Platform Governance in Africa:

Emerging Models and Policy Priorities

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Introduction

Digital platforms have become the main way through which millions of Africans access news, organise politically, and take part in public life. Yet the companies that operate these platforms make consequential decisions about content, voice amplification, often with limited accountability to the communities they affect.

African governments have responded to this concentration of power in different ways. Nigeria has fined Meta for violations of consumer protection and data privacy law. South Africa has used competition law to examine how platforms affect the sustainability of local journalism. Uganda has maintained a long-running restriction on Facebook that began as an election dispute in January 2021, and has since become a broader assertion of digital sovereignty. No single approach has emerged, to reflect on how governments exercise their authority over platforms, what they can enforce, and what they believe platforms owe to the people who use them.

At the same time, platforms are reshaping content governance by relying more on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automated systems, while shifting moderation responsibilities onto users and civil society actors, often without the funding or support needed to make this workable. The result is a governance environment in which users and civil society are increasingly expected to flag, fact-check, and report harmful content, while decision-making power over what is amplified or removed remains concentrated within platforms.

This brief examines these dynamics across the region with a focus on three countries, and sets out what more effective, rights-based platform governance in Africa would require.

State Responses to Platform Power

Governments in Africa are adopting different approaches to governing global digital platforms. The three country bases cases below illustrate the range of tools governments are using to govern platforms whose market power often exceeds national regulatory capacity. They also show that platform governance is about more than content moderation, since it also shapes journalism markets, civic participation, and the distribution of economic value in digital ecosystems.

Nigeria

In 2020, Nigeria's Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC) and the Nigeria Data Protection Commission launched a joint investigation into Meta's data handling practices.[1] After 38 months of investigation and trial, the two commissions concluded that Meta had appropriated Nigerian users' data without consent, abused its dominant market position, and treated Nigerian consumers less favourably than users in other regions. In July 2024, the FCCPC issued a USD 220 million fine against Meta.[2]

Meta appealed, arguing the fine was excessive and that compliance would be technically difficult under Nigerian law. In April 2025, the Competition and Consumer Protection Tribunal rejected the appeal and upheld the fine,[3] ordering Meta to reinstate user consent mechanisms and cease unauthorised data sharing. The Tribunal also awarded the FCCPC USD 35,000 in investigation costs.

After the Tribunal's ruling, Meta threatened to withdraw its services from Nigeria.[4] When the 60-day payment deadline expired in June 2025, all three Meta platforms remained accessible, and neither the FCCPC nor Meta had issued a public statement on whether the fine had been paid. Separately, in October 2025, Meta reached an out-of-court settlement with the Nigeria Data Protection Commission over a USD 32.8 million fine, suggesting the company is willing to negotiate selectively.[5]

Nigeria demonstrated that African regulators can build credible cases and win in court. Nevertheless, as to whether those victories translate into changed platform behaviour remains an open question.

South Africa

In March 2023, South Africa's Competition Commission launched the Media and Digital Platforms Market Inquiry,[6] a two-year investigation into how dominant global platforms affect the sustainability of local journalism and the distribution of advertising revenue. The inquiry examined the practices of Google, Meta, Microsoft, TikTok, X, and AI companies operating in the South African market.

The final report,[7] released in November 2025, found that major platforms capture audiences and monetisation opportunities that traditionally sustained local news outlets, with referral traffic to South African media declining sharply as users increasingly consume AI-generated summaries or remain within platform ecosystems. It also found that AI systems had scraped South African news content to train models without compensation.

The inquiry resulted in commitments that included a ZAR 688 million (USD 41.6 million) media support package from Google and new monetisation tools across Meta, TikTok, and Microsoft.[8] On the other hand, X did not participate in the negotiated process and faced remedial action.[9] The remedies are legally binding, and a dedicated compliance division has been established to monitor implementation. A fallback mechanism would impose a 5-10% levy on digital advertising revenue if platforms fail to comply. [10]

1 *Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, 'Violations: Tribunal Upholds FCCPC's $220 Million Fine Against Meta/WhatsApp' (25 April 2025) https://fccpc.gov.ng/violations-tribunal-upholds-fccpcs-220-million-fine-against-meta-whatsapp/*

2 *Elisha Bala-Gbogbo and MacDonald Dzirutwe, 'Nigeria Fines Meta $220 Million for Violating Consumer, Data Laws' Reuters (19 July 2024) https://www.reuters.com/technology/nigerias-consumer-watchdog-fines-meta-220-million-violating-local-consumer-data-2024-07-19/*

3 *Damilola Aina, 'Tribunal Upholds FCCPC's $220m Fine Against Meta' Punch (26 April 2025) https://punchng.com/tribunal-upholds-fccpcs-220m-fine-against-meta/*

4 *Sarah Laniyan and Chimgozirim Nwokoma, 'Meta Threatened to Exit Nigeria over $220m Fine but Two Months after Deadline, Services Are Still Running' Techpoint Africa (2 September 2025) https://techpoint.africa/insight/meta-and-fccpc-continue-tussle/*

5 *Sarah Laniyan, 'Meta, NDPC Agree Out-of-Court Settlement of $32.8 Million Fine' Techpoint Africa (4 October 2025) https://techpoint.africa/news/meta-ndpc-settlement-fine/*

6 *Competition Commission of South Africa, 'The Competition Commission Launches the MDPMI Final Report' (13 November 2025) https://compcomdev.co.za/mdpmi_final_report/*

7 *Ina Opperman, 'Google to Pay R688 Million to SA's Media Houses as Competition Commission Report Is Released' The Citizen (13 November 2025) https://www.citizen.co.za/business/google-will-pay-up-r688-million-as-media-competition-report-is-completed/*

8 *Courtney Kaplan, 'Google to Pay R688 Million to SA Media Following Competition Commission Inquiry' African Antitrust & Competition Law (13 January 2026) https://africanantitrust.com/2026/01/13/google-to-pay-r688-million-to-sa-media-following-competition-commission-inquiry/*

9 *Michael Markovitz, 'What the CompCom's Final Report Delivers and Leaves Unresolved' South African National Editors' Forum (17 November 2025) https://sanef.org.za/what-the-compcoms-final-report-delivers-and-leaves-unresolved/*

10 *Michael Markovitz, 'Media and Digital Platforms Inquiry Final Report: A Pragmatic Settlement with Unfinished Business' Media Explorations (14 November 2025) https://michaelmarkovitz.substack.com/p/media-and-digital-platforms-inquiry*

The inquiry represents one of the most ambitious regulatory responses to platform power in Africa to date. Rather than relying primarily on a one-time financial penalty, it sought binding commitments aimed at addressing underlying market imbalances. Its long-term impact will depend on whether the Commission can sustain the institutional capacity, political backing, and regulatory oversight needed to ensure compliance over time.

Uganda

Uganda's restriction on the Meta-owned Facebook has now lasted more than five years. The block began in January 2021,[11] days before the general election, after Meta removed accounts linked to government-affiliated influence operations. The government responded by ordering internet service providers to block the platform entirely.

Negotiations between the two sides have repeatedly stalled. When asked to disclose how much revenue it earns from Uganda, Meta told government officials the figure was "negligible."[12] Talks at the Uganda Communications Commission level failed to produce tangible results, with officials recommending that African governments approach Meta collectively to carry greater weight.

The Ugandan government confirmed in March 2026 that the ban would remain in place.[13] The costs have fallen almost entirely on Ugandan users and businesses. Local businesses say the shutdown has cost them millions of dollars.[14] With an estimated 7–10 million users relying on Facebook for news, business, and civic engagement, the restriction underscores the social and economic costs of sustained limits on access to widely used digital services.[15] By late 2025, however, TikTok had become the dominant social media platform in Uganda, accounting for approximately 56% of all social media data traffic, while WhatsApp filled some of the commercial space Facebook once occupied. As of June 2026, there were indications that Uganda was beginning to restore access to Facebook after failing to reach an agreement with Meta.[16]

Comparative Governance Pathways

These three cases point to a common problem in platform governance: African governments often lack sufficient leverage to compel platform change.

Market size often matters more than regulatory design in shaping platform responses. South Africa and Nigeria, as two of the continent's largest economies and digital markets, received stronger responses from platforms than Uganda did. Most African countries have smaller annual Gross Domestic Products (GDPs) than Meta's USD 134.3 billion profit in 2024.[17] In smaller markets, regulatory action carries limited weight when platforms treat potential revenue losses in those countries as minimal.

South Africa's structural approach has so far generated the most substantial platform commitments, including binding remedies and a significant financial support package for the media sector. The contention as to whether these measures will produce lasting changes in platform behaviour and improve the sustainability of local journalism depend on implementation and enforcement over time. Nigeria won in court but is still waiting to see whether its fine will be paid. Uganda neither won in court nor secured a negotiated outcome, and the costs of the standoff have been absorbed mostly by Ugandan users and businesses rather than by the platform.

What connects all three cases is the gap between what governments can demand and what platforms are willing to accept. Enforcement depends not only on legal authority but also on institutional capacity, political will, and economic leverage. For most African governments, acting alone is unlikely to be enough. The above cases point to the need for stronger regional coordination in platform governance.

11 *Juliet Nanfuka, 'Uganda's 2021 Election: A Textbook Case of Disruption to Democracy and Digital Networks in Authoritarian Countries' CIPESA (13 January 2021) https://cipesa.org/2021/01/ugandas-2021-election-a-textbook-case-of-disruption-to-democracy-and-digital-networks-in-authoritarian-countries/*

12 *Arthur Arnold Wadero, 'Facebook to Remain Shut as Govt Talks with Tech Giant Stall' Daily Monitor (12 August 2022) https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/facebook-to-remain-shut-as-govt-talks-with-tech-giant-stall-3912172*

13 *URN, 'Uganda to Maintain Facebook Ban — ICT Minister' The Observer (27 March 2026) https://observer.ug/news/uganda-to-maintain-facebook-ban-ict-minister/*

14 *Isaac K Kassouwi, 'Uganda, Meta Near Agreement on Facebook Restoration After Years-Long Ban' We Are Tech Africa(13 March 2025) https://www.wearetech.africa/en/fils-uk/news/tech/uganda-meta-near-agreement-on-facebook-restoration-after-years-long-ban*

15 *Simon Kemp, 'Digital 2025: Uganda' DataReportal (3 March 2025) https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-uganda*

16 *URN, 'Uganda to Maintain Facebook Ban — ICT Minister' The Observer (27 March 2026) https://observer.ug/news/uganda-to-maintain-facebook-ban-ict-minister/*

17 *Meta Platforms Inc, 'Meta Reports Fourth Quarter and Full Year 2024 Results' (29 January 2025) https://investor.atmeta.com/investor-news/press-release-details/2025/Meta-Reports-Fourth-Quarter-and-Full-Year-2024-Results/*

Regional Governance: COMESA and Platform Oversight

The experiences of Nigeria, South Africa, and Uganda highlight a challenge that many African governments face. Platform power often extends beyond the reach of national regulators acting alone. This has increased interest in regional approaches to platform governance.

A notable example is the ongoing investigation by the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) Competition Commission into Meta's practices across 21 member states' economic bloc.[18] The investigation focuses on concerns related to data collection, advertising practices, market power, and the integration of services across Meta's platform ecosystem.[19] It also examines whether these practices limit competition, reduce consumer choice, or disadvantage businesses that rely on the company's services. [20]

The investigation is significant because it moves beyond questions of content moderation and treats platform governance as a broader issue of market regulation, competition, and digital economic power. It reflects growing recognition that platforms influence not only public discourse but also advertising markets, data flows, and access to digital services.

COMESA's intervention remains at an early stage, and its long-term impact will depend on the willingness and ability of member states to support enforcement. Nevertheless, it signals an important shift towards collective approaches to governing platforms whose operations span multiple jurisdictions.

Emerging Directions in Platform Governance Beyond Content Moderation

The cases in this brief show that platform governance in Africa now goes beyond content moderation alone. Governments are engaging platforms on questions of data governance, market concentration, advertising systems, and the broader role of digital platforms in shaping public communication. These concerns cut across the Nigeria, South Africa, and Uganda cases, reflecting different entry points into the same underlying challenge of platform power.

At the same time, the growing use of AI and automated systems is changing how platforms curate, rank, and distribute content. These systems increasingly shape what users see and how information circulates online, yet they remain largely opaque to regulators and independent oversight. This opacity limits the ability of regulators to assess accountability, particularly in contexts where platform decisions are automated and cross-border in nature.

Regional responses, including the COMESA investigation, reflect a broader recognition that these challenges are not confined to national jurisdictions and may require coordinated approaches to oversight and enforcement. This reinforces a shift away from viewing platform governance as content moderation alone, towards broader questions of accountability over data, algorithms, and market power.

18 *Deogratius Wamala, 'Meta's WhatsApp AI Policy Faces Comesa Investigation' Daily Monitor (14 January 2026) https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/business/technology/meta-s-whatsapp-ai-policy-faces-comesa-investigation-5326742*

19 *Seifeldin Sameh and Nicolas Bremer, 'COMESA Authority Investigates Meta over WhatsApp Business API Restrictions' Bremer https://www.bremerlf.com/resources/comesa-authority-investigates-meta-over-whatsapp-business-api-restrictions*

20 *Fred Obura, 'WhatsApp Business Under COMESA Probe Over Monopoly Concerns' The Kenyan Wall Street (23 February 2026) https://kenyanwallstreet.com/meta-facing-africa-wide-probe-over-alleged-abuse-of-dominance/*

The Human Costs of Weak Platform Accountability

The governance debates discussed above are often framed in terms of competition, regulation, and state authority. Yet their consequences are ultimately experienced by users. The following examples illustrate how governance failures affect people directly.

Conflict settings and language gaps in moderation systems: During the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia, platforms struggled to respond to rapidly evolving events in a multilingual conflict environment. Moderation systems had limited capacity in Tigrinya and Amharic. Harmful content often remained online despite being reported. In one widely documented case, Facebook posts targeting Tigrayan university professor Meareg Amare remained online for eight days after being reported by his son and were removed later only after Amare was killed by gunmen.[21] Moderation also appeared inconsistent across comparable instances of inflammatory political speech, raising concerns about the transparency and consistency of platform enforcement during crises. These failures illustrate how limited linguistic capacity, delayed moderation, and inconsistent enforcement can leave conflict-affected communities with little recourse when online harms emerge.

Uneven social impacts of platform governance: Women journalists, politicians, and activists across Africa face technology-facilitated gender-based violence, including harassment, coordinated disinformation, and reputational attacks that platform governance systems have consistently failed to address adequately. These attacks reflect deeper inequalities in how safety, visibility, and accountability are produced and enforced across digital platforms. The result is not only individual harm but also reduced participation in public life. Women who are already operating under pressure are further pushed to the margins of digital civic and political space, narrowing the range of perspectives represented in public debate.

Speed and scale of coordinated disinformation: In politically sensitive environments, coordinated disinformation campaigns spread rapidly across platforms and messaging services, often reaching large audiences within minutes. Moderation systems and fact-checking interventions typically operate on longer timescales, catching up after the damage is done. In Kenya, a 2025 analysis documented a coordinated yet false campaign that blamed Mt Kenya politicians for ongoing protests that ran for less than two weeks yet generated more than 4,000 mentions and 150,000 views.[22] The same accounts also targeted civil society leaders, protest organisers, and journalists, illustrating how coordinated networks can be rapidly repurposed across multiple targets. This gap between the speed of coordinated disinformation and the slower pace of moderation and verification remains a significant platform governance challenge.

21 *Amnesty International. (2023). A death sentence for my father: Meta's contribution to human rights abuses in northern Ethiopia. https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/7292/2023/en/*

22 *Daily Nation.. Deepfakes, hashtags and hate: The 2025 online disinformation threatening Kenya's 2027 polls. Nation Media Group. https://nation.africa/kenya/news/deepfakes-hashtags-and-hate-the-2025-online-disinformation-threatening-kenya-s-2027-polls--5310674*

Policy Priorities

1. Governments should avoid blanket platform restrictions and ensure that enforcement measures are proportionate, rights respecting, subject to independent oversight, due process, and regular review. Regulatory actions should safeguard access to information, civic participation, and other fundamental rights while providing clear mechanisms for redress and accountability.

2. Regulators should pursue greater transparency and accountability around platform operations, including data practices, advertising systems, recommendation mechanisms, and AI-assisted decision-making as opposed to punitive actions. Where platform power creates persistent market distortions or accountability gaps, structural remedies should be considered alongside financial penalties.

3. Regional bodies such as COMESA should support greater cooperation and coordination on competition oversight, data governance, and platform accountability. This should include information sharing, technical collaboration, and mechanisms for coordinated action where appropriate.

4. Platforms should provide meaningful information about how automated systems influence content visibility, recommendations, and moderation decisions to foster accountability. Regulators and independent researchers should have greater ability to assess the impacts of these systems across different contexts and languages.

5. Effective platform governance requires specialised expertise in competition regulation, data protection, digital markets, and emerging technologies. Governments should strengthen regulatory institutions responsible for oversight, monitoring, and enforcement.

6. Governments, development partners, and platforms should support public interest research and independent monitoring and oversight initiatives that strengthen evidence-based policymaking and accountability in digital spaces.

7. African regulators should strengthen opportunities to share experiences and lessons from platform governance regulatory interventions to build collective capacity and improve regulatory responses across the continent.

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