



Tracking Error 404: IFJ-SAMSN Guide to Monitoring Internet Shutdowns

In today’s wired world, shutting down online access has direct economic, social and psychological consequences, and matters to both states and citizens alike. However, internet shutdowns strike at the very foundation of freedom of expression and have major implications for the media. This is why journalists, writers and bloggers are at the forefront of campaigns demanding free access to the internet.

What exactly is an internet shutdown?

When the internet or internet-based mobile applications such as WhatsApp or Viber are deliberately shutdown, disrupted or slowed down, it is called an ‘internet shutdown’. This intentional disruption can be ordered by government authorities or carried out even because of threats by non-state parties such as religious extremists or militant groups, to control communication or content online. Other names for internet shutdowns are: ‘internet blackout’; ‘network shutdown’; ‘kill switch’ or ‘virtual curfew’.

Monitoring Internet Shutdowns

The first step of the IFJ-SAMSN campaign is to gather reliable information about the problem. Journalists and their unions need to monitor internet shutdowns to systematically gather evidence in order to gauge the extent and nature of shutdowns. Since shutdowns are not always country-wide or even state- or province-wide, it is important to monitor them on a local basis.

```
Fri Dec 23 2016 00:04:18 GMT+0300 (+03)
https://twitter.com 5003 DOWN
https://youtube.com 5007 DOWN
https://facebook.com 5008 DOWN
https://instagram.com 942 UP
https://drive.google.com 579 UP
https://vimeo.com 597 UP
```

There are four methods to keep track of internet shutdowns around us.

- 1. Monitor social media:** Internet users are among the first to write about shutdowns in other places. Word spreads fast on social media, and tracking these platforms, especially those on the mobile phone, like WhatsApp, for any updates about difficulties in accessing the internet is always a good starting point.





- 2. Follow local media of trouble spots:** When internet shutdowns are implemented, the news about it is normally carried by local media in regional languages. So, following local media of trouble spots location is useful.
- 3. Vigilance before and during events:** Internet shutdowns are more likely to occur when there are security or law and order challenges - such as potentially huge anti-government gatherings, funerals of leaders, protests, clashes, demonstrations, widespread criticism of government and mass human rights abuses. Keep an eye on such incidents, remaining vigilant about the possibility of internet shutdowns by noticing them early. Noticing trends will also help predict when shutdowns are most likely, and allow for preemptive action.
- 4. Develop sources in ICT community:** Internet shutdown orders are almost always sent by the telecommunication authority and implemented by the internet service providers (ISPs). So developing sources at the telecommunication authority, ISPs and telecommunication companies is a good way to keep an eye on internet shutdowns and verify them.

Documenting Internet Shutdowns

Tracking shutdowns is an important first step, and systematic recording using standardized terms will help provide data that can feed evidence-based, effective campaigns. How can internet shutdowns be documented?

- 1. Screenshots:** When an internet shutdown is implemented, users normally get Error 404 (file not found) or Error 403 (forbidden) or Error 408 (Request Timeout) or Error 503 (service unavailable) or 504 (Gateway Timeout) message when they try to access the internet or blocked websites. Users may also receive 'Cannot find server' or 'DNS Error' messages. To keep a record of these, screenshots of the message where the URL and the date/time visible should be taken. Mobile Apps normally gives message that there is no internet connection or says the device is offline. File screenshots in a folder according to date and time.



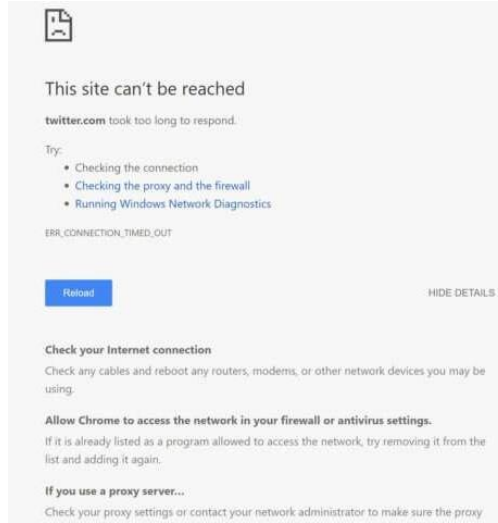
403. That's an error.

Your client does not have permission to access this page.
/search?hl=de&q=
server. (Client IP #





- Paper trails:** Ask ISPs or telecommunication companies for a copy of internet shutdown orders. They may agree to give a copy by hiding their identity in the order. Also keep a copy of any news in local media related to the internet shutdowns or screenshots of users' posts and status on social media about the internet shutdowns.



- News-reports:** Retain news-reports (URLs and screenshots) of any reports of internet shutdowns. News-reports of the impact of the shutdowns are also useful to include.

What can you do with this information?

Alert IFJ/SAMSN and other internet freedom bodies: Once there are screenshots and/or paper trails, alert the following organizations with the date and place from where internet or websites are inaccessible, and a list of websites or mobile apps that were inaccessible. Provide any further information you may have.

Organizations to alert for internet shutdowns

IFJ: ifj@ifj-asia.org
SAMSN: ifjsouthasia@gmail.com
Access Now: shutdown@accessnow.org

<https://facebook.com> 5003 DOWN
<https://twitter.com> 5003 DOWN

