

Uganda's Move to Procure Social Media Tracking Tool: A New Threat to Digital Rights and Freedoms

BY NOELYN NASSUUNA AND HELEN NAMYALO KIMBUGWE

A new digital social media tracking tool

On April 8, 2025, [The Daily Monitor](#) reported that the Government of Uganda is procuring a digital tool capable of tracking social media activity. While full details remain undisclosed, this development raises serious concerns about privacy, surveillance, and consequences on the digital civic space particularly as the country approaches the 2026 general elections.

This development signals a troubling shift toward institutionalized digital surveillance, potentially targeting outspoken citizens, activists, human rights defenders (HRDs), journalists, and civil society organizations (CSOs) who rely on digital platforms for advocacy, mobilization, and truth-telling.

Historical Context: Elections, Social Media, and Suppression in Uganda

Uganda has a documented history of clamping down on digital freedoms during electoral cycles. In previous elections (notably 2016 and 2021), authorities imposed social media shutdowns, increased restrictions on digital platforms like Facebook, and used legislation like the Computer Misuse Act to arrest and silence dissenting voices.

The Act, originally framed to address cybercrime—has frequently been invoked to prosecute online critics, especially those challenging government policies or engaging in political commentary. The potential addition of a sophisticated social media monitoring tool could significantly amplify state surveillance capabilities, leading to greater censorship, arbitrary arrests, and election interference.

Implications for Civil Liberties and Democratic Participation

The procurement of this tool threatens constitutional rights, including:

- Right to privacy (Article 27)
- Freedom of expression (Article 29)
- Freedom of association and peaceful assembly
- Access to information

Should the government proceed without transparent safeguards, legal oversight, or public accountability, this tool may be weaponized to suppress civic engagement, intimidate online users, and control public discourse.

What DPI Is Doing to Respond

The Defenders Protection Initiative (DPI) is actively addressing these threats by:

- Conducting digital security clinics for HRDs, journalists, and CSOs.
- Offering emergency digital support for individuals facing surveillance risks.
- Engaging in policy advocacy for transparent, rights-respecting digital governance.
- Coalition Building with digital rights actors, legal experts, and civil society coalitions to ensure unified resistance and defence of the digital civic space.

How Citizens and Activists Can Protect Themselves

In this emerging context, civil society actors, HRDs, and ordinary citizens must take proactive steps to protect their digital identities and freedom of expression:

- Use encrypted communication tools such as Signal, Element, or Session for sensitive discussions.
- Enable Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) on all social media and email accounts.
- Utilize privacy-enhancing tools, including VPNs and browsers like Tor and Brave, to limit surveillance and tracking.
- Stay updated on digital security practices through community-led training and peer learning.
- Advocate collectively for transparency, legal oversight and public transparency on the purpose, scope, and oversight of any surveillance technology being procured

Call to Action

The government's move to procure a social media monitoring tool is a critical moment for Uganda's digital democracy. While officials may cite national security, the lack of transparency and Uganda's past digital repression raise urgent red flags.

We must remain vigilant, informed, and organized. Civil society, journalists, and everyday citizens must come together to demand legal safeguards, resist the normalization of surveillance, and defend Uganda's constitutional rights.

Only through collective action, digital resilience, and strategic advocacy can we protect our digital space and ensure a free, fair, and open environment ahead of the 2026 elections.