



CHAPTER
ONE
FOUNDATION

INTERNET, WEBSITE & NETWORK MONITORING REPORT



REPORTING PERIOD:

17th - 20th

AUGUST 2026



Monitoring digital access.



Protecting digital rights.



Strengthening democracy in Zambia.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Following the partial internet shutdown experienced during Zambia's 2021 general elections, Chapter One Foundation (COF) is monitoring Zambia's internet ahead of, during, and after the 2026 General Elections. The monitoring covers 57 websites, four instant messaging applications, and network performance across selected mobile network operators and Internet Service Providers (ISPs).

The initiative seeks to identify and document potential disruptions to access to information and digital communications, including website blocking, service unavailability, network performance, and other unusual network performance that may affect users' ability to access online information and communicate during the electoral period.

Monitoring contributes to the protection of digital rights, freedom of expression, access to information, and electoral integrity by generating independent technical evidence on the accessibility and performance of online services. Particular attention is being given to the period immediately preceding, during, and following the 2026 elections, when access to timely and reliable information is especially important for voters, journalists, civil society organisations, political actors, election observers, and the public.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The monitoring exercise uses OONI Probe and complementary network measurements to assess website accessibility, service availability, connection performance, and unusual network results across selected mobile network operators and internet service providers.

To strengthen the geographical coverage of the monitoring exercise, COF enlisted one provincial monitor in each of Zambia's provinces. Provincial monitors conduct regular network tests using standardised protocols and contribute locally generated data on website and service accessibility. This decentralised approach enables COF to identify whether potential disruptions are isolated to locations or networks or whether they occur across multiple provinces and service providers.

Findings are subjected to verification and evidence-preservation procedures to help distinguish technical faults, network anomalies, and service disruptions from potential intentional interference. An anomalous result is treated as an indicator requiring further investigation rather than conclusive evidence of censorship or intentional interference. This distinction is important because unusual network measurements can result from a range of factors, including temporary technical failures, DNS or routing problems, server-side outages, network congestion, measurement errors, or other infrastructure-related issues.

Where anomalous results are identified, COF applies verification and evidence-preservation procedures, including repeat measurements and comparison with complementary network observations where possible. This approach is intended to strengthen the reliability of findings and help distinguish ordinary technical problems from persistent or potentially intentional interference.

3.0 CONTEXT ANALYSIS

This report covers the period 17th to 20th August 2026, immediately after Zambia's 13th August 2026 General Elections, when the announcement of results, security operations, and possible legal challenges made access to reliable public information particularly important.

On 18th August 2026, the Electoral Commission of Zambia declared President Hakainde Hichilema the winner of the presidential election.¹ The declaration followed heightened tension after the temporary suspension of vote counting and results announcements on 14th August, following reports of violence and theft of election materials.² Although the suspension occurred before this reporting period, its effects remained relevant as the results process and public demand for verified information continued.

Consequently, on 19th August 2026, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern about reports of arrests and detentions of opposition members before and after the elections. The High Commissioner called for all arrests and related court proceedings to comply with international human rights standards and Zambian law, including prompt information about charges, access to legal representation and family contact, and timely appearance before a judge. These due process concerns are significant for the online information environment because restrictions on political actors and heightened public anxiety can increase reliance on digital platforms for credible, verified updates.³

Further concerns arose from the death of former Lunte Member of Parliament and former Cabinet Minister Mutotwe Kafwaya. On 19th August 2026, the Inspector General of Police confirmed that Mr Kafwaya had been identified by his family as the person fatally wounded during a shootout in Kabulonga on 14th August.

¹ Please see: [OpenZambia](#)

² Please see: [Mwebantu](#)

³ Please see: [United Nations](#)

Reports indicated that the security operation involved a residence used by National Reconciliation Party for Unity and Prosperity (NRPUP) presidential candidate Brian Mundubile. Authorities said police had come under fire and responded, while Mr Mundubile disputed that account. Given the conflicting accounts, this report does not draw conclusions about responsibility, but it notes the reported fatal shooting as a serious post-election development that increased the need for accurate, independently verified public information and a lawful, transparent investigation.⁴

During the same period, the Human Rights Commission of Zambia called on the Zambia Police Service and other law enforcement agencies to account for persons whose whereabouts remained unknown following election related arrests and security operations. The Commission urged that people in custody be promptly charged and brought before a competent court or released where no lawful basis for continued detention existed.⁵

Conclusively, the reporting period reflected a politically sensitive and tense environment. The most important risk indicator for possible internet disruption was the rampant online debate on what information was confirmed true and which was false. This was concerning, given the continued reliance of electoral stakeholders and the public on online platforms for access to official results, security related information, media reporting, and commentary on the electoral process. In this context, reliable access to digital communications is essential to the timely and peaceful dissemination of verified information, while helping to reduce the risk that rumors, misinformation, and unverified claims gain traction.

⁴ Please see: [News Diggers](#)

⁵ Please see: [HRC](#)

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 Website Availability

During the reporting period, Chapter One Foundation monitored 57 websites for accessibility and potential interference, conducting a total of 14,076 tests. Of these, 11,938 tests confirmed that the websites were accessible and functioning normally. A further 428 tests returned anomalous results that may indicate possible censorship, blocking, or other forms of network interference. However, these results are not conclusive and require further technical investigation and verification before any determination can be made about their cause. The remaining 1,710 tests failed to complete due to various technical or network-related reasons.

Overall, the majority of monitored websites remained accessible during the reporting period. However, the anomalous results and incomplete tests warrant continued monitoring and further technical analysis. While these findings do not, on their own, establish deliberate censorship or interference, they identify areas requiring closer observation to determine whether the results reflect isolated technical issues or emerging patterns of disruption. Continued measurement and verification will therefore be important in assessing whether such patterns could affect access to online information and public confidence in Zambia's digital environment.



4.2 Instant Messaging App Availability

During the reporting period, Chapter One Foundation monitored four instant-messaging applications and found that all four remained broadly accessible throughout the period. No widespread disruption affecting the monitored services was observed. Facebook Messenger was tested 521 times during the reporting period. Of these, 511 tests confirmed that the service was accessible, while 10 returned anomalous results. No outright failures were recorded.

Telegram underwent 523 tests, returning 510 accessible and 13 anomalous results. WhatsApp recorded 522 tests, of which 505 were accessible and 17 anomalous, while Signal had 516 tests with 498 accessible and 18 anomalous results.

Overall, the monitoring findings indicate that all four instant-messaging applications remained accessible throughout the reporting period, with no confirmed blocked tests recorded. Facebook Messenger recorded the highest accessibility rate, with approximately 98.1% of tests confirming successful access, followed by Telegram at approximately 97.5%, WhatsApp at approximately 96.7%, and Signal at approximately 96.5%. Signal nevertheless recorded the highest number of anomalous results among the four platforms.

The anomalous results observed across the monitored platforms may reflect intermittent connectivity, network performance irregularities, or other technical issues. However, these results do not, on their own, provide sufficient evidence of deliberate restrictions or service disruption. Overall, the available data does not indicate a systematic shutdown or blocking of the monitored instant messaging applications during the reporting period. However, continued monitoring and technical verification remain important to determine whether any recurring anomalies develop into identifiable patterns of interference.

INSTANT MESSAGING APPS REMAIN FULLY ACCESSIBLE

Telegram, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and Signal App were **accessible** on all the networks.

Telegram

✓ ACCESSIBLE

WhatsApp

✓ ACCESSIBLE

Facebook Messenger

✓ ACCESSIBLE

Signal App

✓ ACCESSIBLE

**STAY CONNECTED.
STAY INFORMED.**

Open and reliable communication channels are essential for access to information, safety, and participation for everyone.

Unrestricted access to messaging apps supports digital rights and freedom of expression.

Accessible platforms help people **connect**, share information and seek help.

Continuous monitoring ensures a **free, open** and **secure** internet.

**CONNECTED COMMUNITIES.
STRONGER DEMOCRACY.**

INSTANT MESSAGING (by network)

App	Airtel	Liquid	MTN	Starlink	Zamtel
WhatsApp	Accessible	Accessible	Accessible	Accessible	Accessible
Telegram	Accessible	Accessible	Accessible	Accessible	Accessible
Facebook Messenger	Accessible	Accessible	Accessible	Accessible	Accessible
Signal	Accessible	Accessible	Accessible	Accessible	Accessible

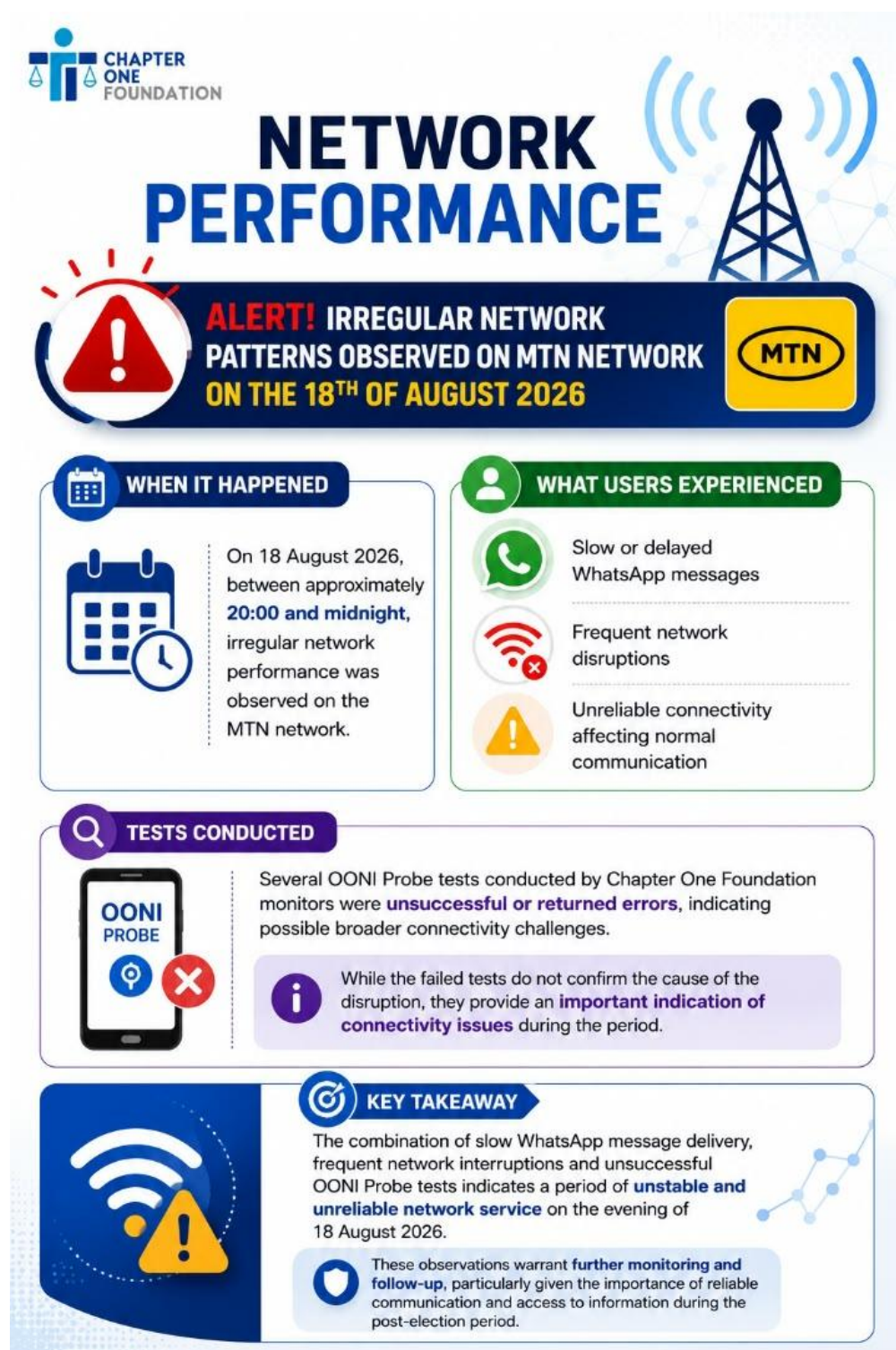
4.3 Network Speed Performance

Further, throughout this reporting period, between approximately 20:00 hours and midnight, irregular network performance was observed on the MTN network and Airtel network. The most notable concern was poor internet connectivity, particularly affecting WhatsApp. Messages were delivered slowly, and in some instances, were not received within the expected timeframe. Frequent network disruptions were also observed, affecting the reliability of normal communication and access to timely information.

This irregular network pattern lasted for three (3) days, starting from 18th August 2026 to 20th August 2026 and was only experienced in Lusaka. This was alarming, considering that it was the first time such irregular network patterns were observed and recorded since the inception of monitoring. What was further alarming was the period at which these occurrences were observed, considering the tense atmosphere post elections.

Chapter One Foundation monitors attempted to conduct network performance tests using the OONI Probe application to further assess the situation. However, several tests were inconclusive and returned errors rather than usable results. While failed tests alone cannot establish the specific cause of the disruption, they provide an important indication of connectivity challenges during the period. This was also notable as monitors had not previously experienced the application failing to operate to this extent due to poor network connectivity.

The combination of slow WhatsApp message delivery, frequent network interruptions and unsuccessful OONI Probe tests indicates a period of irregular and unreliable network performance during the reporting period. These observations warrant further monitoring and follow-up, particularly given the importance of reliable communication and access to information during the post-election period.



An infographic depicting the Network Speed Test findings for Lusaka.



An infographic depicting the Network Speed Test findings for Lusaka.

Additionally, the routine internet speed tests were conducted from 17th to 20th August 2026 to support censorship monitoring, particularly where website tests showed unusual results. The tests measured video quality, download speed, upload speed and latency across Airtel, MTN and Zamtel. Liquid and Starlink recorded no results during this reporting period and are therefore not included in the analysis.

Airtel recorded an average video quality of 1026p, a download speed of 15.7 Mbps, an upload speed of 5.6 Mbps and latency of 89 ms. In comparison to the previous week, Airtel's video quality decreased by 18%. The download speed improved by 52% while the upload speed decreased by 58%. Latency also decreased by 27%.

On the other hand, MTN recorded the highest video quality at 1200p, with a download speed of 11.2 Mbps, an upload speed of 20.2 Mbps and latency of 56 ms. In this reporting period, the video quality decreased by 22% compared to the previous period, while the download speed also decreased by 36%. The upload speed equally decreased by 63% while latency remained about the same.

Furthermore, Zamtel recorded download speed at 17 Mbps, while its upload speed was at 8.5 Mbps and its latency was the highest at 54 ms and the video quality was recorded at 707p. Zamtel recorded an increase of 68% in video quality as compared to the previous period. The download and upload speeds decreased significantly by 95% and 92% respectively. Latency remained almost the same as the previous reporting period.

Across Airtel, MTN, and Zamtel, the average video quality was approximately 978p, the average download speed was 14.3 Mbps, the average upload speed was 11.4 Mbps, and the average latency was 66.3 ms.

When compared with the recent SpeedGeo findings for Zambia, the average download speed of 14.3 Mbps was below the SpeedGeo average of 18.7 Mbps. The average upload speed of 11.4 Mbps was also substantially lower than SpeedGeo's reported average of 78 Mbps. However, the average latency of 66.3 ms was better than the SpeedGeo average of 79 ms, as lower latency indicates a faster response time.

Overall, Airtel, MTN, and Zamtel remained operational throughout the reporting period, although their performance varied across the key indicators. MTN recorded the highest video quality and upload speed, while Zamtel recorded the highest download speed and the lowest latency. Across the three networks, the average download and upload speeds remained below the SpeedGeo findings, although average latency was better. These results may point to temporary network conditions or local performance challenges and do not, on their own, indicate deliberate censorship or interference. Continued monitoring is therefore important to establish whether future irregularities are temporary technical faults or signs of targeted disruption.

NETWORK SPEEDS					
Network	Video	Download	Upload	Latency	vs previous
Airtel	1026	15.7	5.6	89	n/a
Liquid	0	0	0	0	n/a
MTN	1200	11.2	20.2	56	n/a
Starlink	0	0	0	0	n/a
Zamtel	707	16	8.5	54	n/a

NETWORK SPEED PERFORMANCE



Tests were conducted from 17th to 20th August 2026



**VIDEO
QUALITY**
(Average)



**DOWNLOAD
SPEED**
(Mbps)



**UPLOAD
SPEED**
(Mbps)



LATENCY
(ms)



1026p

↓ **18%**

vs previous week

15.7
Mbps

↑ **52%**

vs previous week

5.6
Mbps

↓ **58%**

vs previous week

89
ms

↓ **27%**

vs previous week



**HIGHEST
VIDEO QUALITY**



1200p

↓ **22%**

vs previous week

11.2
Mbps

↓ **36%**

vs previous week

20.2
Mbps

↓ **63%**

vs previous week

56
ms

— About the same
vs previous week



707p

↑ **68%**

vs previous week

17
Mbps

↓ **95%**

vs previous week

8.5
Mbps

↓ **92%**

vs previous week



HIGHEST LATENCY

54
ms

— About the same
vs previous week



**BEST OVERALL
PERFORMER**

MTN leads in video
quality, upload speed
and low latency.



**FASTEST
DOWNLOAD SPEED**

Zamtel recorded the
highest download speed
at 17 Mbps.



**STRONGEST
UPLOAD SPEED**

MTN recorded the
highest upload speed
at 20.2 Mbps.



**LOWEST
LATENCY**

Zamtel recorded the
lowest latency at
54 ms.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The findings from 17 to 20 August 2026 indicate that Zambia's online environment remained largely accessible during the post-election period. Most website tests confirmed normal access, while all four monitored instant messaging platforms were broadly available across the networks tested. Although some anomalous and incomplete results were recorded, the evidence does not indicate a widespread internet shutdown or systematic blocking of messaging services. However, the findings raise questions about whether network performance may have been affected by deliberate throttling or other forms of interference.

Airtel, MTN, and Zamtel remained operational, although network performance varied across video quality, download and upload speeds, and latency. The lower average download and upload speeds recorded during the monitoring period, compared with the SpeedGeo findings, may be attributable to temporary network conditions, congestion, or localised technical challenges rather than intentional interference. The absence of results for Liquid and Starlink, however, limits the comprehensiveness of the overall network performance assessment.

Given the continued public demand for reliable and timely election-related information, anomalous website and messaging-app results will continue to be monitored and technically verified. Ongoing evidence-based testing, together with systematic data preservation, will help distinguish routine network faults and temporary service disruptions from emerging patterns of targeted interference.