that lacked transparency, after being issued a tax bill of $3.9 million. Media analysts expressed suspicion that the tax bill was used to coerce the paper's sale. [86] The *Cambodia Daily* shut down in 2017 when it was unable to pay a $6 million tax bill levied by the government, which the publication claimed was a politically motivated retaliation for its critical reporting. [87] Shortly after the publication's closure, the Cambodia Daily resurfaced as an online-only news outlet.

B7 0-4 pts	
Does the online information landscape lack diversity and reliability?	**3**/4

The government shut down radio stations and newspapers in 2017, during the run-up to the 2018 general election. The internet has since become one of the main sources of news and information for Cambodians, and social media has allowed the proliferation of more diverse content that is free from government influence. [88] Many Cambodians now turn to Facebook and the online versions of Radio Free Asia (RFA), VOA, VOD, and Camboja News as key news sources. The *Southeast Asia Globe* and *ASEAN Today* are also independent news sources based in Cambodia. [89] At the end of the coverage period, VOD's news site had more than 1.7 million followers on Facebook. [90] RFA's Khmer-language Facebook page had more than 7.4 million followers, [91] and VOA Khmer had more than 7.7 million, [92] making them some of Cambodia's most-visited Facebook pages. [93] In contrast, Fresh News, an outlet closely associated with the government, had just over 4 million followers at the end of the coverage period. [94] Similarly, the Khmer-language Facebook pages of the progovernment Khmer Times [95] and *Phnom Penh Post* [96] had only just over 35,800 followers and 127,200 followers respectively at the end of the coverage period.

However, the limited number of independent media outlets remaining has affected the diversity of content online, as has increased self-censorship (see B1, B4, and B6). [97] Media ownership is highly concentrated, and several major media outlets are affiliated with the ruling CPP.

B8 0-6 pts	
Do conditions impede users' ability to mobilize, form communities, and campaign, particularly on political and social issues?	**4** / 6

Amid heightened restrictions on freedom of assembly, communities, NGOs, and activists have turned to petition websites and social media, particularly Facebook, as platforms for advocacy and to organize assemblies. However, repressive laws, arrests, prosecutions, and increased harassment around digital campaigns have undermined the use of the internet for mobilization (see C2, C3, and C7).

The government's monitoring of social media and frequent arrests of users for their online political activity have impeded Cambodians' ability to mobilize and campaign on political issues (see C3 and C5). In October 2020, authorities threatened at least six journalists reporting on protests coinciding with the anniversary of the Paris Peace Agreements, which marked the end of the civil war; the journalists were told to stop shooting live footage and to surrender their phones and cameras. [98] In September 2021, Prime Minister Hun Sen tapped into a private Zoom call between former CNRP leaders, many of whom live in exile, to warn them that he had been monitoring them and to warn them against continuing their "disruptive activities." He then stated that approximately 20 of their previous phone calls had been tapped. [99]

Social media and online petitions have been used to draw attention to issues around gender equality. For instance, NGOs drafted and disseminated online petitions during the coverage period that called on the government to protect the rights of women to freely assemble and to immediately cease using violence against them for exercising their rights, [100] and to stop using violence, including sexual harassment, against the Nagaworld strikers, most of whom are women. [101] In April 2020, NGOs signed an online joint statement calling on the authorities to prioritize the needs of those at increased risk of gender-based violence. [102]

Throughout the coverage period, NGOs have also collaborated online and drafted several joint statements, open letters, and recommendations to the government on a range of issues, including the 2022 commune council elections, [103] impunity for crimes committed against journalists, [104] and democratic reform. [105]

C. Violations of User Rights

C1 0-6 pts	
Do the constitution or other laws fail to protect rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and press freedom, including on the internet, and are they enforced by a judiciary that lacks independence?	**1** / 6

Although some articles in the constitution guarantee freedom of expression, constitutional amendments passed in 2018 undermine these rights, and the legal framework imposes significant restrictions on press freedom and freedom of expression, including online. [106]

Amendments to the constitution and the criminal code [107] adopted in February 2018 restrict fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression online. [108] In particular, amendments to Articles 42 and 49 of the constitution state that individuals and political parties should only conduct activities that uphold Cambodia's "national interest." [109] The broad, vague wording of the amendments leaves them open to abuse, as any legitimate online discourse could be deemed unconstitutional if it ostensibly impacts the national interest.

In April 2020, the Cambodian government passed the Law on the Management of the Nation in a State of Emergency to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. This law empowers the government to monitor information online, ban or restrict news and media sharing, and implement other measures it deems necessary. [110]

A 2019 draft Law on Access to Information [111] contained protections for whistleblowers and had the potential to positively impact free expression online if approved and enforced. However, an updated draft released to the public in August 2019 raised concerns about the law's adherence to international human rights standards, [112] as well as its use of broad and unclear standards that could threaten access of information and freedom of expression. [113] For example, the law narrowly defines the type of information and institutions it applies to; lacks effective oversight procedures; permits public authorities to deny disclosure in various overly broad situations; and contains a criminal libel and defamation provision. [114] In August 2020, the law was finalized and was set to be approved by the Council of Ministers. [115] It had not yet been signed at the end of the coverage period, though as of November 2021, it was reportedly in the final stage of review and due to be expedited. [116]

In January 2021, the General Commissariat of the National Police issued a directive barring journalists from filming, recording, or livestreaming ongoing police investigations and other duties performed by the police. [117] If journalists are found to be in violation of this decree, authorities can take legal action against them under the Press Law. Three days before this

directive was established, Information Minister Khieu Kanharith threatened journalists who took photos and covered news related to authorities in "prohibited areas." [118] The new directive is vaguely worded and open to broad interpretation, whereby journalists could be arrested for undertaking legitimate reporting and investigative activities.

Other directives have been presented in provinces outside of Phnom Penh. In November 2021, Mao Thonin, the newly appointed governor of Kampot, ordered the provincial information department to increase its monitoring of journalists. Journalists were also required to report to that department before reporting on issues within Kampot. Following public outcry, the information minister called the directive "wrong" and warned that it may violate Article 40 of the constitution. [119]

In May 2021, during the previous coverage period, the Ministry of Information issued a letter warning journalists they would face legal action if they broadcasted live within treatment centers, hospitals, or in areas with the most stringent COVID-19 lockdown measures. [120] This directive came a day after livestreamed interviews with COVID-19 patients and ambulance drivers waiting to access a mass treatment site were shared on Facebook.

C2 0-4 pts

Are there laws that assign criminal penalties or civil liability for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards?	**1** / 4

While free expression protections are enshrined in the constitution, expression is nonetheless threatened by provisions of Cambodian law, notably under parts of the criminal code. [121]

Recently passed laws and pending legislation impose a range of civil liability and criminal penalties. The NIG subdecree—which has yet to be implemented as of May 2022—imposes hefty financial penalties and media license suspension on NIG operators or ISPs who fail to comply with any of the stipulated provisions (see A3 and B3). Fines range from 50 million ($12,140) to 100 million riels ($24,280) for individuals, and from 500 million ($122,400) to one billion riels ($242,800) for legal entities. The NIG subdecree also includes a vague catch-all penalty clause, which subjects any natural or legal person to punishment under "applicable laws" for committing offenses that "affect national security, social order, or national revenue." [122] While the final version of the NIG subdecree added a judicial appeal process, NGOs have noted that the Cambodian judiciary lacks independence. [123]

In August 2020, the government released the draft Law on Public Order, which restricts freedom of expression online by prohibiting the use of writing, images, and other content on

social media that endangers national tradition and dignity. [124] The draft law targets women and LGBT+ people by criminalizing wearing clothes that are "too short" or "revealing" in public spaces, including online spaces. Individuals can be fined 100,000 ($24) to 500,000 riels ($121) and imprisoned from one to six days for engaging in prohibited activities. [125] The bill had not been passed by the end of the coverage period.

The government's revised draft Law on Cybercrime —which an August 2020 leak revealed had been heavily revised and broadened in scope—raised alarm from rights groups for its potential to intensify the government's crackdown on free expression (see C6). [126] While the draft law outlaws a few genuine issues such as child sexual abuse imagery, Article 45 permits authorities to fine or imprison persons if they knowingly make or spread a "false statement or disinformation through information technology," potentially justifying arrests for allegedly false information about national security, public health or safety, relations between Cambodia and other countries, the outcome of a national election, public confidence in the functioning of the government, or other sensitive political issues. [127] If passed, the law would impose a prison sentence of two to three years and a fine from 4 million ($970) to 10 million riels ($2,430) for those allegedly spreading disinformation, [128] and a one- to six-month prison sentence and a fine of 100,000 ($24) to one million riels ($243) for defamation offenses, online or offline (see C1). [129] As of September 2022, after the coverage period, the draft was reportedly nearly final. [130]

Under Article 495 of the criminal code, individuals can be arrested for incitement to disturb public order or affecting the dignity of individuals and public officials—a broadly worded provision that can be used to prosecute online critics of the government. [131] Articles 305 and 307, [132] which govern defamation and public insult respectively, are frequently used against those engaged in online discourse. Under the criminal code, individuals can also be prosecuted in connection with written documents or pictures that are released online unintentionally or without their consent. [133] Those convicted for defamation or public insult can be fined up to $2,500. [134] Defamation by media outlets, which is covered in the 1995 Press Law, is punishable with a fine of between $250 to $1,200, and outlets convicted must publish a retraction. [135] People can face prison time in connection with online expression under a variety of criminal charges including forgery, which carries a penalty of up to 10 years' imprisonment, and incitement to disturb social security or discriminate against a person or group, punishable by up to two and three years in prison, respectively. [136]

A 2018 amendment to the criminal code introduced a lèse-majesté offense (Article 437) that criminalizes defamation of, insults of, and threats against the king. The crime is punishable by

between one and five years in prison and a fine of $500 to $2,500. It also applies to media outlets carrying allegedly insulting content.

The 2015 Law on Telecommunications further increased government control over the information and communication technologies (ICT) sector and threatened the rights to privacy and freedom of expression. Using telecommunications to plan criminal activity or damage property can result in a prison sentence of up to six months and fines of up to $8,800. Article 80 punishes the "establishment, installation, and utilization of equipment in the telecommunications sector" leading to "national insecurity" with 7 to 15 years in prison.

The 2015 Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations (LANGO) contains provisions—including Article 24, which requires NGOs to act neutrally toward political parties—that have the potential to restrict freedom of expression, including online.

Article 1 of the current Press Law "assures freedom of the press and freedom of publication in conformity with Articles 31 and 41 of the constitution," but the law does not explicitly cover online media. The law also allows civil action against broadly defined activities; for example, it restricts content that does not promote "the good custom of society" under Article 14, [137] violations of which can incur a fine of between $250 to $1,200. [138]

In December 2020, the government announced that updates to the Press Law were being drafted, though they were not released as of the end of the coverage period. [139]

The government has signaled its intent to legislate so-called fake news. [140] In March 2019, Prime Minister Hun Sen called on relevant ministries to consider drafting a law. [141] Later that year, the Ministry of Information began research to inform new policies related to the dissemination of false news. [142]

Different articles of the criminal code include charges for "plotting," "defamation," "falsifying information," and "incitement to commit a felony". [143]

Article 11 of the March 2021 Law on Measures to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 and other Severe and Dangerous Contagious Diseases [144] imposes a prison sentence of up to five years and a fine of up to 20 million riels ($4,860) for "intentionally obstructing" the implementation of COVID-19 measures. Though Article 11 does not explicitly restrict online freedoms, authorities have already used this provision to target and silence online speech relating to COVID-19 and vaccines (see C3). [145]

C3 0-6 pts

Are individuals penalized for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards?	1 / 6

Prosecutions for online speech continued as the government targeted dissenting voices in the political opposition and among the general public. Individuals faced several charges, including defamation, insult of a public official, and incitement to commit a felony. [146]

Authorities continued to arrest and prosecute CNRP members for their online activities. In March 2022, a court convicted 20 CNRP members over their opposition activism, including criticism of the government posted on social media. Twelve of those sentenced were already detained and sentenced to five years' imprisonment; seven were currently in exile and sentenced in absentia to 10 years in prison. [147] More convictions were issued in June 2022, after the coverage period, with 50 people receiving prison terms of five to eight years; the trial reportedly dealt with social media comments critical of the government. [148] In March 2021, during the previous coverage period, nine former CNRP members were sentenced in absentia to between 20 and 25 years in prison. [149] The courts issued Sam Rainsy multiyear prison sentences in each set of convictions.

In February 2022, CNRP activist Voeurn Veasna was sentenced to a year in prison for incitement over Facebook posts in which he criticized the government's pandemic response and said Prime Minister Hun Sen sought to appoint his son as his successor. [150] In May 2022, the Phnom Penh Appeal Court upheld the verdict. [151] Seven CNRP activists were sentenced in absentia to 18 months' imprisonment in September 2021 for Facebook posts made in 2020 in which they allegedly criticized the government's COVID-19 response. [152]

Previously, authorities arrested and laid charges against CNRP members ahead of Sam Rainsy's attempted return to Cambodia in November 2019. [153] The Ministry of Interior stated that anyone posting messages in support of Rainsy on social media would be arrested; [154] between September and November 2019, approximately 30 supporters were arrested, charged, and detained. [155] The government also summoned over 139 CNRP members in November 2020 to stand a mass trial for "plotting" to overthrow the government and "incitement" to commit serious social chaos. [156] Prosecutors submitted private communications and private social media messages between CNRP members about organizing Sam Rainsy's return to Cambodia, quotes from party officials at media interviews, and Facebook posts as evidence. [157]

In August 2021, prominent union leader Rong Chhun was fined and received a two-year prison sentence; [158] He was arrested in July 2020 after he posted on Facebook on behalf of the Cambodia Watchdog Council, detailing irregularities in border demarcations at the border with Vietnam; [159] the Border Affairs Committee later issued a statement claiming that Rong Chhun's findings were fake news. [160] In November 2021, an appeal court reduced his sentence to time served, suspending the remainder [161] and allowing his release. [162]

Internet users continued to face arrests and convictions for their online activity. In November 2021, a 16-year-old boy with autism—who is the son of detained CNRP official Kak Komphear—was arrested and convicted for criticizing government leaders through a voice message in a Telegram group. [163] His sentence, including an eight-month prison term, was upheld by the Phnom Penh Appeal Court in March 2022. [164] In August 2021, farmer Nguon Ly was arrested and charged with incitement for posting videos on Facebook in which he criticized government policies regulating the importation of goods from Thailand. He was sentenced to 10 months' imprisonment within days of his arrest. [165] In October 2021, a government official was arrested at his home by plainclothes officers after claiming on Facebook that the land management minister committed sexual violence against two women in a rural province. [166] In February 2022, a man was summoned to the police station for questioning over comments he made on Facebook criticizing the local police for demolishing a road in his village which also functioned as a levee. The man was later released but was forced to issue a public apology and to refrain from posting such content in the future. [167] In January 2022, three social media users were summoned and forced to issue public apologies for saying that Phnom Penh firefighters engaged in corruption. [168]

Arrests for online activities related to sharing allegedly false information about COVID-19 or criticizing the government's response following waves of infection continued during the coverage period. In July 2021, an individual was arrested after he made several comments on Facebook and TikTok criticizing the government's issuance of vaccination cards. He was detained and later charged with incitement. [169] In August 2021, a fisherman was arrested and charged with incitement for a TikTok video in which he criticized the government's handling of the COVID-19 outbreak. [170]

Individuals are arrested specifically for their online posts about government officials. In October 2020, during the previous coverage period, former monk Voeun Kimlon was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment for uploading videos on YouTube containing purportedly false information about government officials, including Prime Minister Hun Sen. [171]

Women are increasingly arrested for their online posts. In June 2021, an online lotion vendor was arrested for allegedly discussing the effects of sexual harassment on Facebook. [172]

Journalists across Cambodia continued to be arrested or harassed for their online reporting during the coverage period. In September 2021, the defense minister instructed local authorities to take legal action against Youn Chhiv, an online news publisher and journalist of the Koh Kong Hot News site, over posts on the outlet's Facebook page criticizing authorities for forcibly evicting residents and destroying crops, including his. Two days later, the Koh Kong Provincial Court charged and convicted Youn Chhiv for incitement to commit a felony and sentenced him to one year in prison. [173] In July 2021, a journalist working for Siem Reap Breaking News was arrested and had his identification document confiscated after he made numerous Facebook posts criticizing the Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine and the government's pandemic response. [174] In November 2021, two journalists from Los Seng News were arrested and charged with incitement after they reported on a protest in which demonstrators called for the release of imprisoned relatives. They were later released after issuing a public apology and placed under judicial supervision, as was the outlet's publisher. [175] In May 2022, a producer with Facebook-based TCN TV was arrested and charged with incitement to discriminate and defamation over a Facebook livestream sharing corruption allegations. [176]

Authorities continue to charge users under the lèse-majesté amendment of 2018 to Article 437 of the criminal code. In July 2021, activist Ly Sohom was convicted on lèse-majesté charges after allegedly posting photoshopped images that depicted Hun Sen and the monarch as dogs. His conviction and two-year prison sentence were upheld in November 2021. [177] Also in July 2021, the Phnom Penh Court of Appeal upheld the convictions of two former CNRP officials, Kong Bunheang and Hang Seng, on lèse-majesté charges and confirmed their three-year prison sentence. Both were arrested in Battambang Province in October 2019 after they allegedly insulted the king and the queen mother on Facebook. They were convicted by the Phnom Penh Court in March 2021, which additionally ordered them to pay a fine of $1,500. [178]

C4 0-4 pts	
Does the government place restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption?	**3**/4

Encryption technology is freely available. There are some limits on anonymous communication.

The authorities cracked down on retailers who failed to register SIM card owners in 2017. [179] The 2015 Regulation on Cell Phone Data threatens suspensions and fines for mobile service providers who do not register the identities of customers. [180] The regulation obliges companies to supply police with identification details of SIM card holders on request. [181] In 2016, a TRC spokesman said that the government would monitor telecommunications operators' databases to prevent unregistered SIM cards from being distributed. [182] According to the TRC, the stricter implementation of the regulation led to a decrease in the number of mobile subscribers between 2016 and 2018. [183] [184]

Responding to heightened surveillance, Cambodians have increasingly turned to encrypted applications such as WhatsApp to communicate. Government officials also increasingly use encrypted applications. [185] However, under the NIG subdecree, ISPs will be required to make users complete online forms with accurate, identifiable information, including names and birthdates, thus undermining anonymous communication. [186]

C5 0-6 pts	
Does state surveillance of internet activities infringe on users' right to privacy?	**2** / 6

The government monitors residents' publicly visible activity online and extralegally surveils private communications, despite the existence of some legal safeguards.

Article 97 of the 2015 Law on Telecommunications criminalizes eavesdropping by private individuals but permits secret surveillance with approval from an undefined "legitimate authority." The law includes no legal or procedural safeguards and appears to authorize undeclared monitoring of "any private speech via telecommunications." [187] The passing of the NIG subdecree allows for the government's unfettered surveillance of individuals' online activity, but the extent to which this law will be implemented is not yet known (see A3 and B3).

Private communications have been monitored and published online to discredit public figures in recent years. While members of the ruling CPP have been targeted, individuals affiliated with the CNRP have more often been affected. For example, in October 2017, the progovernment online media outlet Fresh News published purported leaks of CNRP lawmakers' private conversations; Fresh News obtained the messages from the Sei Ha Facebook page, an anonymous page often accused of being a vehicle for government propaganda. [188]

There is also evidence that the government can monitor private phone calls. In January 2018, amid claims of illicit affairs allegedly involving high-ranking government officials, the prime minister implied that the government could access private phone records. [189] Further, the prosecution in the ongoing mass trial against CNRP members has relied, in part, on tapped private phone conversations for evidence in favor of convictions (see C3).

The monitoring of CNRP members' private communications continued during the coverage period. In December 2020, former CNRP activist Kong Mas was arrested in connection with the mass trial of CNRP officials on "plotting" charges. The authorities confiscated his cell phone. Later, he discovered his Facebook passwords were changed and his account had been hacked. The hackers used his account to send messages to other CNRP members in an apparent attempt to manipulate recipients of the messages into incriminating themselves. [190]

In 2019, the National Police announced they were monitoring the social media activity of CNRP supporters ahead of Sam Rainsy's expected return to Cambodia, while the Ministry of Interior confirmed the government was monitoring phone communications between Rainsy and his supporters. [191] [192] In September 2019, two CNRP members, Sun Bunthon and Nou Phoeun, were questioned by police; officials addressed the transcript of their private phone conversation, which focused on Cambodia's political situation and Rainsy's expected return, during questioning. [193]

In recent years, authorities have stated on numerous occasions that they were monitoring online content. [194] In 2017, the National Police announced that it was monitoring Facebook to detect and deter "rebel movements against the government." [195] The ruling CPP's five-year strategic plan, adopted in January 2018, strongly emphasizes the need for increased surveillance. [196] The 2018 interministerial Prakas on Website and Social Media Control gives extensive surveillance powers to the government and mandates that the MPTC, the Ministry of Information, and the Ministry of Interior form a special unit to effectively "police" social media, ostensibly to fight against fake news (see B3). [197] In October 2019, the Ministry of Interior's information technology department announced plans to create a Security Operation Center (SOC), which it said would monitor online threats on all digital platforms. [198] In January 2021, the Ministry of Information announced its intentions to increase monitoring of TikTok and private communications platforms, including WhatsApp, Telegram, and Messenger. [199] As a result of this increased monitoring, the government has targeted individuals for their speech on Telegram and a Ministry of Labor government official was fired for spreading "fake news" via Telegram voice messages about the number of COVID-19 infections in Cambodia. [200]

In September 2021, the Ministry of Interior and Chinese law enforcement officials agreed to form an "anti-crime plan" whereby the Chinese government will provide the National Police with equipment, including biometric surveillance technology. [201] This has led to fears that the surveillance technology could be used against dissidents or those perceived critical of the Cambodian government.

C6 0-6 pts

Does monitoring and collection of user data by service providers and other technology companies infringe on users' right to privacy?	**1** / 6

Service providers are required to provide communication information to the government, though this process lacks judicial oversight. Article 6 of the 2015 Law on Telecommunications mandates that all telecommunications operators provide information and communication technology service data to the MPTC. [202] There is no requirement for a judicial warrant or other safeguards, and the law places no limits on how long data can be stored. [203]

The NIG subdecree contains a catch-all clause requiring NIG operators to maintain technical records, lists of internet protocol (IP) addresses, and internet traffic records (see A3, B3, and C2). Under this clause, bulk data must be collected and maintained with no clear purpose. [204]

The draft Law on Cybercrime obliges all ISPs to retain and maintain the data of internet users for a minimum of 180 days and obliges ISPs to provide the user-identifiable data upon request from the competent authorities (see C2). [205]

The interministerial Prakas on Website and Social Media Control also obliges ISPs to "install software programs and equip internet surveillance tools to easily filter and block any social media accounts or pages" deemed illegal. [206] The Prakas does not provide for any right to challenge a decision taken pursuant to its mandates, nor does it provide for judicial recourse for users whose rights are negatively affected by its implementation. [207] There were no updates on its implementation during the coverage period.

In June 2021, the Asia Times reported that Chinese government officials had sought access to the personal data collected by Cambodia's "Stop COVID-19" contact tracing system. [208] The MPTC and the Health Ministry denied the outlet's reporting. [209] The allegations highlighted the lack of privacy safeguards in the system. [210]

C7 0-5 pts

Are individuals subject to extralegal intimidation or physical violence by state authorities or any other actor in relation to their online activities?	2/5

Journalists, activists, and individuals face increasing violence and threats in Cambodia. A threat-assessment survey conducted by the CCIM in 2021 found that 39 percent of surveyed journalists reported being verbally attacked or physically assaulted while carrying out their duties, while 56 percent said they had experienced legal harassment resulting from their work. [211]

Attacks and threats against journalists and individuals are commonplace. In July 2021, an online journalist and head of CHR TV Online received an anonymous phone call with threats of legal action after he reported on land clearing. [212] Also in July, another online news reporter, Los Seng, from Los Seng News, received threats of criminal legal action from local authorities over his reporting on a land dispute. The Kandal governor also reportedly gave instructions to the local authorities to prevent Los Seng from continuing to report on the case. [213] In September 2021, a VOD journalist was harassed and threatened by authorities when covering an ongoing land dispute. He was later followed and harassed by police officers. [214] Also in September, activist Touch Srey Nich was attacked by a group of assailants, possibly in retaliation for an interview she gave with RFA. [215]

Numerous attacks against journalists and activists were also reported during the previous coverage period. In September 2020, four online news journalists were attacked by timber traders; the journalists had previously identified the timber traders as perpetrators of forestry crimes in the area. [216] In August 2020, activist Chheoun Daravy was arrested and shoved into a car by plainclothes officers after she live-streamed her experience dealing with security personnel while protesting for union leader Rong Chhun's release from prison. In March 2021, a journalist and publisher of digital news outlet Anachak Khmer was physically assaulted by unknown assailants while he slept outside of a temple in Siem Reap. He suffered severe injuries to his face and head and alleged that his attack was premeditated in retaliation against his articles on illegal logging in the area. [217]

In June 2020, during the previous coverage period, Thai prodemocracy activist Wanchalearm Satsaksit disappeared in Phnom Penh. After escaping Thailand during the country's 2014 military coup, Wanchalearm fled to Cambodia, where he maintained his online criticism of the Thai government. In early June, he posted a video on Facebook criticizing Thailand's prime minister. A day later, witnesses reported seeing his abduction at the hands of unidentified armed men. In July 2020, Cambodian authorities claimed that they had no information

regarding Wanchalearm's abduction or his whereabouts, which were still unknown at the end of the coverage period. [218]

Online harassment is increasingly common in Cambodia. A November 2021 survey of 700 Cambodian internet users found that 38 percent reported experiencing online harassment, with LGBT+ people and women more likely to be sexually harassed. [219]

Government authorities also pressure people directly based on their online activity and have orchestrated smear campaigns online to intimidate and harass users (see B5). In a September 2021 speech, Prime Minister Hun Sen threatened to sue political analysts who criticize the government, [220] specifically threatening a lawsuit against political analyst Seng Sary for a July 2021 Facebook post listing conditions for the formation of a unity government. Hun Sen also threatened him with arrest if he did not take down his post and said a warrant had been issued against him. [221] The prime minister later retracted his comments and asked the courts to stop legal proceedings against Seng Sary. [222] During the previous coverage period, in July 2020, the progovernment *Khmer Times* reported that the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO) used a "misleading and biased" methodology to develop a report on the indebtedness of garment factory workers affected by COVID-19. [223]

C8 0-3 pts	
Are websites, governmental and private entities, service providers, or individual users subject to widespread hacking and other forms of cyberattack?	**1** / 3

Social media accounts and websites face technical attacks in Cambodia. Targets include government officials, civil society leaders, activists, and media outlets.

In March 2019, the YouTube and email accounts of activist monk Luon Sovath, who used social media to document social justice issues in Cambodia, were hacked. [224] In July 2018, the website of the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) was reportedly hacked by a group called TurkSiberKarargh. [225] In February 2019, Prime Minister Hun Sen's official Facebook page was reportedly hacked. Hackers posted a message from the account threatening to block Facebook in Cambodia and deleted some of the page's posts. [226] Facebook pages of several media outlets, including the *Khmer Times*, Bayon Television, and BTV, have all been reportedly hacked in recent years. [227]

There are also reports of hacking attempts by actors abroad. A July 2018 report by the US-based cybersecurity firm FireEye stated that a Chinese hacking group known as Rancor

repeatedly targeted Cambodia and other southeast Asian countries between December 2018 and June 2019 in an attempt to compromise online infrastructure related to election administration and steal confidential information. [228] In November 2020, a cybersecurity firm, Recorded Future's Insikt Group, reported that known Vietnamese hacker groups created malware documents which could extract data from the Cambodian government. [229] In December 2020, the MPTC warned Telegram users of a new hacking scheme whereby hackers created inauthentic accounts under the name of senior government officials or other well-known individuals and sent links containing malware to users. If opened, the malware allows the hackers to obtain remote access to control the person's device and steal their personal data. [230] In May 2021, the US Justice Department indicted four Chinese hackers with cyberespionage for targeting Cambodian government ministries in 2018. The hackers reportedly stole data on discussions between the Cambodian and Chinese governments on the use of the Mekong River. [231]

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Footnotes

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

23/100 **Not Free**

Internet Freedom Score

44/100 **Partly Free**

Freedom in the World Status

Not Free

Networks Restricted

No

Social Media Blocked

No

Websites Blocked

Yes

Pro-government Commentators

Yes

Users Arrested

Yes

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