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# **TANZANIA'S REPRESSION OF DISSENT**

**under the guise  
of Counterterrorism**



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# SUMMARY

*Months before the October 2025 elections, the government of President Samia Suluhu Hassan has begun a systematic, unrelenting and brutal clampdown on critics, opposition leaders, civil society and even foreign activists. This repression has silenced critical voices, with media and human rights activists self-censoring over the experienced violent suppression of civil and political liberties.*

Impunity, untouchability and the perception of existential threats to the regime feed these authoritarian tendencies with few signs of abating. This report exposes the persistent use of repressive laws by Tanzania's government, under the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), as a primary weapon for suppressing political dissent, targeting opposition, and maintaining political dominance. Colonial-era and post-independence laws, including detention, treason, and anti-terrorism statutes, are systematically employed to undermine political freedoms and curtail opposition activities. Since independence in 1961, Tanzania's leadership has historically retained colonial-era laws, using them as tools of political control rather than amending them to protect civil liberties. Although past governments insisted that these laws would never be used arbitrarily, history has shown that authorities invoke them whenever the need arises to suppress dissent.<sup>1</sup>

The enactment and subsequent amendments to counterterrorism legislation, often influenced by international pressure, have expanded state powers, enabling their misuse and frequent application beyond genuine security threats to target and punish opposition leaders, activists, and journalists, resulting in prolonged pre-trial detentions and miscarriages of justice. Muslim leaders and Muslim communities have been disproportionately targeted under terrorism laws, with high-profile cases

like the prolonged detention of Uamsho clerics illustrating systemic abuses such as secret detentions, extrajudicial killings, and intimidation of families. The judiciary and prosecutorial systems often lack independence, evidenced by cases like that of opposition Chadema party leader Freeman Mbowe and more recently Tundu Lissu, which reveal political influence over legal proceedings. Judges face pressure, and state agencies routinely act on political directives, further eroding the rule of law.

Civil society advocacy for legislative reform remains weak, partly due to fear of reprisals and the perception that anti-terrorism laws primarily affect marginalised groups. The concentration of power in the executive, enabled by the 1977 Constitution and laws like the National Security Act, facilitates arbitrary detentions, restricts access to information, and curtails media freedoms. Recent legislative additions, such as the Cybercrimes Act of 2015, have further empowered authorities to target journalists and human rights defenders under vague provisions.

Precedents for these practices were set during earlier administrations, notably under President Jakaya Kikwete, whose government prosecuted opposition figures and activists under terrorism laws, often resulting in lengthy pre-trial detentions and judicial criticism of politically motivated prosecutions. The situation significantly deteriorated under the Presidency of John

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1 Chigara B. Building the Rule of Law: Francis Nyalali and the Road to Judicial Independence in Africa. By Jennifer A. Widner. [W.W. Norton & Company: London. 2001. xxii + 454 pp. ISBN 0-393-05037-8. £24.00 (Hbk).]. *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*. 2001;50(4):1007-1009. doi:10.1093/iclq/50.4.1007

Magufuli. The security apparatus—including the police, intelligence services, and military—has consistently aligned with the ruling party, using covert taskforces to target perceived threats and suppress dissent. The misuse of

counterterrorism laws, particularly against dissidents and human rights activists, evokes memories of past government repression, where repressive laws were weaponized to silence critics.

## INTRODUCTION

*Tanzania's post-independence political trajectory has been defined by the unbroken rule of the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party and a corresponding entrenchment of state power through a complex web of repressive laws, securitised governance, and politicised law enforcement.<sup>2</sup>*

Upon attaining independence from Britain in 1961, Tanzania initially pursued a one-party socialist vision under its founding President Julius Nyerere.<sup>3</sup> He retained colonial-era laws such as preventive detention statutes and treason provisions, which were repurposed and deployed alongside newly enacted laws to neutralise dissent, centralise authority, and limit civic and political space. The evolution of these mechanisms of statecraft has been justified under the pretext of preserving national unity, promoting development, and, since the early 2000s, combatting terrorism. Yet the practical effect has been the consolidation of authoritarian rule and the subversion of human rights and democratic governance. The enactment of counterterrorism legislation in the early 2000s, largely driven by external pressures—particularly from the United States in the post-9/11 security paradigm—introduced additional complexities with significant, albeit negative implications for democratic governance and human rights.

Over the years, Tanzania's counterterrorism legislation has undergone multiple amendments, notably expanding to

incorporate provisions addressing money laundering to curtail terrorism financing. However, the enforcement of these measures has consistently raised concerns regarding their application and potential misappropriation to stifle political dissent and constrain civil liberties, thereby posing substantive challenges to the country's democratic development. While ostensibly aimed at combatting terrorism, these laws have been repeatedly operationalised to quash political opposition, muzzle independent journalism, and target human rights defenders. Suspected Islamic radical leaders have been held in pre-trial detention for extended periods—some for approximately eight years—due to the state prosecutors' limited expertise in effectively prosecuting terrorism-related crimes and as a government tactic to punish opponents.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, human rights activists, opposition leaders and journalists targeted under these laws often secure release after prolonged legal battles through an inefficient court system. A notable example is the 2013 case of Wilfred Lwakatare, an opposition leader from the main opposition party, Chadema, whose legal team fought lengthy

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2 CCM was known as Tanzania African National Union (TANU) from 1961 until 1977 when it merged with Afro-Shiraz Party (ASP) of Zanzibar to form CCM.

3 'How Tanzania became a single-party state in 1965' The Citizen, March 2020 <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/how-tanzania-became-a-single-party-state-in-1965-2705076>

4 Interview with former state attorney, April 2025.



court battles for his release. Similarly, leaders of Uamsho, a Muslim group advocating for Zanzibar's secession from the union with Tanzania, faced terrorism charges in 2012 and remained in pre-trial detention for nearly nine years without trial until the Director of Public Prosecutions dropped the charges in 2021.<sup>5</sup> In another high-profile case, Chadema's then leader Freeman Mbowe faced terrorism charges in 2021 but was released after behind-the-scenes negotiations between him and President Samia, facilitated by religious leaders, business figures and journalists.<sup>6</sup> Despite the widespread misuse of these laws, civil society organizations, human rights groups, and public interest lawyers have shown limited advocacy for legislative reforms to prevent the targeting of individuals not involved in terrorism. The laws on terrorism have only been brought to the public's attention in a few instances when prominent opposition leaders have been charged with them. This is mainly due to the perception that such cases were only affecting Muslims and arrests were done secretly, with most of the suspects brutally killed by the police, while others were kept in secret terrorism chambers without the public's knowledge for years.<sup>7</sup>

Increasing police brutality towards human rights advocates has also created fears in the public to speak out. A few outspoken human rights advocates have generally blamed the public for their silence, particularly after members of the counterterrorism squad kidnapped suspects without following due process of the law. Families of the suspects also feel intimidated to report the incidents to the public or pursue a legal course to determine the whereabouts of

their relatives.<sup>8</sup> The most vocal opposition has come from Muslim leaders, whose communities have been disproportionately affected by terrorism-related allegations. Security agencies, particularly the police and intelligence services, have reportedly abused their authority under these laws, with incidents of kidnappings and, in extreme cases, extrajudicial killings of Muslims suspected of supporting terrorism. Such actions often violate fundamental human rights, including prolonged detention without sufficient evidence. The ongoing terrorism cases, mainly against the Uamsho clerics, remain the widely cited case study of prolonged detentions. At least 50 clerics were held in pre-trial detention for at least eight years until the Director for Public Prosecution (DPP) decided to drop the charges against them in June 2021. Despite their release, it is estimated that at least another 150 clerics are still behind bars.<sup>9</sup>

The impunity associated with these abuses has not only hindered the prosecution of legitimate terrorism cases but also damaged public trust in security agencies. This distrust has led to a reluctance among communities to provide information on suspects. For example, in southern Tanzanian towns bordering Mozambique, where radical Islamic insurgent groups have attacked innocent civilians, some communities have even begun supporting these groups, viewing them as more trustworthy than state authorities.<sup>10</sup> This mistrust is partly rooted in repeated instances of police brutality, cases of missing relatives returning home with amputations, deaths in police custody, and prolonged pre-trial detentions. Addressing these human rights violations is essential to rebuilding

5 'DPP drops charges against the 36 'uamsho' muslim clerics' The Citizen newspaper, June, 2021, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/dpp-drops-charges-against-the-36-uamsho-muslim-clerics-3439260>

6 Interview with senior member of the CCM Secretariat, April 2025.

7 Interview with Sheikh Ponda Issa Ponda, Secretary-General of the Council of Imams which presents itself as an alternative to the government-backed Muslim Council of Tanzania (Bakwata).

8 Peter Madeleka, prominent human rights lawyer in Tanzania, interview with Azam TV, a national TV, 20, March 2024.

9 Author's interview with Sheikh Ponda, March 2025.

10 Kabendera, Erick, 'Tanzania and Mozambique: Cooperation to counteract a cross-border Islamist Insurgency' in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado Conflict, Routledge, 2024.

public trust, enhancing the effectiveness of counterterrorism efforts, and ensuring that security measures respect the rule of law and fundamental freedoms.

When current President Hassan was sworn into office in March 2021 (replacing the deceased President John Magufuli), there was initial optimism that her leadership might usher in a new era characterised by adherence to the rule of law and respect for human rights, particularly in relation to counterterrorism efforts. However, these hopes were swiftly challenged when opposition leader Mbowe was arrested and charged with economic crimes and financing terrorism activities at the High Court's Corruption and Economic Crimes Division. A significant aspect of the case was the defence lawyers' consistent complaints about the apparent lack of impartiality among the judges assigned to the case.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, they objected to two of the judges. Subsequently, cross-examination of state witnesses during the preliminary hearing revealed the prosecution's tenuous evidence against Mbowe. Nevertheless, in a development suggesting that hopes of a new era of moving towards democracy were misplaced, President Hassan continued defending the security agencies' decision to detain Mbowe on terrorism charges. The president was later forced to resolve Mbowe's case politically after it became increasingly detrimental to her political image both domestically and internationally. The case was resolved through a *nolle prosequi* (meaning that the case was dropped although it does not seal or expunge a criminal record history) by the Director for Public Prosecutions (DPP). This raised concerns about the existing collusion between the executive and judiciary branches. Although the case was dropped, the initial hearings exposed profound weaknesses within the prosecutorial and

police systems and appeared to lend credence to widely held views that they operate on political directives rather than independent legal considerations.

President Hassan attempted to address these challenges by forming a presidential commission to review the criminal justice system, including repressive laws such as the 2002 Anti-Terrorism Act. However, the review team did not identify significant flaws within the legislation itself. This was despite the recommendations of Muslim leaders, particularly the Muslim Council of Tanzania (Bakwata) and the Council of Islamic Organisation, who advocated for amendments to the definition of terrorism and other provisions of the Act.<sup>12</sup> Instead, their recommendations centred on improving procedural safeguards, such as ensuring that police conduct thorough investigations before making arrests and that prosecutors only pursue cases supported by strong evidence. Despite these recommendations, security and prosecuting agencies largely rejected them, arguing that such changes would hinder their ability to execute their mandate effectively, and were subsequently not included in the final report of the commission.<sup>13</sup>

Beyond resistance from security agencies, CCM leaders have also been reluctant to support reforms that would limit their ability to (order) law enforcement bodies to detain or fabricate charges against political opponents. The symbiotic relationship between security forces and political leaders has created a system in which both entities benefit from retaining repressive laws, further entrenching their use for political control. The police, the intelligence services and military have consistently sided with the ruling party while harassing opposition leaders and human rights activists. During the October 2010 general elections, the opposition Chadema

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11 James Magai, 'Judges in Mbowe's terrorism financing case steps down' Sept 2021, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/judge-in-mbowe-s-terrorism-financing-case-steps-down-3539888>

12 Sheikh Ponda presentation before the presidential commission on the reform of the criminal justice system, 5 April, 2023.

13 Interview with the senior political officer who attended a meeting between the commission and the police, April 2024.

said they had secured evidence to prove that the intelligence services had helped CCM rig the election.<sup>14</sup> In that election, the second highest ranking military official, the Chief of

Staff, Lt Gen Abdulrahman Shimbo released a statement ahead of the election indicating the military “would deal with whoever” protested against the election outcome.<sup>15</sup>

## CURRENT POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

*As Tanzania prepares for general elections in October 2025, concerns are growing among human rights activists and opposition leaders over the potential for election-related violence.<sup>16</sup>*

The CCM party has demonstrated its willingness to use force to maintain its grip on power, while the opposition continues to push for electoral reforms to guarantee a free and fair voting process.<sup>17</sup> The human rights situation has regressed to levels reminiscent of the Magufuli era, marked by enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and systematic repression.<sup>18</sup> The counterterrorism task forces, notorious for the alleged kidnapping and killing of perceived government critics, have resurfaced with full force, targeting opposition figures, activists, and journalists. On the 9th of April 2025, respected opposition leader and current president of CHADEMA, Tundu Lissu was

arrested and charged in court with treason.<sup>19</sup> Events leading to Lissu's imprisonment and saw police commanders issuing statements similar to CCM leaders while banning opposition political rallies. Lissu won the party chairmanship in January 2025 and launched a 'No Reforms, No Elections' campaign to boycott the elections unless reforms were made to ensure free and fair polls.<sup>20</sup> The predicate offences for the treason charges are Lissu's statements at political gatherings that the opposition would disrupt the elections if they were held without electoral reforms, which included an independent election commission, and clearer rules to candidate selection to avoid their removal from ballots.<sup>21</sup>

14 Evarist Chahali, 'How Politicisation of 'tradecraft' – that's the Art of intelligence – could hinder Tanzania Spy Agency's Counter-Terror Capabilities' Feb, 2023. <https://chahali.medium.com/how-politicisation-of-tradecraft-that-s-the-art-of-intelligence-could-hinder-tanzania-spy-b8260dade883>

15 Alex Bitekeye, 'Tanzania: Military Warning in Order, says CCM, The Citizen newspaper, October, 2010, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201010151018.html>

16 'Arrested, Tortured, Dumped in Bushes' Crackdown on Opposition Ahead of 2025 Elections' The Chanzo, April 2025, <https://thechanzo.com/2025/04/25/arrested-tortured-dumped-in-bushes-tanzanias-escalating-crackdown-on-opposition-ahead-of-2025-elections/>

17 'LHRC urges government action on electoral reform' LHRC, April 2024, [https://humanrights.or.tz/en/news-events/electoral\\_reforms](https://humanrights.or.tz/en/news-events/electoral_reforms)

18 Chimba Jerry, 'Tanzania: Police Under Scrutiny Over Disappearances' Institute for War & Peace Reporting, March 2024, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/tanzania-police-under-scrutiny-over-disappearances>

19 'Tanzania: Joint statement condemning violent crackdown, malicious arrest, and treason charges against Tundu Lissu' April, 2025. <https://www.icj.org/tanzania-joint-statement-condemning-violent-crackdown-malicious-arrest-and-treason-charges-against-tundu-lissu/>

20 'Chadema Launches 'No Reforms, No Election' Campaign, Reaffirms Demand for Major Electoral Reforms' March, 2025, <https://thechanzo.com/2025/03/24/chadema-launches-no-reforms-no-election-campaign-reaffirms-demand-for-major-electoral-reforms/>

21 'Tanzania opposition officials arrested as Tundu Lissu refuses to appear in Court,' April 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/24/tanzania-tundu-lissu-court-treason-opposition-detained>

The CCM regime has for years attempted to silence Lissu, who has been arrested multiple times. Tundu Lissu, was one of Magufuli's fiercest critics, famously branding him "a petty dictator."<sup>22</sup> His assassination attempt of 2017, when Lissu was gunned down in broad daylight outside his home in Dodoma (he was shot 16 times), was condemned both domestically and internationally, yet no official investigation yielded results, and the perpetrators were never brought to justice.

<sup>23</sup> Now CCM is using lawfare to address what they consider is an existential threat. If convicted of treason Lissu can receive the death penalty. This accusation also almost guarantees that the Tanzanian general elections will proceed in October without an opposition. If any evidence were needed to confirm that President Hassan and her advisors have abandoned all pretensions to democracy and reform, it is the recent wave of attacks on foreign human rights defenders that came to support Lissu ahead of his treason trial.

A group of politicians, jurists and human rights activists from the region, including former Kenyan Minister of Justice Martha Karua, travelled to the Tanzanian capital in solidarity with Lissu. Joining them were Kenyan Boniface Mwangi and Ugandan Agather Atuhairi. On the 18th of May 2025 Karua, who also leads Kenya's People Liberation Party, was detained at Mwalimu Julius Nyerere International Airport in Dar es Salaam along with two other Kenyan activists and lawyers, Gloria Kimani and Lynn Ngugi. The trio had been invited by the East Africa Law Society to attend Lissu's court hearing. They were detained pending deportation to Kenya. Karua criticised the Tanzanian

government for going against the ideals of East African unity and freedom of movement. She suggested their detention was politically motivated since "no reasons were given (for their detention)". "The common thread between myself, Gloria Kimani (a Law Society of Kenya council member), and Lynn Ngugi is that we are guests of the East Africa Law Society. I suppose our interest in the politically motivated case against Tundu Lissu is the issue," Karua added.<sup>24</sup> They were deported.

However, Mwangi a renowned Kenyan human rights defender and Atuhairi a high-profile Ugandan lawyer-activist were arrested and kept in police custody for 4 days. There they were brutally tortured, humiliated and tormented.<sup>25</sup> Their accounts present a harrowing description of barbaric actions, ordered by a yet unidentified man from State Security that allegedly reports directly to President Samia Suluhu Hassan. His instructions to police were to give these detainees the "Tanzanian treatment". From Monday the 19th of May until Thursday the 22nd of May, when they were released, both human rights activists suffered inhuman, degrading and brutal treatment. Both were handcuffed and blindfolded, told to strip naked. After being tortured they were told to wash off the blood. Placed in adjacent rooms they could hear the screams of pain endured. Mwangi was threatened with circumcision while Atuhairi was held repeatedly to "thank mama Samia" during her torture. Boniface Mwangi was released on Thursday, driven across Tanzania and left in Ukunda. When he was found he could barely walk. Agather Atuhairi was found at the Mutukula border where she had been left. Both had been sexually assaulted during her detention.<sup>26</sup>

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22 Jenerali Ulimwengu 'No end to Harassment of Tanzania opposition' DW, April 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/no-end-to-harassment-of-tanzania-opposition/a-40351239>

23 'It was a political assassination attempt, Lissu tells journalists,' The Citizen newspaper, April, 2021. <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/it-was-a-political-assassination-attempt-lissu-tells-journalists-2618942>

24 <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250518-kenyan-politician-lawyer-for-tanzania-opposition-leader-arrested>

25 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/05/tanzania-torture-and-forcible-deportation-of-kenyan-and-ugandan-activists-must-be-urgently-investigated/>

26 <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn4qlqxx9ql0>



The fact that the duo was subjected to such treatment despite their international profile and the immediate outcry is instructive of the extent to which the Hassan regime has abandoned concerns about its international image in pursuit of domestic control.

This is not however a new phenomenon under Hassan's tenure. Individuals who have publicly criticised her have been abducted and disappeared without a trace, while others have been brutally murdered, sending a chilling message to government critics.<sup>27</sup> One such case is that of Chadema's Secretariat, Ally Kibao, who was kidnapped in September 2024 from a bus in broad daylight and dumped in a forest with his face burned with acid.<sup>28</sup> Chadema officials suspect that the counterterrorism squad framed him due to his military background,<sup>29</sup> perceiving him as someone who could potentially aid the opposition's efforts to unseat the CCM. His murder served as a stark warning to political opponents, reinforcing fears that state-backed security forces remained willing to eliminate individuals deemed threats to the ruling establishment. The suppression of dissent has extended beyond political figures to artists and ordinary citizens. In July 2024, 24-year-old artist Shadrack Chaula was sentenced to two years in prison or a fine of US\$2,000 for drawing and burning a picture of President Samia Suluhu Hassan.<sup>30</sup> After

paying the fine and securing his release, Chaula disappeared less than a month later and has never been seen again.<sup>31</sup>

The operations targeting suspected Islamist insurgents have been used as a pretext to cover up human rights violations. Leaders of the task forces responsible for persecuting human rights defenders during Magufuli's tenure have been rewarded with senior positions in the current administration, particularly James Kaji, who was in December 2024 appointed the National Identification Agency (NIDA) as director general.<sup>32</sup> The opposition interprets this as condoning their past actions rather than holding them accountable.<sup>33</sup> Such developments stand in stark contrast to President Hassan's earlier stance on political, criminal justice, and human rights reforms, which initially earned her widespread public approval after assuming office in March 2021. Upon succeeding Magufuli, she ordered the release of prisoners facing money laundering, economic sabotage and terrorism charges. She proceeded to issue a stern warning to the police and security agencies against targeting civilians. These actions created public optimism that the targeting of dissidents would become a thing of the past.

Barely three months into her presidency, the President freed 36 Uamsho clerics, who

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27 'Pressure Mounts on Tanzania's President Over Police's Allege Involvement in Forced Disappearance incidents' August, 2024.

28 The East African, "Ally Kibao, abducted Tanzanian opposition leader found dead, acid poured on face", Sept, 2024, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/tanzanian-opposition-leader-found-dead-acid-poured-on-face-4754912>

29 Interview with Chadema member of secretariat, Dar es Salaam, Feb, 2025.

30 Wycliffe Muia, BBC "Tanzania artist who burned president's picture jailed" July, 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c25104r4v1ko>

31 Mathias, Hawa, The Citizen, "Artist who was arrested and later released after burning President Samia's picture goes missing" August, 2024, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/artist-who-was-arrested-and-later-released-after-burning-president-samia-s-picture-goes-missing-4718114>

32 Amina Mwampangala, 'Samia appoints Kaji as new NIDA czar' December 2024. <https://dailynews.co.tz/samia-appoints-kaji-as-new-nida-czar/>

33 Three opposition leaders and an MP identified James Kaji as the leader of the counterterrorism taskforce which was involved in human rights violations when President John Magufuli served as president. On December, 18, 2024, President Samia announced his appointment as the new Director-General of the National Identification Authority (NIDA). See statement as published by the government owned newspaper, the Daily News. <https://dailynews.co.tz/samia-appoints-kaji-as-new-nida-czar/>

had been detained for nearly nine years on terrorism-related charges.<sup>34</sup> Their release was a significant rebuke to the widespread practice of holding human rights activists in pre-trial detention for years without formal charges. In another move which appeared to signal her commitment to restoring the rule of law and democracy, the Registrar of Political Parties, Justice Francis Mutungi, appointed a bipartisan task force on 23 December 2021, to propose minimum electoral reforms aimed at ensuring a free and fair environment ahead of the 2025 elections.<sup>35</sup> However, opposition party Chadema boycotted the process, insisting that its then Chairman, Freeman Mbowe, who was incarcerated on trumped-up terrorism charges, be released unconditionally. They also demanded face-to-face talks with Hassan.<sup>36</sup> Subsequently, she initiated reconciliation talks, primarily with Chadema, in an effort to acknowledge the injustices endured by the opposition during Magufuli's presidency and to establish a mutual path forward in strengthening Tanzania's democratic principles. In closed door reconciliation talks between the opposition and the ruling CCM representatives, abuses such as kidnapping and disappearances of the opposition leaders under Magufuli were acknowledged and promises made to never

repeat the trend.<sup>37</sup> Hassan became the first CCM national chairperson to attend a Chadema national convention,<sup>38</sup> suggesting the possibility of the ruling party and the opposition engaging in a more civil manner. Additionally, she lifted the six-year ban on political demonstrations, which had been imposed by Magufuli in 2016, describing the move as "nurturing democracy."<sup>39</sup> The President went even further, establishing a Presidential Commission on Criminal Justice Reform, which submitted its findings in July 2023.<sup>40</sup> The Commission's report highlighted critical concerns, particularly the overlapping powers among security agencies to arrest suspects, which has led to frequent confusion regarding the whereabouts of detainees.<sup>41</sup> It also exposed the existence of multiple detention facilities, complicating efforts to track and monitor the status of arrested individuals. The commission recommended that only police should have arrest and detention powers, failing to take into account the fact that the intelligence services also have detention powers under the newly amended intelligence and Security Services Act of May 2023.<sup>42</sup> As these efforts continued, it appeared to most Tanzanians that the country was on the right path towards respecting international human rights principles and adhering to legal norms.

34 Wambura, Bethsheba, "DPP drops charges against the 36 'Uamsho' Muslim clerics', The Citizen, June, 2021, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/dpp-drops-charges-against-the-36-uamsho-muslim-clerics-3439260>

35 Minde, Nicodemus "Tanzania's pathway to a new constitution: genuine progress or political rhetoric", Constitution Net, <https://constitutionnet.org/news/tanzanias-pathway-new-constitution-genuine-progress-or-political-rhetoric>

36 The Chanzo, "Timeline: Inside Tanzania's Attempt to Charge Freeman Mbowe with Terrorism" March, 2022, <https://thechanzo.com/2022/03/04/timeline-inside-tanzanias-attempt-to-charge-freeman-mbowe-with-terrorism/>

37 Interview, CCM official who attended the reconciliation talks, October 2025.

38 Msekwa, Pius "President Samia's reconciliation efforts: The dawn of a new era" March, 2023, <https://dailynews.co.tz/president-samias-reconciliation-efforts-the-dawn-of-a-new-era/>

39 Dausen, Nuzulack, "Tanzania president lifts six-year ban on political rallies" January 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/tanzania-president-lifts-six-year-ban-political-rallies-2023-01-03/>

40 Tanzania Digest, "Tanzania's Criminal Justice System: Analysis of President Samia's Commission Key Findings & Recommendations," July, 2023, <https://www.digest.tz/tanzanias-criminal-justice-system/>

41 Tanzania's Criminal Justice System: Analysis of President Samia's Commission Key Findings & Recommendations' July, 2023, <https://www.digest.tz/tanzanias-criminal-justice-system/>

42 'What's Up with Tanzania's Proposed Intelligence and Security Services Act' The Chanzo, May 2023, <https://thechanzo.com/2023/05/31/whats-up-with-tanzanias-proposed-intelligence-and-security-service-act/>

However, Hassan's advisers viewed the reform trajectory differently. They argued that if the proposed reforms were fully implemented, not only could CCM risk losing power, but the president herself might struggle to secure a second term.<sup>43</sup> With most MPs tied to Magufuli's faction, they worried that reconciliation and the potential for reforms would result in the changing of laws enabling free and fair elections which would cause them to lose power. In general, CCM has resisted calls for reforms due to fears that any reforms could empower the opposition to broaden its political base. For this same reason, the efforts to write a new constitution in 2014 stalled despite having reached an advanced stage.<sup>44</sup> These concerns aligned with a growing sense of frustration within the opposition, particularly Chadema, whose leaders began traversing the country rallying

their supporters and signalling their intention to withdraw from reconciliation talks. The opposition accused CCM and Hassan of lacking genuine commitment to reform, alleging that the dialogue was being used to discredit the opposition's stance on human rights. Continuous engagement in talks with CCM, they argued, created the impression that the opposition was complicit in their agenda,<sup>45</sup> undermining its credibility among supporters. Meanwhile, security agencies quietly resisted recommendations from the Presidential Commission on Criminal Justice Reforms. Despite the president's initial endorsement of the commission's findings, instructing it to collaborate with security agencies to ensure full implementation, state security institutions rejected key proposals, signalling a reluctance to relinquish their unchecked powers.

## AN ARSENAL OF REPRESSIVE LAWS

*Throughout Tanzania's history, no administration has deployed the full extent of repressive legal instruments against dissenters as systematically as during the presidency of John Magufuli from 2015 till his death in 2021.*

While many of these laws were inherited from the colonial administration, additional statutes were enacted post-independence, primarily to shield the political elite from opposition and preserve the ruling CCM's dominance.<sup>46</sup> The Magufuli administration invoked these colonial-era statutes and post-independence counterterrorism legislation on the pretext of fighting corruption and terrorism, but one clear (and probably intended consequence) has been the suppression of critics. Parliamentarians voiced grave concerns regarding reports that at least

380 individuals—predominantly Muslims accused of terrorism—had been subjected to enforced disappearances during Magufuli's tenure. In response, a governmental commission advocated for constitutional amendments (to the 1977 Constitution which provided for a strong presidential system) to curtail executive authority over other branches of government.<sup>47</sup>

More specifically, the recommendation included the repeal of the National Security Act, which, among other things, empowers

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43 Interview with the ruling party member of the Central Committee, Dodoma, December 2024.

44 Interview with retired senior CCM official, October 2024.

45 Interview with senior Chadema leader and member of the party's Central Committee, Arusha, Nov, 2024.

46 Jennifer Widner, *Building the Rule of Law: Francis Nyalali and The Road to Judicial Independence in Africa*. (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001).pp.42-74

47 The Law Reform Commission of Tanzania, final report on designated Legislation in the Nyalali Commission Report, April 1994.

the police to seize property and detain individuals suspected of violating the act without a warrant. It also provides a vague definition of classified information, restricting media and public access to information. Whereas the commission recommended the amendment of 40 repressive laws, civil society organisations insisted that an additional 30 equally repressive laws enacted in the past 30 years also be reviewed.<sup>48</sup> Most notably, provisions of the Cybercrimes Act 2015 which criminalise the publication of false information have been used to target human rights activists and journalists.<sup>49</sup> During his tenure, Magufuli capitalised on the precedent set by his predecessor, President Jakaya Kikwete, whose government charged 20 Zanzibari political activists with terrorism, leading to their eight-year pre-trial detention. Kikwete's presidency also saw the first major terrorism case against a senior politician: Wilfred Lwakatare, Chadema's security director.<sup>50</sup> Lwakatare was charged at the peak of Chadema's political influence, when many believed the party had a strong chance of defeating the CCM in the 2015 general election. His alleged crime was making an online statement implying intentions to harm a senior editor. Judges overseeing the case, however, criticised the state for abusing terrorism laws to target political dissidents. The judgment dismissed the case after rising concerns that the charges may have been politically motivated, and warned the office of the DPP against the growing trend of "using terrorism laws to target the opposition."<sup>51</sup> If the trend was left to continue, the judge warned this would lead to the authorities failing to address genuine terrorism threats at a time when the world was focusing on terrorism issues. Not paying attention to real terrorism issues could result in a profound impact on national security.

The judge went as far as accusing the state of pursuing the case despite knowing that it was a politically motivated case. Despite the concerns raised by the court, the case did not result in any tangible amendments to the law.

During Kikwete's presidency (2005-2015) Tanzania experienced a surge in violent crime, including attacks on police stations and bank robberies which the law enforcement authorities attributed to the emergence of terrorist and radical Islamist groups. Claiming that these groups were attempting to amass weapons for larger-scale attacks on major cities and towns, the police and the Tanzania Intelligence and Security Services (TISS) clandestinely formed covert counterterrorism taskforces to meet the rising threats. However, cases of forced disappearances, allegedly by the taskforces, increased dramatically, thus exacerbating existing concerns about human rights violations.

The security agencies employed these taskforces to target journalists and human rights activists, as demonstrated by the cases involving Absalom Kibanda (the then chairperson of the Tanzania Editors Forum), Saed Kubenea (a newspaper editor), and Stephen Ulimboka (chairperson of the Tanzania Doctors Association). The three were viewed as threats to the CCM due to their human rights advocacy. Their cases demonstrated the state's capacity to target human rights defenders with impunity and delivered a cautionary message to others about the dangers of speaking out against the government. During the 2010 elections, activists were very cautious in raising human rights concerns due to fears of reprisals by the state.<sup>52</sup> Nonetheless, the case involving the abduction and subsequent prosecution on terrorism charges of 40 members of

48 "Civil society says dozens more 'bad laws' enacted", The Citizen newspaper, July 2020, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/-civil-society-says-dozens-more-bad-laws-enacted-2712596>

49 'Tanzania: Cybercrimes Act upheld further blow to free expression' Article 19, march 2017, <https://www.article19.org/resources/tanzania-cybercrimes-act-upheld-in-further-blow-to-free-expression/>

50 The Citizen newspaper, "State risks to be ignored in genuine terrorism cases" August, 2021, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/oped/my-take-on-this-state-risks-to-be-ignored-in-genuine-terrorism-cases-2495408>

51 Miscellaneous Criminal Application No. 14 of 2013, Wilfred Lwakatare versus the Republic, criminal cases 37/2013 & 6/2013.

52 Interview with a senior journalist, Dar es Salaam, January 2025.

the Association for Islamic Mobilisation and Propagation (Uamsho) raised serious concerns about the state's misuse of terrorism laws to suppress activism.<sup>53</sup> The activists, particularly the youth, had galvanised support for Zanzibar's succession from the mainland, a contentious issue since the unification of Tanganyika and Zanzibar was achieved in 1964.<sup>54</sup> The activism of Uamsho united Zanzibaris in opposition to the union, alarming CCM leaders in both Zanzibar and Tanganyika threatening CCM's political hegemony, especially ahead of the 2015 elections. Fearing that the opposition could leverage this movement to win the election and end the union, CCM resorted to the use of terrorism laws to detain Uamsho's leaders and intimidate their followers.<sup>55</sup> At the time of their arrest in Zanzibar in October 2012, Uamsho were charged with incitement to violence and were granted bail.<sup>56</sup> Upon their release on bail, they were transferred to the mainland of Tanzania and charged with terrorism, which is an unbailable offence.<sup>57</sup> For eight years they were in pre-trial detention, with their case never being scheduled for a hearing, which was a sign that the state lacked evidence to meet the international legal standards for defining terrorism and prosecuting the case successfully. In Zanzibar, there was almost a national consensus that the clerics were targeted because of their political activism to "liberate Zanzibar from the unfair union"<sup>58</sup>

It was against this background that Magufuli assumed the presidency following the 2015 elections. His ascension to power came after what was arguably the narrowest electoral victory for a CCM candidate since the multi-party system was restored in 1995.<sup>59</sup> Magufuli secured 58 percent of the vote, compared to former prime minister and opposition-backed candidate, Edward Lowassa's 40 percent. Lowassa had been preparing to become president since 1995, while Magufuli emerged as the ruling party's "accidental" presidential nominee.<sup>60</sup> As a result, Lowassa had spent years building support within the CCM. This tenuous victory likely contributed to President Magufuli's sense of insecurity and the subsequent greater arbitrary application of law and reliance on security agencies to suppress dissent. In particular, he is said to have harboured a strong conviction that Muslims opposed his leadership.<sup>61</sup> This was allegedly why his government firmly opposed the release of jailed Uamsho clerics even when former Prime Minister Lowassa advocated for their freedom, citing human rights violations against them. The Director of Criminal Investigations (DCI) responded to Lowassa's plea by summoning the politician and threatening him with legal action.<sup>62</sup> The threats against Lowassa were followed by the commencement of one of the bleakest periods for human rights in Tanzania. Kidnappings and forced disappearances became commonplace, with numerous individuals vanishing across various regions of the country.<sup>63</sup>

53 2022 report on international religious freedom: Tanzania, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/tanzania>

54 Interview with a senior opposition leader, Zanzibar, December 2024.

55 *ibid*

56 Munir, Zakaria 'Zanzibar separatist group leaders charged with inciting violence' Reuters, October, 2012. <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/zanzibar-separatist-group-leaders-charged-with-inciting-violence-idUSBRE89LOXR/>

57 Issa Yusuf, 'Tanzania: families of Terrorism Suspects Want Clerics Brough Back Home' August 2015. <https://allafrica.com/stories/201408250534.html>

58 Interview with former Zanzibar state attorney, April 2025

59 Interview with a former CCM MP and political observer, December 2024.

60 Interview, former advisor to Edward Lowassa, April 2025

61 Interview with a former friend and associate of President Magufuli, January, 2025.

62 The Citizen, "former prime minister Edward Lowassa summoned by police over unknown reasons" April, 2021, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/former-prime-minister-edward-lowassa-summoned-by-police-over-unknown-reasons--2594326>

63 Erick Kabendera, 'In the Name of the President'



One of the most chilling incidents was an operation ordered by President Magufuli to eliminate suspected terrorist elements in the Kibiti area along Tanzania's southern coastline. This operation was often described in hushed tones by MPs and activists as one of the darkest chapters in the country's human rights history. Hundreds of young men were believed to have been rounded up, tortured in undisclosed locations, and killed by security forces. The operation was launched following a series of targeted killings—approximately 37 in total—and multiple armed raids on police stations that left over a dozen officers dead.<sup>64</sup> However, the government remained tight-lipped about the full extent of casualties, and little verifiable information emerged. The number of people killed in Kibiti during the entire counter-terrorism operation remains unclear. However, a credible estimate is provided by journalist Erick Kabendera who suggests that at least 3,000 individuals may have been killed by security agencies between 2016 and 2020.

Around the same time, a significant number of unidentified bodies were discovered floating along the beaches of Dar es Salaam. The bodies were found in body bags, their hands tied behind their backs, their heads covered in plastic bags, and, in some cases, a stone tied around their necks—likely to ensure they remained submerged. Fishermen

along the expansive coastline reported seeing more such bodies. To date, the police have not explained the origin of these bodies or disclosed the identities of those found. Families in Kibiti and Muslim clerics in Dar es Salaam repeatedly reported missing young men who were taken away during the operation. Independent autopsies or forensic analyses were never conducted on the bodies.

A blanket ban on media coverage of the operation ensured that the full extent of human rights abuses in Kibiti remains undocumented. One of the most prominent victims of this suppression was *Mwananchi Communications Limited* reporter Azory Gwanda, who has been missing since 21 November 2017. Gwanda was last seen being taken away by unidentified individuals in an unmarked white Land Cruiser who pounced while he was investigating abductions and killings connected to the Kibiti operation. Despite a sustained media campaign for his release, authorities made no substantive effort to locate him. President Magufuli, then-Interior Minister Mwigulu Nchemba and senior police officials all defended the Kibiti operation and dismissed concerns regarding human rights violations. Attempts by opposition leaders to bring the matter before parliament for debate were systematically obstructed.

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64 'Fear engulfs village as killing of police, leaders persists' The Citizen, April 2017

# MAGUFULI'S CONSOLIDATION OF POWER AND AUTHORITARIAN CONTROL

*Soon after assuming office in February 2016, Magufuli declared that he would not tolerate political opposition.<sup>65</sup> By July of the same year, he took a decisive step in banning political rallies and demonstrations, threatening to “break the legs” of anyone who defied him.*

This pronouncement set the stage for an unprecedented crackdown on opposition politicians, who faced arrests, intimidation, and persecution under his rule. Opposition lawmakers, including elected MPs, suffered the brunt of this repression. Mbeya MP Joseph Mbilinyi and Kilombero MP Peter Lijualikali were imprisoned, while dozens of other opposition leaders were subjected to prolonged legal battles as they attempted to defend their constitutional rights to political participation.<sup>66</sup>

Magufuli's brazen approach to reform was however initially supported. Polls in 2017 showed that 7 out of 10 Tanzanians supported Magufuli's strong public resource mismanagement and swift action against underperforming top civil servants.<sup>67</sup> He initially projected the image of a no-nonsense leader committed to fulfilling his campaign promises of clamping down on wasteful government spending. Magufuli's initial agenda was to highlight how the elites had

exploited the country for far too long while the poor continued to struggle in poverty. He promised to make the elites “live like zombies.” To advance his goals against the elites, he instructed the police to carry out their duties without following human rights principles and urged the courts to overlook due process if they wanted the executive branch to give them a bigger budget.<sup>68</sup> He believed the only way to consolidate his position was through authoritarianism. Three years into his presidency, it became evident that Magufuli had deviated from his initial agenda, placing Tanzania on an increasingly precarious path. His administration veered towards authoritarian rule, governing by decree and often disregarding established legal and constitutional boundaries. The result was a rapid decline in democratic freedoms and human rights, with extrajudicial killings becoming more rampant.<sup>69</sup> Overzealous security forces, particularly the police, blatantly abused their powers at the behest of Magufuli's inner circle.<sup>70</sup>

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65 Pius Msekwa, 'Tanzania =: Ban imposed on Political Rallies – a critical lesson in political education' Daily News, July 2016, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201607070729.html>

66 Ismail Akwei, 'Tanzanian MP to spend six months in jail for assaulting policemen' 2016, <https://www.africanews.com/2017/01/12/tanzanian-mp-to-spend-six-months-in-jail-for-assaulting-policemen/>

67 '7 out of 10 citizens approve of the performance of President Magufuli' Twaweza, June 2017. <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://twaweza.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/PerformancePoliticsPressRelease-EN-FINAL.pdf>

68 Erick Kabendera, 'In the Name of the President' pp. 3-10

69 Ansbert Ngurumo, 'Magufuli allows police to shoot and kill citizens' December 2018, <https://sautikubwa.org/under-magufuli-police-are-allowed-to-shoot-and-kill-criminals-for-promotion/>

70 'As Long as I am Quiet, I am Safe': Threats to Independent Media and Civil Society in Tanzania' Human Rights Watch, October 2019. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/10/28/long-i-am-quiet-i-am-safe/threats-independent-media-and-civil-society-tanzania>

Through executive fiat, Magufuli significantly curtailed democratic space —suppressing the opposition and limiting the public's freedom of expression. His consolidation of power undermined and significantly compromised Parliament's independence, limiting its ability to hold the executive to account. On multiple occasions, he openly expressed disdain for judicial rulings that obstructed his agenda. If he was not promising more money to the courts that delivered “positive” judgements he was questioning why Judges took vacations outside the country and how they funded their foreign trips.<sup>71</sup> It was clear that Magufuli sought to rule Tanzania with an iron fist, maintaining unfettered control over state resources, which he deployed at his discretion.<sup>72</sup> By consolidating executive power in the presidency and reshaping the leadership of the ruling party to expand his control, Magufuli signaled that he would tolerate no challenge in the 2020 General Election.<sup>73</sup> His personal political ambitions shaped Tanzania's governance trajectory, leading to an unprecedented assault on the rule of law and a dramatic shift in the country's human rights landscape. His tenure saw an escalation of authoritarian tactics, which shaped political freedoms, opposition politics and civil liberties —a legacy that continues to influence the country's political climate, even after his death in March 2021.

## ATTACKS ON THE OPPOSITION

Magufuli viewed a thriving opposition as an existential threat to his presidency and re-election in 2020. His concerns stemmed from 2015 General Election, when a united opposition coalition backed former Prime

Minister Edward Lowassa in the closest presidential race in Tanzania's history. Magufuli secured 58% of the vote, compared to Lowassa's 40%, marking the lowest winning margin for a CCM presidential candidate. The opposition alleged massive election rigging, claiming their own tallying systems showed Lowassa had won with 62%. Furthermore, the opposition's parliamentary representation more than doubled, reinforcing CCM's fears of a growing opposition movement.<sup>74</sup> In response, Magufuli moved to consolidate his grip on power, with the Registrar of Political Parties Retired Judge Francis Mutungi drafting a controversial bill designed to expand state control over political parties. The proposed law, yet to be tabled in Parliament at the time, sought to grant the Registrar powers to deregister at will, restrict political coalitions, and tighten government oversight on party affairs. Critics accused the Registrar of acting as a government and CCM operative, further eroding political pluralism. The Registrar was later sued in court over his role in the internal wrangles that split opposition party Civic United Front (CUF) into rival factions, demonstrating the judiciary's struggle to maintain independence in an increasingly authoritarian landscape.<sup>75</sup> Opposition MPs and civic leaders from CUF were enticed to defect to CCM. CUF MP for Kinondoni, along with nearly 40 councillors resigned from their positions and defected to CCM under questionable circumstances. Subsequent by-elections were marred by blatant electoral fraud, including open vote rigging, intimidation of voters, harassment and abductions of opposition supporters. The Kinondoni Constituency by-election of February 2018 provided clear evidence

71 Carmel Rickard, 'Tanzanian lawyers in uproar after judge suspends their immediate past president from practice' Sept 2019, <https://carmelrickard.co.za/tanzanian-lawyers-in-uproar-after-judge-suspends-their-immediate-past-president-from-practice/>

72 Michaela Collord, 'Tanzania – Where President Magufuli's politics and his economics meet' DiA, democracy in Africa. <https://democracyinafrica.org/tanzania-president-magufulis-politics-economics-meet/>

73 Daniel Mumbere 'No one can defeat Magufuli, so no need for 2020 elections: Tanzania MP, 2020. <https://www.africanews.com/2019/04/09/no-one-can-defeat-magufuli-so-no-need-for-2020-elections-tanzania-mp/>

74 'Tanzania opposition Rejects Presidential Vote Results' October 2015, Voice of America, <https://www.voanews.com/a/vote-nullified-in-tanzanias-zanzibar-region/3026211.html>

75 'CUF board of trustees files lawsuit against Lipumba' The Citizen, April 2021. <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/cuf-board-of-trustees-files-lawsuit-against-lipumba-2569354>

of a state-orchestrated effort to subvert the democratic will of the people. Security agencies were directly involved in ensuring CCM victories, further eroding confidence in Tanzania's electoral system.<sup>76</sup>

The Leader of the Official Opposition in Parliament, Freeman Mbowe, endured a sustained campaign of persecution. His business empire was systematically targeted—his hotel and club business in Dar es Salaam were demolished over a tenancy dispute with the National Housing Corporation, while his horticultural farm in Hai district was destroyed in a state-sanctioned operation led by the District Commissioner of Hai, Gelladius Byakanwa in April 2017.<sup>77</sup> The authorities accused him of illegally establishing the farm in a water catchment area. He had owned the farm for over 10 years and the timing of the allegations was influenced by his struggles with the government. His bank accounts were frozen and emptied without legal justification or due process of the law.<sup>78</sup> Even in Parliament, Mbowe faced obstruction. He was denied access to the official services due to him by virtue of his position as leader of the opposition. Among other things, he was stripped of his official vehicle and his support staff were removed. Together with several Chadema MPs, he was charged with incitement, further restricting his political influence.

The February 2018 the abduction and assassination of a Chadema official Daniel John, which occurred just days before the Kinondoni by-election, was another chilling reminder of the ruthless campaign to silence critics of the Magufuli administration.<sup>79</sup>

The same month, Chadema councillor Godfrey Luena of Namawala in Morogoro was murdered, reportedly by CCM-aligned zealots. The attacks on opposition figures, however, did not begin in 2018. Ben Saanan, a close personal assistant to opposition leader Freeman Mbowe, disappeared in November 2016 and remains missing to this day.<sup>80</sup> His case remains one of the most high-profile unresolved disappearances in Tanzania's recent history. Just days before Saanane vanished, another Chadema regional official, Alphonse Mawazo, was abducted and killed in Geita in November 2016.<sup>81</sup> These cases represent only a fraction of a broader campaign of political persecution, designed to instil fear and suppress political opposition. Under Magufuli's leadership, Tanzania witnessed a rise in enforced disappearances, politically motivated killings, and systemic repression of dissent. Opposition politicians and civil society activists became prime targets, with many enduring arbitrary arrests, physical attacks, and even assassinations.<sup>82</sup> The Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) has extensively documented numerous other cases of suspect disappearances and attacks on perceived critics of the regime.<sup>83</sup>

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76 Interview with main opposition party chairperson, Tundu Lissu, November 2024.

77 'Mbowe given 14 days to pay levy for hotel' The Citizen, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/mbowe-given-14-days-to-pay-levy-for-hotel-2578482>

78 'Mbowe recalls how his bank accounts were emptied under Magufuli's regime' the Citizen newspaper, December 2024, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/mbowe-recalls-how-his-bank-accounts-were-emptied-under-magufuli-s-regime-4865832>

79 Interview with Tundu Lissu, opposition Chadema national chairperson, January 2025

80 'It's agony not knowing where Ben Saanane is, say parents' The Citizen, October, 2017, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/it-s-agony-not-knowing-where-ben-saanane-is-say-parents-2607296>

81 'AG objection in Mawazo petition rejected in Court' The Citizen November 2015, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/ag-objection-in-mawazo-petition-rejected-in-court-2539456>

82 Tina Kontinen & Ajali Nguyahambi, 'Negotiating CSO Legitimacy in Tanzanian Civil Space' Springer Nature Link' [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-23305-0\\_6](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-23305-0_6)

83 'Unknown Assailants': A Threat to Human Rights' Legal and Human Rights Centre, Tanzania Human Rights Report – 2017

Despite repeated calls for accountability, most of these cases remain unresolved. The police have been widely accused of complicity, cover-ups, or a deliberate lack of interest in pursuing justice.<sup>84</sup> Despite the evidence presented by civil society, the government and the police have consistently denied any involvement in kidnappings.<sup>85</sup>

## THE EROSION OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In the years leading up to President Magufuli's death in 2021, Tanzanians experienced greater fear of reprisals for expressing their views on various social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and others. There was a rise in the number of individuals arrested and charged for criticising Magufuli online who was widely perceived as being hostile to the media. Under his rule, Tanzania tumbled down the world press freedom index, from 71 in 2016 to 124 in 2021 (out of 180 countries) just one tier above Uganda and the Central African Republic. This followed the government's introduction of stringent regulations aimed at curtailing freedom of expression and the police actively monitoring internet and social media communications to suppress debates and messaging which portrayed Magufuli in an unfavourable light.

The Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) was granted expanded powers to licence online content producers and bloggers, compelling certain users to pay exorbitant fees of up to US\$900 annually. The Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations (2017) imposed

severe penalties for violations, including fines of Tsh5 million (US\$2300), a minimum imprisonment term of 12 months, or both. People could no longer freely post content that was deemed offensive by the authorities, including anything seemingly mocking the president. A notable example of a 'violation' of these stringent regulations was that of rapper Emmanuel Elibariki (known professionally as Nay wa Mitego), who in March 2017 was arrested after publishing music lyrics online that criticised Magufuli's administration, though he was never formally charged in court.<sup>86</sup> In another case, comedian Idris Sultan was charged with failure to register a SIM card after posting a video of himself laughing at an old photograph of President Magufuli wearing an oversized suit. The case was dismissed only after President Magufuli's death.<sup>87</sup>

Several human rights analysts and legal scholars argued that the deliberately broad and ambiguous wording of the regulations—such as prohibiting content deemed “indecent, obscene, hate speech, extremely violent or material that may offend, incite others, cause annoyance, threaten harm or evil, encourage or incite crime, or lead to public disorder”—was strategically designed to inhibit internet usage. Social media had demonstrated significant efficacy in raising public awareness, stimulating debate, and holding governmental authorities accountable, as evidenced by the public outcry following the killing of university student Aquilina Acquiline.<sup>88</sup> She was struck and killed by a stray bullet whilst travelling on a bus that was passing where police were confronting demonstrators from the

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84 Ansbert Ngurumo, 'Exposed: Tanzanian police officer implicated in kidnappings in arbitrary killings of Civilians' Sauti Kubwa, September 2024. <https://sautikubwa.org/exposed-tanzanian-police-officer-implicated-in-kidnappings-and-arbitrary-killings-of-civilians/>

85 Priscilla Mines 'Tanzanian authorities deny rights abuses as critics keep disappearing' Voice of America, <https://www.voanews.com/a/tanzanian-authorities-deny-rights-abuses-as-critics-keep-disappearing/7779552.html>

86 'Tanzania rapper Nay wa Mitego freed after Magufuli criticism', BBC, March 2017. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-39404366>

87 'Tanzania: Charges against comedian for laughing must be thrown out' Amnesty International, July 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/07/tanzania-charges-against-comedian-for-laughing-must-be-thrown-out/>

88 Interview with human rights journalist and researcher, Nov, 2024; <https://mg.co.za/article/2018-03-16-00-three-hitmen-came-for-me/>



opposition Chadema party on 16 February 2018. Chadema leaders, including the-then chairperson Mbowe, spent four months in pre-trial detention.<sup>89</sup> Mbowe and eight Chadema leaders were subsequently found guilty of unlawful assembly, rioting, sedition, and inciting the commission of offences. They were sentenced to either pay fines of Tshs 30 million each (approximately \$11,000) or serve five months in prison.<sup>90</sup> They were freed after social media was used to raise money to pay for the fines but appealed the sentence.<sup>91</sup>

The suppression of digital expression was part of President Magufuli's broader strategy to restrict freedom of expression, and this began early in his presidency with the enactment of the restrictive Media Services Act and the rapid prohibition of four newspapers in succession. The Act vests regulatory authority in the Director of Information Services Department to oversee print media licencing and establishes the Journalists Accreditation Board for the licensing of journalists but the bodies are not independent from government

interference.<sup>92</sup> The Act was used to ban four newspapers; Mseto, Mawio, Mwanahalisi and Tanzania Daima between 2016 to 2020.<sup>93</sup> In particular, Mwanahalisi was banned for 'tarnishing Magufuli's name' while Mawio was prohibited from linking former presidents to controversial mining agreements.<sup>94</sup>

It was apparent that these new internet restrictions were timed to coincide with (and to stifle) increasing moves by human rights activists to mobilise citizens to use social media to shine the spotlight on President Magufuli's repressive leadership style. Fearing that physical protests would encounter police brutality and human rights abuses, activists were strategically opting for cyberspace where citizens would disseminate anti-government messages via social media. On its part, the Magufuli administration was alive to the threats posed by online opponents and it dispatched agents to the United States in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to kidnap and possibly extradite one of the online protests' organisers, Mange Iambizing.<sup>95</sup>

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89 Dorothy Ndalu, 'Tanzania opposition leader freed after nearly four months in jail' The East African, March 2020. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/tanzania-opposition-leader-freed-after-nearly-four-months-in-jail-1413808>

90 'Mbowe and co found guilty, to pay fines or serve five months in prison,' The Citizen, March 2020, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/mbowe-and-co-found-guilty-to-pay-fines-or-serve-five-months-in-prison--2705152>

91 Faustine Kapama, 'Tanzania: Mbowe, Seven Chadema Senior Officials Appeal Against Convictions, Sentences' Daily News Tanzania, may 2020. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202005190477.html>

92 'Tanzania: Analysis of the Media Services Act, 2016' Centre for Law and Democracy, February 2017.

93 Oryem Nyeko 'Tanzania Ends Ban of Four Newspapers' Human Rights Watch, February 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/17/tanzania-ends-ban-four-newspapers>

94 Ibid

95 'Do you know Mange Kimambi was behind April demonstrations? You are among only 2pc of Tanzanians who do, says Twaweza' The Citizen, April 2021.

# TANZANIA'S COUNTERTERRORISM LAWS AND THEIR MISUSE

*While Tanzania's counterterrorism laws were initially enacted to combat rising terrorism threats and the financing of extremist groups, they have been also weaponised to suppress political dissent.<sup>96</sup> These have frequently been used to detain opposition leaders, activists, and journalists for prolonged periods, as terrorism and money laundering offenses are generally non-bailable.*

Several sets of laws govern terrorism-related offences, namely the Anti-Money Laundering Act (Cap 423), the Prevention of Terrorism Act of 2002, and the Proceeds of Crime Act No. 10 of 2009 forming the primary legal framework for counterterrorism measures. Over the years, these laws have undergone significant amendments, including the introduction of beneficial ownership disclosure requirements through changes to the Finance Act of 2022, the Companies Act No. 15 of 2013 (Zanzibar), and the Trustees Incorporation Act (Cap 318).<sup>97</sup> Under Magufuli, the Tanganyika Law Society recorded a sharp increase in money laundering cases, with 530 legal entities charged.<sup>98</sup> However, while charges against corporates were publicly documented, little information was available regarding individuals prosecuted under money laundering laws, including those linked to terrorism-related charges.

The enactment of these laws was heavily influenced by international pressure, particularly from the United States following the September 11, 2001, attacks. Given that the U.S. Embassy in Tanzania was among the targets of terrorist bombings, the U.S

government lobbied Tanzania to introduce stringent counterterrorism laws. This push coincided with the adoption of the Dakar Declaration Against Terrorism in 2001<sup>99</sup> and then President Benjamin Mkapa's foreign policy priorities, which placed great emphasis on strengthening diplomatic ties with western governments, particularly the U.S. There was a growing concern in government circles that failure to enact counterterrorism laws could internationally isolate Tanzania.

Despite this external pressure, Tanzania's Muslim community and a significant number of MPs opposed the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2002, arguing that it was being introduced without adequate public consultation. The framing of the law appeared to assume guilt among Muslims before trial, reinforcing a presumption that members of the Muslim community were inherently linked to terrorism. Critics warned that such framing could inflame sectarian tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims.<sup>100</sup> Concerns were also raised regarding the vague definition of who is a terrorist, which critics feared could violate fundamental human rights. While most MPs at the time focused on the

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96 Interview with one of the leading criminal lawyers in Tanzania, Sept 2024.

97 Tanganyika Law Society, "National Risk Assessment on Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing for Legal Persons and Legal Arrangements in the United Republic of Tanzania", June 2024, pp. 30-40.

98 Ibid, p.38

99 Former MP who served in parliamentary committee for international affairs. He attended the African Summit of October 2001, which adopted the Dakar Declaration against terrorism. The Tanzania US Embassy was attacked in August, 7, 1998 and left 220 people dead.

100 Prof Daimon Mwanga, MP while contributing to the debate about the Prevention of Terrorism Act in parliament, on 5, November 2002.

potential for sectarian tension, there was little discussion about how the same laws could later be used to target political dissidents, including opposition leaders, human rights activists and journalists.<sup>101</sup> Despite these warnings, the bill was passed, laying the groundwork for laws that would later be weaponised against government critics.

As the number of terrorism-related cases increased, security agencies intensified abductions of suspected terrorists, but at the same time, there was a sharp rise in terrorism-related charges against human rights activists. According to a criminal defence lawyer, defending clients accused of terrorism and money laundering became exceptionally challenging, as these moved excruciatingly slowly —often taking an average of four years before even reaching the hearing stage. “Prosecutors lack the mechanisms to successfully prosecute these cases due to poor training and therefore resort to holding suspects as long as necessary to punish them. Sometimes, they act under political pressure. The police and prosecutors kidnap or arrest suspects in response to political demands. Even if the charges are baseless, the law favours the prosecution, not the defendants,” said a senior defence lawyer with 25 years of experience.

The Anti-Money Laundering Act (as amended by Act No. 2 of 2022) defines terrorism financing as providing financial support or services to a terrorist group or individual with the intention of facilitating terrorist activities. For a financial transaction to qualify as terrorism financing, it must be directly or indirectly linked to supporting terrorist acts and may be conducted on behalf of a terrorist

organization. The law covers transactions aimed at facilitating the travel of individuals or groups for the purpose of committing terrorist acts.<sup>102</sup> Although predicate offenses for money laundering initially included poaching, armed robbery, forgery, and drug trafficking, the government later expanded the scope of financial crimes to include offenses related to prostitution, corruption, and mobile phone theft. Officials have linked this expansion to Tanzania’s porous borders, which have been exploited by international criminal syndicates, including terrorist organisations.<sup>103</sup>

Despite a seemingly robust legal framework to combat terrorism and money laundering, the judiciary and prosecuting authorities have shown a poor understanding of these laws. Judges, magistrates, and prosecutors have struggled to prosecute cases effectively, leading to weak convictions and prolonged pre-trial detentions. In most instances, authorities opt to charge suspects with predicate offenses, as evidence for terrorism and money laundering charges is often weak or misunderstood.<sup>104</sup> In 2017, amid rising cases of forced disappearances and kidnappings, MPs from both CCM and the opposition united to challenge the use of counterterrorism laws to justify human rights violations. Lawmakers reported that the abductions had escalated to the point where even women and children were targeted, which was unprecedented. MPs demanded the establishment of an independent commission to investigate and prosecute security officers involved in these kidnappings. Their investigations revealed that at least 380 individuals had gone missing, raising alarm across the

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101 Interview with former chair of the parliamentary committee for legal affairs, November, 2024

102 [Tanzania] Financial Intelligence Unit, “Terrorist Financing and Hawala Risk Assessment Report, 2022”, May, 2022, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclclefindmkaj/https://www.fiu.go.tz/uploads/documents/en-1712919524-TF%20and%20Hawala%20Risk%20Assessment.pdf

103 Shetret, Liat, et al. “Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism of Terrorism in East Africa and Greater Horn of Africa,” Global Centre on Cooperative Security, 2015, p.60 chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclclefindmkaj/https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep20268.14.pdf

104 Ibid., 65

political spectrum.<sup>105</sup> The then Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Tulia Ackson, publicly acknowledged that a secretive task force within the intelligence services was behind the abductions, warning that its actions threatened national stability. However, the government remained silent, refusing to acknowledge or act on these concerns.<sup>106</sup>

While human rights violations escalated, Tanzania also faced legitimate security threats, particularly along its southern border with Mozambique. Since 2017, the Islamist insurgent group Ahlu Sunna wa Jamaa (ASWJ), also known as ISIS-Mozambique, has conducted violent attacks in northern Mozambique and southern Tanzania, killing 2,500 people and displacing over 700,000.<sup>107</sup> In response to growing insecurity, the U.S. State Department designated ASWJ as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) on March 10, 2021.<sup>108</sup> Tanzania responded by deploying troops along its southern border, while Mozambique hired the Russian Wagner group and then the Dyck Advisory Group (DAG), a South African private military company, to assist its military in countering the insurgency.<sup>109</sup> In 2018, Tanzania and Mozambique signed a comprehensive security agreement, allowing intelligence sharing and joint military operations against the jihadist insurgents. Despite these efforts, terrorist attacks have escalated, with insurgents growing in confidence.<sup>110</sup> In March 2021, ASWJ shocked the world when

hundreds of well-armed fighters overran the town of Palma in Cabo Delgado province, targeting shops, banks, and military barracks, and killing dozens of civilians.<sup>111</sup> Following this, at least 300 insurgents crossed the Tanzania-Mozambique border, launching an attack in Kitaya village, where they killed an unknown number of people. Tanzania's military responded swiftly, launching a counterterrorism operation, which led to the capture of several militants and the seizure of weapons and ammunition.<sup>112</sup>

The longstanding security cooperation between Tanzania and Mozambique has however failed to counter the insurgency. Previous security cooperation between the two countries played a crucial part in helping Mozambique attain its independence from Portuguese colonial rule in 1975 and end the Mozambican civil war in 1992.<sup>113</sup> Bilateral defense agreements signed since independence have resulted in the deployment of over 40,000 troops to support Mozambique. Mozambique reciprocated by providing troops to support Tanzania during the Kagera War fought between Tanzania and Uganda from 1978 to 1979.<sup>114</sup> Despite this deep shared history, the two countries have not been able to effectively join forces to counter ASWJ and in contrast to previous times, this insurgency has strained the Tanzania-Mozambique relationship. Prior to the signing of the 2018 security agreement, there were accusations and

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105 Kabendera, Erick, "Where are the missing 380 people? Tanzanian MPs ask government" May, 2018, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/where-are-the-missing-380-people-tanzanian-mps-ask-government-1392976>

106 Parliament Ansard, April, 10, 2017

107 (BBC, 2021)

108 (Campbell John, 2020)

109 Ibid.,15

110 (Tanzania: Defence forces to launch a manhunt along the border with Mozambique - report.2020)

111 (Columbo Emilia, 2021); 13

112 Obulutsa, G. 2020. Militants from Mozambique staged deadly attack in Tanzania, police say. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tanzania-security-mozambique-idUSKBN2781PB>

113 (Cowel, 1982)

114 Ibid

counteraccusations that the insurgents originated from each other's countries.<sup>115</sup> The Tanzanian military was accused of crossing the border without consent and transferring radicalized individuals from Tanzania to Mozambique.<sup>116</sup> International humanitarian organizations accused Tanzania of rejecting over 1,000 displaced people seeking asylum to escape violence in Northern Mozambique due to Tanzania's concerns that the insurgents might be disguised as refugees and enter the country to plot further attacks.<sup>117</sup>

Following the continued escalation of attacks, in April 2021 the Southern African Development Community (SADC) passed a resolution for a military response to the attacks on civilians.<sup>118</sup> This was an attempt to restore peace and security, while sending the message that terrorism would not be tolerated in the region. Mozambique, however, resisted consenting to the resolution due to concerns that such a decision would violate its sovereignty. Instead, it indicated its preference for bilateral and non-state support to counter the insurgency.<sup>119</sup> Although both Tanzania and Mozambique chaired the SADC regional bloc between 2018 and 2019, there is little evidence that they used their leadership roles to establish concrete mechanisms for resolving the crisis.<sup>120</sup>

Counterterrorism in Tanzania has been securitised, which has limited room for adhering to human rights laws. Not even parliamentary committees have the power to raise questions regarding security matters, and there is a lack of oversight powers over the security agencies involved in

counterterrorism, thus raising concerns about human rights abuses. The police, the intelligence services, and the military all operate separate counterterrorism teams despite a joint team being in place, but they are struggling with resources and a lack of mandate. The lack of accountability has resulted in such teams being involved in political activities primarily to support the ruling party.

## CASES OF MISUSE OF COUNTER TERRORISM LAWS

Since 2010, Tanzania has witnessed at least four high-profile cases (some previously mentioned) in which the government charged journalists, activists, and opposition politicians with terrorism-related crimes. One of the first major cases involved Wilfred Lwakatare, a member of Chadema's secretariat, who, along with activist Joseph Rwezahura Ludovick, was charged with conspiracy to commit an offence by "maliciously administering poison with intent to harm" on a newspaper editor Dennis Msacky on 28 December 2012. According to the charge sheet, the conspiracy was contrary to section 24 (2) of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, No. 21 of 2002.<sup>121</sup> The second count stipulated that the respondents were charged with conspiracy to commit an offence, and the third count was "commissioning of offence of terrorist meeting" contrary to Section 5 (a) of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. In the third count, Lwakatare was charged with "promotion of offences" for allowing his house to be used for plotting the attack.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Interview with security source who attended a joint meeting between Mozambique police commander, Bernardino Rafael and the Tanzania Inspector General of Police, Simon Sirro to discuss joint operation against cross-border insurgents on 23, November, 2020.

<sup>116</sup> (BBC Swahili, 2020)

<sup>117</sup> (The UN Refugee Agency, 2021) <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/6/un-warns-tanzania-not-to-reject-people-fleeing-mozambique#:~:text=%E2%80%99CUNHCR%20teams%20%E2%80%A6%20have%20received%20worrying,access%20to%20those%20seeking%20protection.>

<sup>118</sup> (Svicevic Marko Walker Timothy, 2021)

<sup>119</sup> Ibid

<sup>120</sup> Interview with retired Tanzanian ambassador, October, 2024.

<sup>121</sup> 'Tanzania: Court of Appeal to Hear DPP's Lwakatare Case Application' Daily News, October, 2014. <https://allafrica.com/stories/201410131613.html>

<sup>122</sup> Criminal Case 37/2013 & 6/2013, Wilfred Lwakatare versus Republic.



Another notorious case involved Freeman Mbowe, who was charged with terrorism in 2021 under President Samia Suluhu Hassan's government. The state accused him of financing terrorist activities with the intent of assassinating government officials, but as the trial progressed, prosecution witnesses provided conflicting testimonies, and no credible evidence was presented. After months of legal pressure and international outcry, Mbowe was released following a negotiated political settlement. A third major case involved 36 Uamsho clerics, who were arrested for advocating Zanzibar's secession from Tanzania. They were detained for nearly a decade without trial, underscoring the extent to which counterterrorism laws were being used as a tool for political repression.

### The Wilfred Lwakatare case

When Lwakatare and Ludovick were charged with terrorism charges in March 2013, the media fraternity was shocked to learn that the alleged victim of the conspiracy, managing editor of Mwananchi Newspaper, Dennis Msacky, had never filed a complaint to the police against the suspects.<sup>123</sup> While Msacky knew Lwakatare as a Chadema official and former MP, there was no evidence to suggest that the two had any problem, which could have triggered a plot leading to the case.<sup>124</sup> However, prosecutors had alleged in court that a recording of Lwakatare and Ludovick plotting the incident had been obtained from an online platform and it was to be used as primary evidence in court.<sup>125</sup> Editors considered the case as emanating from the internal wrangling within Chadema after the party's central committee stripped its deputy chairman,

Zitto Kabwe of his position due to allegations of a plot to unseat the party chairman in 2013.

<sup>126</sup> Given Msacky was an editor of the most influential newspaper in the country, Chadema felt he was favoring Kabwe in his coverage of the dispute, but the involvement of the government in the matter was a development that puzzled everyone.<sup>127</sup> After Lwakatare and Ludovick were charged in court, they filed a case to challenge the validity of the charges. Shortly before the ruling was delivered, the prosecutor entered a *Nolle Prosequi* (formal withdrawal of charges) and dropped the case. However, on the same day, the defendants were immediately re-arrested and charged again in the same court with the same crimes—an act they condemned as “abuse of judicial process, abuse of prosecutorial power and derogation of independence of judiciary.”<sup>128</sup> Yet the case was filed in the Kisutu Resident Magistrate Court which lacked jurisdiction to hear a terrorism case. The defendants had seen the *Nolle Presque* as the prosecutor's strategy to pre-empt a ruling that was pending at a magistrate's court against the validity of the charges.

Without the defendants filing a miscellaneous criminal application at the high court, there were credible concerns that the case could have taken years before the residential magistrate court was granted jurisdictional powers by the high court to try the case.<sup>129</sup> The High Court provided an avenue not only to quash the charges but as a way of providing speedy justice to the respondents.<sup>130</sup> The defendants asked the high court to generally quash the *Nolle Prosequi* to allow the ruling of the case to take place. In the proceedings, the

<sup>123</sup> Interview with former editor, Mwananchi newspaper who closely worked with Dennis Msacky, January 2015.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>125</sup> Interview with defendant lawyer, December 2024.

<sup>126</sup> The Citizen, “Twists and turns in Zitto saga as Chadema cries foul” November 2013, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/twists-and-turns-in-zitto-saga-as-chadema-cries-foul-2501006>

<sup>127</sup> Interview with the editor

<sup>128</sup> The High Court of Tanzania at Dar es Salaam, ruling on miscellaneous criminal application no. 14 of 2013 (originating from Criminal Case 37/2013 & 6/2013) of Kisutu RSM Court).

<sup>129</sup> Interview with defence counsel, Dar es Salaam, Feb 2025

<sup>130</sup> Defence counsel

defense team had raised concerns about the insubstantial definition of what constitutes a terrorist attack. In the end, the court ruled that the charge sheet was defective as it did not provide substantial ingredients of the offence charged in compliance to the Criminal Procedure Act. Specifically, the Court said given that the offences of promotion of terrorism emanated from the fact that the meeting to plot the terrorist attack had taken place therefore there could have not been a conspiracy to commit a terrorist attack. The Court struck out count 2, 4 and four. That left them with a trivial charge of harming a journalist after the court acquitted them of terrorism charges. Furthermore, the judge warned the authorities against abusing terrorism law and using the law politically.

The Citizen newspaper, Tanzania's leading independent newspaper ran an editorial in which it mocked the nature of the charges after the court had dismissed the terrorism charges.<sup>131</sup> The editorial further questioned whether the government had substantial evidence before it filed the case, and warned the office of the Director of the Presidential Prosecution (DPP) against "playing to the whims of the ruling party and its impact on genuine terrorism cases." The most plausible reasons for Lwakatare being targeted was because of his position as the head of security affairs for the main opposition Chadema, which had raised concerns in CCM that he was receiving information from security agencies and using it to give Chadema advantage.<sup>132</sup>

## Freeman Mbowe terrorism charges

In the period leading to the 2020 general elections, Mbowe spent most of his time in exile after the opposition chief whip, Tundu Lissu was shot 16 times and airlifted to receive medical care abroad.<sup>133</sup> In March 2019, Mbowe was released from prison, where he and other Chadema leaders had spent four months facing charges of sedition, incitement to violence, and holding an illegal rally.<sup>134</sup> As the threats on his life increased, he was advised to hire Tanzanian retired military commandos to protect him due.<sup>135</sup> Around 2019, his ex-military bodyguards were kidnapped and charged with terrorism charges but there was no media coverage because they barely appeared in court due to the covid pandemic which restricted court appearances for suspects.<sup>136</sup> Mbowe only returned to Tanzania in 2020 to support his party in the election; the opposition only won one seat out of the 264 parliamentary seats, Mbowe held a press conference and accused CCM of using the security agencies to rig the election and immediately left the country.<sup>137</sup>

It was only after the death of President Magufuli and the swearing in of President Samia that Mbowe returned to the country to resume political activities.<sup>138</sup> It was hoped that President Samia would have ushered in the new era of democracy and allow opposition leaders to resume their political activities, even though the ban on the political rallies remained in place.<sup>139</sup>

131 The Citizen, "my take on this: state risks to be ignored in genuine terrorism case" August 2013, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/oped/my-take-on-this-state-risks-to-be-ignored-in-genuine-terrorism-cases-2495408>

132 Interview, former senior CCM member of the National Executive Committee, December 2024.

133 The Citizen, "Doctors' report awaited to airlift Tundu Lissu to the US" Sept, 2017, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/doctors-report-awaited-to-airlift-tundu-lissu-to-the-us-2605130>

134 Ndal, Dorothy, "Tanzania Opposition leader freed after nearly four months in jail" The East African, March, 2019, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/tanzania-opposition-leader-freed-after-nearly-four-months-in-jail-1413808>

135 Interview with Chadema senior official, Dar es Salaam, May 2021.

136 Interview with Chadema senior official

137 Al Jazeera, "Tanzania opposition loses key seats in vote marred by fraud claim" October 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/29/tanzania-opposition-loses-key-seats-in-vote-marred-by-fraud-claim>

138 Al Jazeera, "Tanzania swears in new president after sudden death of Magufuli" March 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/19/tanzania-to-swear-in-new-president-on-friday-after-death-of-maguf>

139 Interview with Freeman Mbowe's senior advisor, March 2025

On the 17 July 2021, Mbowe drove by road from the Northern Tanzania town of Moshi to Mwanza to attend a conference, which was organized by the Chadema Youth Wing (Bavicha) to demand for the review of constitution for the country, which became a key agenda after the death of Magufuli. President Samia had warned the opposition that the ban against all the rallies was still in place, but Mbowe organized a press conference while in Mwanza and declared that they would defy the government's order. A night before the youth conference where he was expected to be the guest of honour, armed men invaded his hotel and whisked him away at a gunpoint. It wasn't until the July 22, 2021, that the police announced they were charging Mbowe with terrorism, together with six other unnamed people for conspiracy to assassinate government officials. The charges became clearer when Mbowe appeared before the Kisutu Magistrate Court to face economic sabotage charges, involving funding of terrorist activities, with the aim of assassinating government officials together with his bodyguards.<sup>140</sup>

As it was the case for Lwakatare, the Chadema lawyers filed a preliminary objection at the high court, but it was dismissed on the grounds that the case was unattainable before the parties were all heard in court. The court proceedings attracted a significant public interest. As state witnesses appeared before court, it became clear that the government had not thought through the charges before they were filed in the court, as most provided conflicting accounts of how Mbowe had financed terrorism and the names of the leaders he had conspired to assassinate.<sup>141</sup> As the case proceeded in court, President Hassan conducted an interview

with the BBC and used the opportunity to discuss the case.<sup>142</sup> The president said that the police had been investigating Mbowe since Sept 2020, and he was aware of the charges he was likely to face but fled the country. Despite the state persistently defending the case, it did more damage than good to the president who was initially seen as trying to move Tanzania away from the brutality of Magufuli's regime.<sup>143</sup> Despite the president facing backlash, her defenders claimed that she was being misled by factions within the security agencies who didn't want to her to reverse Magufuli's policies. However, the backlash led to some advisors within the president's inner circle to find a political solution to the case as consistent coverage of the case in the press tainted the president's image early on her presidency.<sup>144</sup> To justify that the ideas came from other people, not the president, a group of religious leaders were paraded to at the state house to plead with the president to release Mbowe from prison. Pictures from such meetings were being circulated on the internet, a group of politicians, businesses people and journalists were negotiating with Mbowe to accept the terms which had been presented to him as a condition for his release. One of the conditions involved Mbowe embarking on the reconciliation talks with CCM right after his release from prison to help diffuse political tension.<sup>145</sup>

After months of persuasion, he accepted the terms and was released from prison after the office of the DPP had informed the court that it was not interested in pursuing the case. On the same day he was released from prison, Mbowe went straight to the state house where he shook hands with President Samia to mark the beginning of the new chapter, an act which disappointed most of the party's

140 Reuters, "Tanzanian court charges opposition leader with terrorism-related crimes" July 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/tanzanian-court-charges-opposition-leader-with-terrorism-related-crimes-2021-07-26/>

141 Interview with retired government prosecutor, Feb 2025.

142 The Citizen, "President Samia: Mbowe's arrest, charges not politically motivated" August 2021. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/president-samia-suluhu-speaks-on-mbowe-charges-3507192>

143 Interview with former opposition MP, Dar es Salaam, Feb 2025

144 Interview with CCM member of Secretariat, Feb 2025.

145 Ibid

supporters who have resisted reconciliation talks with CCM.<sup>146</sup> The subsequent two years were marked by Chadema supporters criticising Mbowe for being a sellout for participating in the reconciliation talks, which they view as compromising the party's values.<sup>147</sup> In addition to the criticisms,

Mbowe faced further allegations of being compromised by President Samia to soften Chadema's position towards the government. The criticisms resulted in a backlash against Mbowe and were seen as a contributing factor to Mbowe's loss of the party leadership to Tundu Lissu in December 2024.<sup>148</sup>

## EXTERNAL ACTORS AND TANZANIA'S SURVEILLANCE INFRASTRUCTURE

*Tanzania's transformation into a surveillance state has been largely facilitated by external actors who have provided sophisticated technological capabilities, training, and operational support to the country's security apparatus.*

These extensive surveillance capabilities, which have been used in the counterterrorism fight, are systematically deployed against political opponents, journalists, and human rights activists. Through their contributions to the development of Tanzania's surveillance infrastructure, foreign governments, private corporations, and international institutions have contributed to the erosion of civil liberties and democratic freedoms in Tanzania, particularly since the presidency of John Magufuli (2015-2021) and continuing under President Hassan (2021 to present). Tanzania presents an important case study in how international actors can contribute to democratic backsliding, authoritarianism and human rights violations through technology transfers and security cooperation. The sophistication and pervasiveness of surveillance capabilities (extending from traditional communications interception to

advanced spyware capabilities and location tracking systems) provided by these nations have fundamentally altered Tanzania's political landscape, creating advantages for authoritarian governance while eroding democratic competition and civil liberties. Israel, China and Russia are largely considered Tanzania's main military partners.<sup>149</sup> These partners have traditionally sold military hardware and security equipment to Tanzania, but have also extended their sphere of influence to include surveillance equipment, particularly since Magufuli became president. Since the 2015 election, Israel became a reliable surveillance partner, helping the government to target dissidents and human rights activists.<sup>150</sup>

The involvement of multinational telecommunications companies in Tanzania's surveillance infrastructure presents a critical,

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<sup>146</sup> Owere, Paul "President Samia meets Mbowe hours after his release" March 2022, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/president-samia-meets-mbowe-hours-after-his-release-3737898>

<sup>147</sup> Francis, Lusekelo "CCM, Chadema Row Over Stalled Reconciliation Talk" Feb 2024, The Chanzo, <https://thechanzo.com/2024/02/05/ccm-chadema-row-over-stalled-reconciliation-talks/>

<sup>148</sup> Interview with Chadema's member of the secretariat, January, 2025

<sup>149</sup> Interview, former member of the parliamentary committee for security affairs, May 2025.

<sup>150</sup> According to Evarist Chahali, a former Tanzanian intelligence officer who lives in exile, Israel was the biggest supplier of surveillance technology, particularly Pegasus spyware from 2015. See, "Tanzania and the Circles Surveillance Platform: A case study in Digital Intrusion", April 2024, <https://www.ujasusi.com/p/tanzania-and-the-circles-surveillance>

perhaps under-examined dimension of external actor participation. The government has compelled mobile phone companies to share information regarding the location of the opposition politicians and journalists under the circumstances which remains unclear to date.<sup>151</sup> Fearing that they would lose their licenses, mobile phone companies, particularly, Tigo Tanzania [owned by Millicom International Cellular] and Vodacom Tanzania [owned by Vodacom South Africa] were under pressure to comply with government demands.<sup>152</sup> opposition leader Tundu 2017

Similarly, the case of investigative journalist Erick Kabendera against Vodacom Tanzania reveals systematic telecommunications company involvement in surveillance operations. Kabendera alleged that Vodacom abruptly switched off his mobile phone signal to facilitate his kidnapping in July 2019<sup>153</sup>. The Hassan regime has either created or maintained pressure forcing telecommunications companies into compliance and complicity with its surveillance demands regardless of legal or ethical concerns.

## ISRAEL

Israel has established itself as the primary supplier of advanced surveillance equipment since 2015.<sup>1</sup> The relationship deepened considerably in the aftermath of Magufuli's electoral victory, when Israeli firms began providing comprehensive surveillance solutions that went far beyond traditional military hardware sales.

The centrepiece of Israel's contribution has been the provision of spyware which was deployed extensively from 2015 onwards<sup>154</sup>. According to testimony from Evarist Chahali, a former Tanzanian intelligence officer now living in exile, Israel became "the biggest supplier of surveillance technology, particularly Pegasus spyware from 2015"<sup>155</sup>. This sophisticated malware enables remote access to mobile devices, allowing operators to monitor communications, access stored data, activate cameras and microphones, and track real-time location without the target's knowledge.

Israeli contributions to Tanzania's surveillance capabilities is said to extend beyond provision of software to include training programmes for Tanzanian security personnel. Some local human rights organisations have alleged that "Israel had provided training and technology to the police to determine the location of mobile phone users without necessarily seeking cooperation from the telecoms"<sup>156</sup>. This capability represents a significant escalation in surveillance sophistication, enabling direct targeting of individuals without requiring formal legal processes or telecommunications company cooperation.

## THE MER GROUP

The Mer Group, an Israeli conglomerate operating in telecommunications, cyber intelligence, and homeland security, has emerged as one of the significant external players building Tanzania's surveillance infrastructure, enabling and enhancing the

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151 James Magai, 'Vodacom raises an objection against Kabendera's \$10 million lawsuit' James Magai. <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/court-news/vodacom-raises-an-objection-against-kabendera-s-10-million-lawsuit-4684986>

152 Pegg, David, "Firm disclosed phone data of shot Tanzanian politician, UK tribunal hears," The Guardian, Sept 2024. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/sep/24/firm-disclosed-phone-data-of-shot-tanzanian-politician-tundu-lissu-uk-tribunal>

153 Magai, James, "Vodacom raises an objection against Kabendera's \$10 million lawsuit" July 2024 <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/court-news/vodacom-raises-an-objection-against-kabendera-s-10-million-lawsuit-4684986>

154 Ibid

155 Ibid

156 Interview with technological researcher who works for the country's biggest human rights organisations, Dar es Salaam, January 2025.



state's capacity to monitor, intimidate, and suppress dissent.

MER Group began operating in Tanzania during in 2007, having been awarded a large cellular turnkey tender by then President Kikwete's administration.<sup>157</sup> On its website, the company states that it subsequently established a "permanent base in Dar Es Salaam" and rapidly became "one of the dominant integrators in the local market," completing "hundreds of turnkey cellular sites" in partnership with most major mobile operators and tower infrastructure providers.<sup>158</sup> Though described in technocratic, commercial and neutral language typical of global technology providers engaging in sales talk, the implications of Mer Group's extensive presence and activities in Tanzania are far from benign. It masks a far more sinister reality: MER Group's diversification into "homeland security, cyber, intelligence, data analysis, safe and smart cities, and emergency response"<sup>159</sup> has enabled the authoritarian Tanzanian state to deploy sophisticated tools for repression under the guise of national security and modernisation. Mer Group portrays and markets itself as a commercial entity providing "*endtoend solutions*" to national security forces, police, intelligence agencies, municipalities, prisons, border authorities, and corporations.<sup>160</sup> This expansion into sensitive security domains reveals its deep involvement in surveillance infrastructure, an involvement that could facilitate human rights violations.

Under Presidents Kikwete and Magufuli, Tanzania witnessed growing surveillance and legal encroachment into civil and political spheres—especially targeting opposition parties, journalists, academics, NGOs, and religious groups—often under the pretext of counterterrorism or maintaining public order. Under the incumbent Hassan administration,

the arbitrary arrests, torture, harassment, abductions, and enforced disappearances that characterised previous regimes are increasing exponentially as the elections slated for October 2025 draw closer. The current regime has recalibrated by engaging in repression that is increasingly data-driven and digitally enabled.

And Mer Group's technological portfolio aligns disturbingly well with the priorities of the Hassan regime. The conglomerate's "advanced cyber and intelligence" tools, tailored for use in municipal governance, prisons, critical infrastructure, border control, and transportation<sup>161</sup>, are the very systems Tanzania and other repressive states need to facilitate mass surveillance, predictive policing, and digital authoritarianism. It is, therefore, not far-fetched to assert that Mer Group's systems have enabled the surveillance-led repression—such as the interception of communications, arbitrary detentions, and enforced disappearances of opposition figures, journalists, and human rights activists discussed elsewhere in this report. Consequently, Mer Group and other Israeli technology firms should not be viewed as commercial actors, but as willing and active enablers and co-architects of state repression in Tanzania.

As Tanzania approaches its October 2025 general election, there is mounting concern about the deployment of surveillance tools designed to suppress political dissent. Interception of communications, facial recognition in campaign spaces, and AI-driven data profiling—core components of Mer Group's offering—are reportedly being used to intensify surveillance. The result could be an orchestrated environment in which electoral freedom is constrained digitally thus removing the need to use brute force to maintain the CCM hegemony.

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<sup>157</sup> <https://mer-group.com/es/countries/tanzania-es/> accessed on 22 June 2025

<sup>158</sup> Ibid

<sup>159</sup> Ibid

<sup>160</sup> Ibid

<sup>161</sup> Ibid

Mer Group's operations in Tanzania can be divided into three key categories, each with raising serious implications for human rights:

### 1. Communication Interception and Predictive Policing

Mer Group's deployment of RoIPVoIP systems—voice-over-internet protocols that are also found in Israeli military vehicles<sup>162</sup>—provides the Tanzanian regime with the capacity to intercept and archive private telecommunications. When integrated with AI-based data analysis, this enables predictive policing models much like Israel's "Wolf Pack" system, which algorithmically flags individuals for pre-emptive surveillance or even detention<sup>163</sup>. In the Tanzanian context, such capabilities may be used to target opposition figures ahead of the upcoming elections under the guise of pre-emptive security measures.

### 2. Smart City Surveillance and Checkpoint Control

Mer Group's *Safe City* platforms—successfully piloted in places such as Jerusalem's Old City—combine high-definition CCTV, facial recognition, and motion analytics<sup>164</sup>. If they are deployed in cities like Dar es Salaam or Mwanza, these systems would enable round-the-clock monitoring of political gatherings, religious events, and movements by journalists. The firm's technology for upgrading surveillance at checkpoints aligns with the militarisation of Tanzanian

public spaces, where forceful crowd control tactics, including the use of tear gas and live ammunition, have been employed to suppress dissent.

### 3. Border Security and Population Control

Mer Group produces advanced border surveillance tools—including drones, thermal cameras, and AI-enhanced perimeter systems—that mirror technologies used in Israel's control of Palestinian movement<sup>165</sup>. These tools likely underpin violent displacement efforts, such as those impacting Maasai communities in Ngorongoro<sup>166</sup>.

## CHINA

China is by far Tanzania's oldest and most reliable ally. These relations run deep and have evolved since the much celebrated Tazara railway into security and regime support. China's counterterrorism ideology is premised on the concept of the 'Three Evils': terrorism, separatism (or "splittism"), and religious extremism.<sup>167</sup> As a popular slogan of the Chinese Communist Party, this Three Evils framework enables the Chinese state to conflate legitimate political dissent, religious expression, and ethnic pride and identity with national security threats. This conflation enables the state to deploy counterterrorism laws and measures- including mass surveillance, profiling, repression and arrests- against a broad range of individual rights and freedoms.

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162 <https://www.whoprofits.org/companies/company/4041> accessed on 22 June 2025

163 <https://www.mei.edu/publications/nowhere-hide-impact-israels-digital-surveillance-regime-palestinians> accessed on 22 June 2025

164 Ibid

165 Ibid

166 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/10/tanzania-experts-call-urgent-action-amid-crackdown-civil-society-ahead> accessed on 22 June 2025

167 <https://uschinadialogue.georgetown.edu/podcasts/china-s-approach-to-counterterrorism> accessed 24 June 2025

The implementation of China's counterterrorism doctrine is heavily dependent on the deployment of sophisticated surveillance technologies that enable comprehensive population monitoring and behavioural prediction. The technological architecture supporting preventive counterterrorism includes facial recognition systems, biometric data collection, communications monitoring, and algorithmic analysis of individual behaviour patterns. Happening in the context of Tanzania's weak or non-existent parliamentary oversight mechanisms, the potential influence of China's counterterrorism doctrine and associated surveillance technologies to Tanzania has compounded the erosion of democratic governance and human rights protection.

China's contributions to Tanzania's surveillance ecosystem differs from Israel's targeted spyware provision by offering comprehensive digital infrastructure through multiple channels, notably combining state-to-state cooperation with commercial technology transfers. China has focused on building foundational digital infrastructure that enables comprehensive surveillance capabilities, including telecommunications networks, data centres, and artificial intelligence systems<sup>168</sup>. Chinese telecommunications companies Huawei and ZTE, have played a leading role in developing Tanzania's telecommunications infrastructure backbone, which provides the fundamental architecture for surveillance operations<sup>169</sup>. China is rapidly becoming one of the most important funders of information and communications technology (ICT) networks

across the Global South, with Chinese contractors deeply involved at all levels of ICT and mobile telecom provision<sup>170</sup>.

This has included video surveillance systems, data analytics platforms, and artificial intelligence capabilities for processing large volumes of communications data<sup>171</sup>. Analysis indicates that "tech companies like Huawei, ZTE, Hikvision, and Cloudwalk have secured government contracts to build smart cities, data centres, e-governance platforms, and surveillance systems.

## HUAWEI

Huawei alone is involved in 25 data centre and e-governance projects across Africa<sup>172</sup>. Huawei's transfer of technology to Tanzania and other countries exemplifies what scholars of surveillance studies refer to as "dual-use" technologies<sup>173</sup>. These are systems developed for legitimate commercial applications yet inherently equipped with capabilities that allow for their adaptation to political surveillance and control. Such technologies may be instrumentalised by authoritarian regimes to suppress dissent and facilitate human rights violations. In the case of Tanzania, Huawei's deployment of 5G networks, mobile communication systems, and broadband infrastructure has collectively enabled successive governments- from President Kikwete to the current Hassan regime- to establish a comprehensive communications dragnet—a technical apparatus capable of intercepting, monitoring, and analysing digital communications across the national territory.

168 Council on Foreign Relations, "China's Digital Silk Road and Africa's Technological Future," accessed May 2025, [https://cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Chinas Digital Silk Road and Africa's Technological Future\\_FINAL.pdf](https://cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Chinas%20Digital%20Silk%20Road%20and%20Africa's%20Technological%20Future_FINAL.pdf)

169 South African Institute of International Affairs, "China-powered ICT Infrastructure: Lessons from Tanzania and Cambodia," September 12, 2023, <https://saiia.org.za/research/china-powered-ict-infrastructure-lessons-from-tanzania-and-cambodia/>

170 Ibid

171 Eurasia Review, "Mapping China's Presence in Africa's Digital Economy – Analysis," July 15, 2021, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/16072021-mapping-chinas-presence-in-africas-digital-economy-analysis/>

172 Ibid

173 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/26746317\\_A\\_Note\\_on\\_the\\_Definition\\_of\\_Dual\\_Use](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/26746317_A_Note_on_the_Definition_of_Dual_Use) accessed on 22 June 2025

The surveillance capabilities embedded within Huawei's telecommunications infrastructure are highly sophisticated and extensive. Deep packet inspection (DPI) systems allow for real-time analysis of internet traffic, enabling authorities to monitor web browsing patterns, identify anonymous users, and correlate online activities with physical identities.<sup>174</sup> Additionally, the location tracking capabilities embedded in mobile networks provide continuous surveillance of citizens' movements, allowing for the construction of intricate profiles detailing individuals' movements, daily routines, and social affiliations. These capabilities are further complemented by metadata analysis systems which can map surveillance subjects' social networks, identify their communication patterns, and predict their political activities based on their communication behaviours.

The US, Australia, Japan, and many other "developed nations" have effectively banned Huawei from building their 5G networks, but the Chinese company remains popular in Tanzania and other low-income countries,<sup>30</sup> reflecting global concerns about the surveillance implications of Huawei's technology. The Tanzanian government appears more concerned about internal threats to its survival than it is about any arguments about "digital colonialism" and surveillance threats it could be vulnerable to because of using Huawei and other Chinese technologies.

## HIKVISION: VISUAL SURVEILLANCE AND FACIAL RECOGNITION SYSTEMS

Hikvision has established itself as a leading surveillance technology company, manufacturing millions of cameras annually and providing surveillance technology to 180 countries.<sup>175</sup>

Local retailers in Tanzania advertise comprehensive ranges of Hikvision CCTV cameras, digital video recorders (DVRs), network video recorders (NVRs), and integrated surveillance systems,<sup>36</sup> indicating widespread adoption of Chinese visual surveillance technology across both public and private sectors in the east African nation. This proliferation helps build a powerful surveillance ecosystem that places at the authoritarian state's disposal, an interconnected system of monitoring devices that can be integrated for comprehensive population surveillance.

Hikvision's surveillance systems go beyond simple video recording to encompass sophisticated artificial intelligence-powered analysis systems. Advanced facial recognition algorithms can identify individuals in real-time across multiple camera feeds, tracking their movements throughout urban environments and correlating their activities with other data sources. Behavioural analysis systems can identify suspicious activities, flag unusual movement patterns, and automatically alert authorities to potential security concerns. Hikvision Network Video Recordings (NVRs) can be remotely accessed through local area network and the internet.<sup>176</sup> Licence plate recognition capabilities enable comprehensive tracking of vehicle movements, whilst crowd analysis systems can monitor public gatherings and identify potential unrest before it develops.<sup>177</sup>

## DAHUA TECHNOLOGY

Although the extent its operations in Tanzania remain unclear, Dahua's presence and offerings in Tanzania are nonetheless disconcerting from a human rights perspective. The company has branded itself as a "world-leading video-centric artificial intelligence solution and service provider," specialising in surveillance technologies that

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174 <https://forum.huawei.com/enterprise/intl/en/thread/huawei-aps-and-wlan-controller-licenses/745435707947761664?blogId=745435707947761664> accessed 22 June 2025

175 <https://www.hikvision.com/en/about-us/company-profile/> accessed on 22 June 2025

176 <https://www.pabxsystemtanzania.com/hikvision-distributor-dar-es-salaam/> accessed 22 June 2025

177 <https://www.hikvision.com/en/about-us/company-profile/> accessed on 22 June 2025

support urban management, public safety, and enterprise operations.<sup>178</sup> It integrates intelligent surveillance systems with digital innovation to enhance security infrastructure, enable data-driven governance, and optimise operational efficiency across both municipal and commercial domains. One of its local distributors offers Tanzanians both Internet Protocol (IP) and analogue cameras for use in various surveillance applications in both public and domestic settings.<sup>179</sup> Its Network Video Recorders (NVRs) boast sophisticated features including real live view support, recording and preview, real-time playback, intelligent search, multiple network monitoring and the automatic acquisition of IP addresses.<sup>180</sup> The behavioural monitoring capabilities provided by Dahua technology are particularly concerning in the context of Tanzania's grave human rights situation which is deteriorating further as the October 2025 elections draw closer.

The Chinese model of surveillance technology transfer operates within the broader framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has positioned infrastructure development as a vehicle for expanding Chinese influence across Africa<sup>181</sup>. The Digital Silk Road component of the BRI has been particularly significant in enabling surveillance capabilities through telecommunications infrastructure development<sup>182</sup>. In Tanzania's case, this has included significant investments in digital

infrastructure that have dual-use capabilities for surveillance purposes, creating what scholars describe as “techno-authoritarian” dependencies<sup>183</sup>.

## RUSSIA

Russia's contributions to Tanzania's surveillance capabilities have primarily been through traditional military and security partnerships, focusing on training, equipment supply, and intelligence cooperation<sup>184</sup>. The most recent example of this military and intelligence partnership took place in May 2025 when Russia hosted Tanzanian intelligence as well other officials from 39 other African countries in Moscow.<sup>185</sup> Dubbed the 13th International Meeting of High-Ranking Officials Responsible for Security Matters, the meeting which lasted from 27 to 29 May 2025, sought to cement military and intelligence cooperation between Russia and African nations. Speaking on the sidelines of the event, Director of External Operations at the Tanzania Intelligence and Security Service (TISS), Edmund Kitokezi, underscored his country's need for close cooperation with Russia to tackle numerous “serious threats including terrorism, cybercrime, and money laundering.”<sup>186</sup> Russian involvement in Tanzania predates the current surveillance infrastructure but has been adapted to support operations as part of Moscow's broader strategy of expanding influence in Africa since 2014<sup>187</sup>.

178 <https://www.dahuasecurity.com/aboutUs/introduction/0> accessed on 22 June 2025

179 <https://www.pabxsystemtanzania.com/dahua-distributor-dar-es-salaam/> accessed on 22 June 2025

180 Ibid

181 Council on Foreign Relations, “China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative,” February 3, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/background/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>

182 Council on Foreign Relations, “China's Digital Silk Road Initiative,” accessed May 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/china-digital-silk-road/>

183 South African Institute of International Affairs, “China-powered ICT Infrastructure: Lessons from Tanzania and Cambodia.”

184 Council on Foreign Relations, “Russia's Growing Footprint in Africa,” December 28, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/background/russias-growing-footprint-africa>

185 <https://afrinz.ru/en/2025/05/tanzanian-intelligence-service-emphasize-importance-of-cooperation-with-russia/> accessed 23 June 2025

186 Ibid

187 Reuters, “Factbox: Russian military cooperation deals with African countries,” October 17, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-africa-russia-factbox-idUSKCN1MR0KH/>



Russia has signed military cooperation agreements with at least 19 African countries in the last 12 years, which involve supplying arms and equipment, military training, intelligence sharing, and other cooperation<sup>188</sup>. Although Tanzania is not among the most prominent recipients of Russian military assistance in Africa, the relationship has included communications interception equipment, signals intelligence capabilities, and training for Tanzanian security personnel in surveillance techniques<sup>189</sup>. It is possible that the Russo-Tanzanian cooperation is much stronger than media reports suggest with many aspects going under the radar. In a 2021 statement on “Current Russian-Tanzanian Cooperation”, the Russian Embassy in Tanzania disclosed that large Russian companies were “ready to cooperate with Tanzanians in implementing major projects and provide support and solutions for Tanzania’s industrialization agenda”.<sup>190</sup> One of these was Rostec, the military-industrial behemoth, which incorporates over 700 companies and employs over half a million people.<sup>191</sup> This state-owned corporation oversees the research and development of military technologies and owns several production facilities, which play an instrumental role in putting those technologies into operation on the battlefield. Rostec and its subsidiaries produce an array of military equipment, including helicopters and armoured fighting vehicles, Kalashnikov rifles and night vision goggles. Given the long history of diplomatic relations and military cooperation, it would not be surprising if Tanzania turned to the Russian market to boost its military capabilities.

The Russian cooperation with Tanzania has also included the provision of radio interception equipment, communications monitoring systems, and training programmes for intelligence personnel<sup>192</sup>. The Russian model of security cooperation across Africa has seen an aggressive expansion of its military cooperation with African nations through various mechanisms including private security companies and state-to-state agreements<sup>193</sup>.

This includes diplomatic support for Tanzania’s surveillance activities, providing political cover within international forums for policies that restrict civil liberties and enable surveillance operations. The political dimension of this partnership has been crucial in legitimising surveillance practices that would otherwise face international criticism, particularly within regional and international bodies where Russia maintains influence<sup>194</sup>.

## SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia is a newer but potentially significant addition to Tanzania’s surveillance partnerships. Saudi Arabia was one of several countries that participated at a 2017 conference hosted by Tanzania for ICT professionals and decision makers in government, industry, academia and NGOs to discuss improving cybersecurity and resiliency for security in Arab and African regions. The conference topics included incident response, Forensic and Malware Analysis, Threat Intelligence, Internet Resilience, Internet Security Policies.<sup>195</sup>The

188 Council on Foreign Relations, “Russia’s Growing Footprint in Africa.”

189 Center for Strategic and International Studies, “Russia Is Still Progressing in Africa. What’s the Limit?” October 8, 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-still-progressing-africa-whats-limit>

190 [https://tanzania.mid.ru/en/press-centre/tanzanian\\_media\\_about\\_russia\\_1/curre\\_russiooper/](https://tanzania.mid.ru/en/press-centre/tanzanian_media_about_russia_1/curre_russiooper/) accessed on 23 June 2025

191 <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/the-inner-workings-rostec-russias-military-industrial-behemoth> accessed on 23 June 2025

192 PBS News, “What to know about Russia’s growing influence in Africa,” June 6, 2024, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/what-to-know-about-russias-growing-influence-in-africa>

193 Ibid

194 Center for Strategic and International Studies, “Russia Is Still Progressing in Africa. What’s the Limit?”

195 [https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Cybersecurity/Pages/Tanzania\\_cyberdrill\\_2017](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Cybersecurity/Pages/Tanzania_cyberdrill_2017) accessed on 23 June 2025

participants also engaged in cyber drill exercises structured around various scenarios involving the most common types of cyberattacks while the sharing sessions provides a platform for cooperation and discussions on cybersecurity.

The FIRST-ITU Regional Symposium for Africa and Arab Regions, took place from 13 to 15 November 2017 and the Applied learning for Emergency Response Teams (ALERT) cyber drill for Africa and Arab Regions, took place from 16 to 17 November 2017.<sup>196</sup>

In 2023, Tanzanian President Hassan visited Saudi Arabia to participate in the Saudi-African Summit. She is also said to have met senior Saudi officials on the sidelines to discuss bilateral and regional cooperation.<sup>197</sup> Although details of that meeting were not disclosed, it is believed that security matters featured in the agenda. The most notable development has been the September 2024 signing of a cybercrime cooperation bilateral agreement between the two countries. This has however, raised concerns among human rights organisations about expanded surveillance capabilities ahead of the October 2025 elections<sup>198</sup>.

This partnership reflects Saudi Arabia's broader strategy of exporting surveillance technologies and expertise to allied governments across Africa and the Middle East. The timing of the agreement, coinciding with Tanzania's electoral preparations, suggests specific intentions to enhance surveillance capabilities for political monitoring purposes.

The Saudi contribution appears focused on cybercrime cooperation, which typically

includes capabilities for monitoring online communications, tracking digital activities, and coordinating international surveillance operations. This partnership potentially provides Tanzania with access to advanced cyber surveillance tools that complement existing capabilities provided by other partners.

## WESTERN COUNTER TERRORISM PARTNERS

An analysis of the role of Western powers, particularly the United Kingdom and United States, in Tanzania's surveillance ecosystem reveals ambivalent patterns of engagement that combine support for counter-terrorism capabilities with concerns about human rights violations<sup>199</sup>. Western involvement has primarily operated through security cooperation programmes, counter-terrorism initiatives, and development assistance that includes technological components with dual-use implications for surveillance capabilities.

The UK's engagement with Tanzania's security sector has included training programmes, equipment provision, and intelligence sharing arrangements<sup>200</sup>. While officially focused on legitimate security concerns including counterterrorism and organised crime, these programmes have contributed to building institutional capabilities that enable broader surveillance operations. This approach has emphasised capacity building within Tanzania's security services, including training programmes for intelligence personnel and the provision of communications monitoring equipment for counter-terrorism purposes<sup>201</sup>.

A notable recent example of the UK and US military collaboration with Tanzania is the Exercise Justified Accord which was

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid

<sup>197</sup> <https://www.spa.gov.sa/en/> accessed on 23 June 2025

<sup>198</sup> Media Wire Express, "Tanzania, Saudi Arabia Sign Security Pact" September, 2024. <https://mediawireexpress.co.tz/tanzania-saudi-arabia-sign-security-pact/>

<sup>199</sup> Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2024: Tanzania," January 11, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/tanzania>

<sup>200</sup> U.S. State Department, "2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Tanzania," January 3, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/tanzania/>

<sup>201</sup> Ibid

conducted in February 2025 across three countries, Djibouti, Kenya, and Tanzania. This exercise involved over 2000 personnel from 29 countries including Tanzanian infantry units.<sup>202</sup> The drills included urban warfare, drone operations, and the coordination of ground and air support—skills directly relevant to surveillance and counterinsurgency operations.

These exercises included intelligence sharing and in particular, the UK provided instruction on the use of surveillance drones, reconnaissance tactics, and digital communications interception.<sup>203</sup>

The engagement has however become increasingly complicated by concerns about human rights violations and the misuse of security capabilities for political repression. The UK government has faced scrutiny in its own parliament about the use of British-provided security assistance in human rights violations, leading to reviews of security cooperation agreements and enhanced human rights conditionality in assistance programmes<sup>204</sup>.

The United States' engagement through counter-terrorism programmes and security assistance has provided capabilities that can be repurposed by the Tanzanian government for domestic surveillance operations<sup>205</sup>. The US Africa Command (AFRICOM) has maintained cooperation with Tanzanian security forces, including intelligence sharing and training programmes that have enhanced surveillance capabilities<sup>206</sup>. In 2023,

the US and Tanzania co-hosted a military intelligence conference that “facilitated the cultivation of collective strategies to address common challenges across Africa” and “reinforced AFRICOM’s whole-of-government approach, integrating diplomacy, development, and defense”<sup>207</sup>.

The challenge for the US lies in balancing legitimate security cooperation with concerns about enabling authoritarian surveillance practices. US State Department human rights reports have documented concerns about Tanzania’s surveillance activities<sup>208</sup>. The 2022 Country Report noted that “a variety of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated with government restrictions” and documented concerns about government surveillance of civil society organisations<sup>209</sup>.

## THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU)

Since the early 2000s, the EU has positioned itself as a key development partner for Tanzania, investing heavily in digital infrastructure, e-governance, and data governance frameworks. Through various initiatives, the EU has supported the expansion of 4G networks, fibre optic cables, and digital government services.<sup>210</sup>

The European Union’s approach has emphasised promoting good governance and human rights while maintaining security cooperation relationships<sup>211</sup>. However, the practical impact of EU engagement has

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202 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/by-land-and-by-sea-uk-supports-us-led-military-exercises-improving-african-security-and-stability> accessed on 22 June 2025

203 Ibid

204 Human Rights Watch, “World Report 2022: Tanzania,” January 17, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/tanzania>

205 U.S. State Department, “2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Tanzania.”

206 U.S. Africa Command, “U.S. and Tanzania Co-Host Military Intelligence Conference,” accessed May 2025, <https://www.africom.mil/pressrelease/35471/us-and-tanzania-co-host-military-intelligence-conference>

207 Ibid

208 U.S. State Department, “2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Tanzania.”

209 Ibid

210 [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/countries/tanzania\\_en](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/countries/tanzania_en) accessed on 23 June 2025

211 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “United Republic of Tanzania,” accessed May 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/tanzania>

been limited by the competing interests of member states and the challenges of conditioning security assistance on human rights performance. EU development assistance has included digital governance components that have dual-use implications for surveillance capabilities, creating tensions between development objectives and human rights concerns<sup>212</sup>.

## EU Companies

European companies have also played crucial roles in developing Tanzania's surveillance infrastructure, providing the technology and operational expertise necessary for comprehensive population monitoring. These companies, operating through various commercial arrangements supported by EU development aid and bilateral agreements, have transferred sophisticated surveillance capabilities that enable unprecedented levels of social control without sufficient consideration for the human rights consequences of their actions.

Thales Group, the French multinational aerospace and defence conglomerate, has emerged as a key provider of biometric and surveillance technologies across Africa, including Tanzania.<sup>213</sup> Among other things, Thales has provided Tanzania with surveillance systems to improve safety and security at its various airports. However, the company's involvement in Tanzania and other African countries

extends beyond equipment provision to encompass system integration, training programmes, and ongoing technical support that enable effective surveillance operations. Thales's biometric identity management

systems provide the technical foundation for comprehensive population monitoring, whilst its communications interception capabilities enable comprehensive digital surveillance. The company's Gemalto subsidiary, acquired in 2019, specialises in digital security and identity management solutions that form critical components of surveillance infrastructure. Gemalto's products, including SIM cards with built-in surveillance capabilities and biometric authentication systems, enable comprehensive mobile communications monitoring and citizen tracking.<sup>214</sup> The company's software solutions facilitate real-time data analysis and pattern recognition that transform raw surveillance data into actionable intelligence for security services. These technologies have helped entrench and enhance Tanzania's surveillance capabilities.

Since the turn of the millennium, Ericsson, a Swedish company has been providing mobile network infrastructure, network analytics, and security solutions to Tanzania.<sup>215</sup> The company's sophisticated analytics systems facilitate real-time tracking and profiling of individuals, enabling state actors to surveil and suppress dissent.

German software company SAP SE, has also done business with Tanzania, boosting its surveillance capabilities through the supply of technology for data analytics, e-governance platforms, and digital public infrastructure. Its centralised data platforms can be leveraged to monitor civic activity and restrict access to services for targeted groups. SAP SE has had the dubious distinction of being charged and fined for bribing officials in Tanzania, South Africa, Malawi, Kenya, Ghana, Indonesia, and Azerbaijan to secure contracts.<sup>216</sup> In January 2024, the company agreed to monetary

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212 Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa, "Unmasking Digital Security Threats facing Human Rights Defenders in Uganda and Tanzania," August 9, 2018, <https://cipesa.org/2018/08/unmasking-digital-security-threats-facing-human-rights-defenders-in-uganda-and-tanzania/>

213 [https://www.thalesgroup.com/en/group/journalist/press\\_release/tanzania-civil-aviation-authority-takes-final-delivery-thales-toposky](https://www.thalesgroup.com/en/group/journalist/press_release/tanzania-civil-aviation-authority-takes-final-delivery-thales-toposky) accessed on 23 June 2025

214 <https://www.thalesgroup.com/en/markets/digital-identity-and-security> accessed on 23 June 2025

215 <https://www.ericsson.com/en/about-us/company-facts/ericsson-worldwide/tanzania> accessed on 23 June 2025

216 <https://www.sec.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2024-4> accessed on 23 June 2025

sanctions of nearly US\$100 million to settle the charges which had brought against it by the Securities and Exchange Commission in the United States of America.<sup>217</sup> The episode clearly demonstrates that the company lacks ethics and is not adverse to underhand dealings with equally corrupt officials in Tanzania and other countries. Therefore, such a company cannot be trusted to prioritise safeguards for human rights in its dealings, it would not be far-fetched to think it could even aid an authoritarian government like Tanzania in its repressive agenda.

The EU's support for digitalisation and e-governance, while framed as development assistance, has had the unintended but foreseeable effect of empowering Tanzanian authorities to centralise control over information and communication. The expansion of broadband and mobile networks, coupled with mandatory SIM registration and digital ID systems, has enabled the state to monitor citizens with unprecedented precision. Successive Tanzanian governments have exploited these capabilities to track the movements and communications of opposition leaders, leading to arbitrary arrests and intimidation, especially during election periods. Journalists, human rights activists and other dissenters have also not been spared harassment and arbitrary arrests. The state has employed the digital surveillance tools it has acquired from the EU and European companies to identify and harass journalists and activists critical of the government, thus contributing to a climate of fear and self-censorship. The Tanzanian case highlights the need for greater accountability and transparency in international technology transfers. It is imperative for the EU and its

companies to ensure that their contributions to digital development are not repurposed into instruments of repression.

### United Nations and International Oversight

The United Nations has played an increasingly important role in documenting and criticising Tanzania's surveillance activities, particularly through the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and special rapporteurs<sup>218</sup>. UN human rights mechanisms have documented concerns about the use of surveillance technologies against human rights defenders and civil society organisations<sup>219</sup>.

A 2023 UN report highlighted how counterterrorism 'rhetoric' was used to justify the rise of surveillance technology with "drones, biometrics, artificial intelligence (AI) and spyware being ramped up in the ongoing fight against terrorism, without due regard" for human rights implications<sup>220</sup>. The UN has called for enhanced oversight of surveillance technology transfers and the implementation of human rights safeguards in security cooperation programmes<sup>221</sup>.

However, the effectiveness of UN oversight has been limited by the voluntary nature of many human rights mechanisms and the lack of enforcement powers. Tanzania has "generally cooperated with visits from UN representatives, such as special rapporteurs, as well as those from UN specialized agencies" but has not always implemented recommended reforms<sup>222</sup>.

The surveillance technology sourced from external actors has been systematically deployed against Tanzania's civil society,

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid

<sup>218</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "United Republic of Tanzania."

<sup>219</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Technology and Rights," accessed May 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/topic/technology-and-rights>

<sup>220</sup> UN News, "Counter-terrorism 'rhetoric' used to justify rise of surveillance technology: human rights expert," March 14, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/03/1134552>

<sup>221</sup> Ibid

<sup>222</sup> U.S. State Department, "2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Tanzania," January 3, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/tanzania/>

creating a comprehensive system of political monitoring, repression and ultimately human rights violations. The targeting has been particularly focused on three key groups: political opposition figures, journalists, and human rights activists.

Opposition leaders report being unable to conduct private communications or meetings without assuming government monitoring, fundamentally altering the dynamics of political competition.

Journalists have also faced targeted surveillance that has been used to identify their news sources, monitor investigative activities, and facilitate their arrest and detention. This has resulted in significant self-censorship among Tanzanian journalists, who will always assume there is comprehensive government monitoring of their activities.

Human rights activists and civil society organisations have similarly faced systematic surveillance that has been used to monitor

their activities, identify their networks, and coordinate repressive actions. The sophistication of this surveillance has increased significantly in recent times with the deployment of advanced technologies provided by external partners.

The impact on civil society has been profound, with many organisations reducing their activities due to surveillance concerns, contributing to what some human rights observers describe as the “closing of civic space” in Tanzania. The inability to conduct private communications or meetings has fundamentally undermined the independence and effectiveness of civil society organisations.

The long-term impacts of civil society suppression include reduced accountability, diminished service delivery, and weakened social cohesion. Civil society organisations play crucial roles in Tanzanian society that cannot be replaced by government institutions.

## TANZANIA’S SECURITY APPARATUS

*Tanzania employs a multi-agency approach in its fight against terrorism. Prominent in that counterterrorism architecture are the following security agencies: the Tanzania People’s Defence Force (TPDF), the Tanzania Police Force (TPF), the Tanzania Intelligence and Security Service (TISS), the National Counterterrorism Centre (NCTC), and the People’s Militia (auxiliary force).*

Although, each of these security agencies have distinct roles, mandates and command structures, they collaborate to address terrorism threats, particularly those emanating from extremist groups such as ISIS-Mozambique (ASWJ) in the southern regions. required

As a result, Tanzania’s security architecture has evolved significantly in response to regional terrorism threats. The country’s multi-layered security framework encompasses military, police, intelligence, and paramilitary components, each playing

distinct yet interconnected roles in national counterterrorism efforts.

### TANZANIA PEOPLE’S DEFENCE FORCE (TPDF)

Comprising of Land Forces, Naval Forces, Air Force, and National Building Army, the TPDF is the country’s main military force and it operates under the Ministry of Defence. It plays a major role in ensuring border security, counterterrorism and general counterinsurgency operations, particularly in the southern regions bordering Mozambique



where extremist/terrorist groups like Ahlu Sunna wa Jamaa (ASWJ) operate. ASWJ is also known as ISIS-Mozambique (ISIS-M). It has also deployed as part of regional and UN peacekeeping missions, in the Central African Republic (for MONUSCA), in the DRC, (for MONUSCO), in Lebanon (under UNIFIL), in South Sudan (under UNMISS) and also in Sudan (under UNAMID and UNISFA).

Following a major reorganisation in 2004, conscripts are obligated to serve two years, ensuring a steady flow of trained personnel whilst maintaining the force's connection to broader Tanzanian society. This conscription system contributes to the TPDF's substantial manpower base and its ability to conduct sustained operations.<sup>223</sup>

The TPDF also has a Marine Commando Unit and other special forces (trained in amphibious and anti-guerrilla warfare) that can be deployed against organised militant groups. The United States (US) Special Operations Command has regularly conducted joint exercises with the Tanzanian Marine Commandos to enhance maritime and rapid-response capabilities. The Tanzanian Navy and Air Force also contribute with aerial surveillance and coastal patrols, supplementing the police-led ground response.<sup>224</sup> In 2018 the TPDF was reported as having 27,000 soldiers in active duty across the different branches (23,000 army, 1,000 navy, 3000 airforce, and 1400 paramilitary), and had a reserve of 80,000.<sup>225</sup>

China has emerged as a primary partner in ongoing efforts to modernise, train and equip the TPDF. In February 2018, then Tanzanian President Magufuli officially opened a Chinese-built training centre for the TPDF in Mapinga. At the time, President Magufuli was quoted as saying the US\$30 million Comprehensive Training Centre (CTC) had been built with the assistance of China's

People's Liberation Army and would be used to provide modern training to the TPDF to enable the latter to counter current and future threats to Tanzania. During the opening ceremony, President Magufuli witnessed demonstrations of TPDF capabilities that included an amphibious landing and counter-terrorism operations.

Recent joint exercises demonstrate the significant scope of Chinese involvement with the TPDF. An example is the July and August 2024 Sino-Tanzanian training exercise dubbed Peace Unity-2024. Writing extensively on the joint training which also included the Mozambican army, Jake Vartanian notes that the exercise "provided the People's Liberation Army (PLA) an opportunity to apply its growing joint expeditionary capability, while also strengthening its relationship with a key strategic partner on the African continent". The exercise comprised a "sea phase" and a "land phase" lasting from July 29 to August 11.

During the sea phase, the Chinese navy conducted maritime patrols, search and rescue, and live-fire training off the coast of Mozambique alongside Tanzanian and Mozambican military counterparts.

The land phase took place in Mapinga, and focused on counterterrorism operations. It was divided into four stages, namely, joint specialty training, combined command, tactical training, and live-fire drills. During the joint specialty training component, units from the TPDF and the Chinese PLA participated in an equipment-instruction module. PLA soldiers displayed and provided instruction on more than 23 different types of weapons and equipment, including small arms, micro unmanned aerial vehicles, and various engineering, reconnaissance, communication, and infantry vehicles. Tanzanian and Chinese soldiers trained together on counterterrorism concepts and modern battlefield tactics,

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223 Global Security, "Tanzania - People's Defence Force," accessed May 2025.

224 NSW operators, Tanzania Marine Special Forces close out JCET, <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/8140394/nsw-operators-tanzania-marine-special-forces-close-out-jcet#:~:text=Tanzania%20Marine%20Special%20Forces%20members,Joseph%20Pick>, accessed May 2025

225 The Military Balance, (2018), International Institute for Strategic Studies

techniques, and procedures.<sup>226</sup> China has also provided military hardware to Tanzania, including 24 Type 63A light amphibious tanks, 12 Type 07PA 120 mm self-propelled mortars, FB-6A mobile short-range air defence systems and A100 300 mm multiple rocket launchers.<sup>227</sup>

This follows military hardware delivered earlier in the decade, including tanks, armoured personnel carriers and combat aircraft. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), China also provided Tanzania with two Y-8 transport aircraft in 2003, four ZFB-05 armoured personnel carriers in 2006/7, 30 Type-59G tanks in 2011/13, 14 F-7MG fighters in 2009/12, six K-8 jet trainers in 2011/12 and ten WZ-551 APCS in 2011/12.<sup>228</sup>

The US has maintained parallel engagement with the TPDF for more than 25 years. According to the US embassy in Tanzania, it has “worked closely with Tanzanian military and security forces to counter terrorism, ensure territorial integrity, and support international peacekeeping operations. A critical part of this cooperation is the Professional Military Education (PME) provided to hundreds of TPDF officers at U.S. military institutions, which strengthens mutual capabilities and deepens the partnership between our nations”.<sup>229</sup>

Through the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), it cooperates with Tanzanian security forces in intelligence sharing and training programmes that have enhanced surveillance capabilities.

In 2023, the US and Tanzania co-hosted a military intelligence conference.

Later in 2025, the US and Tanzania conducted two joint military training exercises and programmes aimed at enhancing regional security and peacekeeping capabilities.<sup>230</sup>

The land-based Justified Accord 2025 exercise focused on enhancing the TPDF's peacekeeping capabilities, while the naval-based Cutlass Express maritime exercise brought together Indian Ocean countries to boost maritime domain awareness and security. According to a statement by the US Embassy in Tanzania, the training was aimed at enhancing the TPDF members' “experience in counter-improvised explosive device (C-IED) tactics, gender protection, medical evacuation procedures, and the integration of both manned and unmanned aerial vehicles in peace operations”.<sup>231</sup>

The US-facilitated training programmes encompassed both conventional military skills and specialised counterterrorism capabilities.

## PEOPLE'S MILITIA

The People's Militia functions as a reserve component of the TPDF. It was established by the Militia Act of 1963 to provide the military with Tanzanian citizens; the peasants and workers who were ready to defend their country as one of the components of the TPDF.<sup>232</sup> This militia system draws from Tanzania's historical experience under President Nyerere's socialist military doctrine,

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226 Peace and Unity: China's Growing Military Footprint in Tanzania: <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/SSI-Media/Recent-Publications/Display/Article/3930357/peace-and-unity-chinas-growing-military-footprint-in-tanzania/> accessed June 2025

227 “Chinese-built military training centre opens in Tanzania”: <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/land/land-land/chinese-built-military-training-centre-opens-in-tanzania/> accessed June 2025

228 Ibid

229 “U.S. and Tanzania Strengthen Security Cooperation through Joint Military Training Exercises”: <https://tz.usembassy.gov/u-s-and-tanzania-strengthen-security-cooperation-through-joint-military-training-exercises/> accessed June 2025

230 Ibid

231 Ibid

232 [https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/tanzania/peoples-militia.htm#google\\_vignette](https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/tanzania/peoples-militia.htm#google_vignette) accessed June 2025

providing a broad-based security structure that can be mobilised for various threats, including terrorism.<sup>233</sup> The roles of the Militia as stipulated in the National Defence Act of 1966 include the following:

- Train and work with civil authorities in maintaining security, law and order in their respective areas
- Aid to civil power in national emergencies.
- Work as volunteer reserve of the Armed Forces
- Guard sensitive installations in their respective areas<sup>234</sup>

The same Act states that a militiaman or woman is liable for military training (provided by the TPDF) for a period not exceeding 30 days per year in his or her location and in a military unit for a period not exceeding 30 days per year.<sup>235</sup> Army units provide instructors to train militia in the brigade's area of operation from the regional level down to the village level. Militia Advisors at the regional and district commissioner's offices supervise training and coordinate any administration required for training. Apart from military training, civic education is also taught to create a sense of nationalism and patriotism.<sup>236</sup>

These reserve forces are integral components of TPDF because they provide support across crises and capability warning times. This may be in the form of intelligence in their communities which is crucial since they have a knowledge of their own areas which outsiders may not possess. The People's Militia operates as a decentralised force organised at local levels and integrated with traditional governance structures. In counterterrorism contexts, militia units have been deployed to support intelligence gathering, border monitoring, and community mobilisation

against suspected terrorist activities. This deployment pattern reflects broader trends in African security governance, where state authorities have increasingly relied upon auxiliary forces to extend security provision beyond the capacity of regular security services. The militia's local knowledge and community integration theoretically provide advantages in identifying suspicious activities and monitoring cross-border movements. However, the effectiveness of these operations remains difficult to assess due to limited transparency in security operations and the classification of most counterterrorism activities.

However, the integration of militia units into intelligence operations has also created opportunities for the abuse of surveillance powers, particularly in politically sensitive contexts. The overlap between counterterrorism objectives and political control has resulted in situations where legitimate security concerns become intertwined with broader patterns of political oppression. International organisations have documented the involvement of militia forces in political violence, particularly during electoral periods. "The Tanzanian government has not held security forces and aligned militia accountable for killings in Zanzibar during the 2020 elections, Human Rights Watch stated in a 2021 report.<sup>237</sup> The organisation found that at least 14 people died and 55 were injured, as police, soldiers, and armed men in civilian clothes teargassed and shot into crowds, between October 26 and 30, 2020. "The armed men also arbitrarily arrested, detained, and tortured opposition supporters on Zanzibar's main islands of Unguja and Pemba. Neither the Tanzanian central authorities nor Zanzibari authorities have acknowledged, let alone investigated, the full scale and toll of the violence, despite a public outcry within the

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233 Ibid

234 Ibid

235 Ibid

236 Ibid

237 "Tanzania: No Justice for Zanzibar Election Violence": <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/29/tanzania-no-justice-zanzibar-election-violence#:~:text=Human%20Rights%20Watch%20research%20has,High%20Commissioner%20for%20Human%20Rights> accessed June 2025

country, and calls for investigations, including by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,” Human Rights Watch added in the same report.<sup>238</sup> It is therefore evident that, just like other security agencies the People’s Militia can be misused for political ends by the government.

## TANZANIA INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICE (TISS)

The TISS is the primary intelligence agency tasked with identifying and assessing national security threats. TISS is a member of Tanzania’s National Counterterrorism Centre (NCTC) alongside representatives from the police, defence, immigration and prisons, sharing intelligence and planning joint investigations to counter terrorism. The extent to which the security agencies cooperate is difficult to gauge due to the opacity of the TISS and its counterparts’ operations. It was formally established in 1996 following the enactment of the National Security Act. Before then, intelligence operations were conducted by the Police Special Branch, a colonial-era institution.<sup>239</sup>

The TISS operates under the aegis of the Office of the President and is directly answerable to the President. It is not subject to public parliamentary oversight, contributing to its reputation for opacity. The agency is headed by a Director General (DG), appointed solely by the President without the requirement for legislative confirmation or transparency in terms of criteria or qualifications. This structure has been criticised for fostering a culture of unaccountability and turning the TISS into a partisan institution which frequently engages in human rights violations.<sup>240</sup>

Over the years, TISS has expanded from a loosely organised body into a hierarchical and bureaucratic institution with regional offices throughout all of Tanzania’s regions. It is believed to be divided into multiple departments, including domestic intelligence, foreign intelligence, cyber-surveillance, counterterrorism, and political affairs, though the exact configuration remains classified.

The TISS is believed to be composed primarily of civilian personnel recruited through highly secretive procedures. Recruitment into the agency is not subject to public advertisement or competitive processes, with most officers allegedly vetted through ruling-party-linked patronage networks.<sup>241</sup> It is also likely that some TISS staffers are seconded from the police or military services, the bulk of TISS staff are believed to be career intelligence officers recruited and trained internally.

It has long been a contentious institution, frequently implicated in human rights abuses. However, its role is believed to have intensified under President Magufuli, with widespread allegations that it was utilised primarily as a tool for political repression rather than for safeguarding national security. Throughout the 2015 and 2020 election cycles, numerous opposition leaders, civil society organisations, and independent journalists reported incidents of threats, intimidation, surveillance, and enforced disappearances—allegedly orchestrated by intelligence operatives.

One of the most prominent cases occurred in November 2017, when prominent opposition CHADEMA leader and outspoken Magufuli critic, Tundu Lissu, was shot multiple times outside his home in Dodoma in a failed assassination attempt. Although no one was

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238 Ibid

239 Paget, D. (2020). Tanzania: Shrinking Space and Opposition Strategies. *Journal of Democracy*

240 “Why spy chief role has been a roller coaster”: <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/why-spy-chief-role-has-been-a-roller-coaster--4078592> accessed June 2025

241 Ibid

charged, the CHADEMA and international observers suspected TISS involvement or at least its prior knowledge, given the level of surveillance placed on Lissu before the attack.

In October 2020, ahead of the general election, several opposition candidates, including Zitto Kabwe and Freeman Mbowe, were reportedly subjected to arbitrary arrests and digital surveillance. These actions created an environment of fear that severely undermined democratic participation.

Human rights violations have continued and appear to be escalating under current President Hassan's watch. The latest incidents involved the arrest and torture of regional human rights defenders who had come to Tanzania last month to attend Lissu's ongoing treason case, suggests the use of TISS alongside other security agencies in the escalating repression under President Hassan. (See Current Political Environment chapter for details). The lack of transparency surrounding the TISS has made it difficult to ascertain its precise involvement in human rights violations perpetrated by security forces over the years. This institutional opacity has, in effect, allowed TISS to evade accountability. While it is widely recognised that Tanzanian security forces have engaged in acts of torture, killings, illegal surveillance, enforced disappearances of journalists, political opponents, human rights activists, and civilians, determining the extent to which TISS has directly contributed to these abuses remains difficult.

## TANZANIA POLICE FORCE (TPF)

The Tanzania Police Force operates under the Ministry of Home Affairs and serves as the primary law enforcement agency responsible for internal security and counterterrorism operations. It has a paramilitary wing, the Field Force Unit (FFU), that is trained for high-risk scenarios. Some of its units are specially trained for rapid-response and

counterterrorism (also known as often called anti-terror police or special operations units) and they are tasked with bomb disposal, hostage rescue, and armed interventions. In Dar es Salaam, the police maintain a dedicated Anti-Terrorism Unit and Explosive Ordnance Disposal team. Zanzibar has its own Revolutionary Police Force under the Zanzibar Interior Ministry; however, union agencies like the TPF and the Tanzania Intelligence and Security Service (TISS) may operate there under union provisions.<sup>242</sup>

Under President Hassan's administration in 2024, significant expansion of the police force occurred, with 7666 new officers recruited in the financial year leading up to the 2025 elections, including 5237 for the police specifically, as the government moves to strengthen its security capabilities.<sup>243</sup> While this is necessary for enhancing law enforcement capabilities, it also increases the Hassan regime's capacity for repression of real and perceived opponents.

TPF training is coordinated by the Police Training College in Moshi and other academies in Kiwira and Dar es Salaam. Basic police training includes criminal law, use of force, human rights, public order management, and basic firearms handling. Judging by the frequency of alleged rights violations and repression by police officers and other security agencies, it does not appear the human rights training has had any effect on the TPF officers.

Specialist counterterrorism training is also provided in collaboration with international actors like the United States, through its Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) Programme. Select TPF officers have received training in areas such as counter-IED operations, VIP protection, and hostage negotiation. INTERPOL have also supported capacity-building initiatives aimed at strengthening counterterrorism investigations, cybercrime responses, and forensic analysis.

242 [https://media.tanzlil.org/media/legislation/305598/source\\_file/c8ac0afe941afdc6/1996-15.pdf#:~:text=This%20Act%20may%20be%20cited,Interpretation](https://media.tanzlil.org/media/legislation/305598/source_file/c8ac0afe941afdc6/1996-15.pdf#:~:text=This%20Act%20may%20be%20cited,Interpretation) accessed May 2025

243 The Citizen, "Tanzania Recruits 7666 New Security Officers Ahead of 2025 Elections," 2024.

The TPF's operational responses are shaped by a combination of preventive policing, rapid response, and intelligence-led operations. The Field Force Unit (FFU) is deployed in crowd control, counterinsurgency, and border patrol missions. However, the FFU's frequent use of excessive force has drawn criticism from human rights watchdogs, especially during political protests and demonstrations.

Surveillance capabilities within the TPF have increased in recent years, driven by regional and international pressure to respond effectively to terrorism and transnational crime. In urban areas, particularly Dar es Salaam and Arusha, the TPF has installed CCTV networks, some of which are integrated into central command posts.<sup>244</sup> Facial recognition software and Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems have also been introduced, although coverage remains patchy. The Cybercrime Unit, established under the Cybercrimes Act (2015), has acquired tools for monitoring digital communications, social media activity, and mobile transactions. There is also evidence that the TPF has used technologies provided by foreign security firms, including those from Israel and China, for telecommunications interception.<sup>245</sup> However, these capabilities are frequently deployed without adequate legal oversight, raising concerns over privacy and unlawful surveillance—particularly of opposition figures and journalists.

## NATIONAL COUNTER-TERRORISM CENTRE (NCTC)

Tanzania's NCTC is an inter-agency unit comprising of officers from the intelligence, police, defence, immigration, and prison sectors who work collectively on counterterrorism issues. This is the primary liaison agency between Tanzania and international partners in counterterrorism initiatives, engaging in intelligence sharing, policy implementation and capacity building initiatives. It coordinates Tanzania's counterterrorism strategies.<sup>246</sup> In practice, however, observers have noted gaps. For instance, it has been observed that the NCTC lacks its own equipment and clear authority, hence its crisis response tends to rely on ad-hoc cooperation rather than a codified command structure. Although agencies can coordinate during incidents, heads of the agencies may exercise autonomy in operations.<sup>247</sup> Nonetheless, the NCTC is Tanzania's primary liaison with international partners on CVE (Countering Violent Extremism), highlighting its central role in coordinating both domestic and international counterterrorism efforts.<sup>248</sup> The establishment of the SADC Regional Counterterrorism Centre in Dar es Salaam in 2022 has accorded Tanzania a dual role as both a national actor and regional hub for counterterrorism coordination.<sup>249</sup>

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244 "Tanzania to install street cameras in its biggest city, Dar es Salaam": <https://africa.cgtn.com/tanzania-to-install-street-cameras-in-its-biggest-city-dar-es-salaam/> accessed June 2025

245 "Dissent as cybercrime: social media, security and development in Tanzania": <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17531055.2021.1952797#abstract>

246 "Country Reports on Terrorism 2016 – Tanzania"- <https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/usdos/2017/en/117935?prevPage=/node/117935#:~:text=Tanzania%27s%20NCTC%20is%20an%20interagency,analysis%20and%20crime%20scene%20investigation> accessed May 2025

247 Ibid

248 U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism 2024: Tanzania, Bureau of Counterterrorism, 2024.

249 Ibid



# DANGERS AHEAD OF THE 2025 ELECTIONS

*With general elections scheduled for October 2025, there are justified concerns about the security agencies' potential misuse as political instruments in the hands of the incumbent Hassan regime.<sup>250</sup>*

Based on past patterns and current trends of repression, the following could occur:

## WEAPONISED SURVEILLANCE INFRASTRUCTURE

The transformation of Tanzania into a digital surveillance state poses one of the gravest threats to electoral integrity. Surveillance tools supplied by foreign governments and corporations ostensibly to bolster Tanzania's counterterrorism fight have been repurposed to monitor opposition leaders, journalists, civil society actors, and ordinary citizens. The state's surveillance capabilities include spyware, phone tracking, social media monitoring, facial recognition, and communications interception. The surveillance tools could be used for:

- Targeting opposition mobilisation: Tracking the locations and communications of opposition leaders enables the government to pre-emptively disrupt meetings, rallies, and campaign operations.
- Data-driven repression: AI-based surveillance could be deployed to flag individuals as 'risks' based on their online activity, political affiliation, or attendance at rallies.
- Instilling a culture of fear: Citizens, activists, and journalists could self-censor or avoid political activity altogether out of fear of digital surveillance and reprisals.

## USE OF REPRESSIVE LAWS

President Hassan heads to the polls armed with an assortment of highly repressive laws, some inherited from colonial rule and others enacted post-independence and expanded ostensibly to fight terrorism post-9/11. These include the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2002), Cybercrimes Act (2015), and the Intelligence and Security Services Act (amended). These laws empower the state to arrest and detain individuals without trial, ban political gatherings, criminalise online speech, and prosecute political leaders under terrorism or treason charges.

## HOW THE LAWS COULD BE USED AHEAD OF THE ELECTIONS:

Opposition targeting and elimination: the prosecution of opposition leader Tundu Lissu on trumped-up treason charges demonstrates that the government is prepared to unleash its arsenal of repressive laws which carry the death penalty in its desperate quest to eliminate opponents

Silencing dissent: government critics may be charged with cybercrimes or terrorism to remove them from the political contest and public discourse.

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250 "Tanzanian Arrests Bad Omen for Upcoming Elections": <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/29/tanzania-no-justice-zanzibar-election-violence#:~:text=Human%20Rights%20Watch%20research%20has,High%20Commissioner%20for%20Human%20Rights> accessed June 2025

Attrition: Weak cases like that of Lissu may increase against opponents just to consume time, energy, and resources, ultimately immobilising opposition campaigns. The state would likely get a helping hand from a complicit judiciary which will be compelled to do the executive's bidding.

## **POLITICISATION OF SECURITY FORCES**

Historical precedent has shown that Tanzania's police, military, and intelligence services are not neutral state institutions, and they do not serve impartially. Rather, they have been partisan instruments, serving the interests of the ruling CCM party. This is unlikely to change and there may be more harassment, intimidation, detentions, torture, and even enforced disappearances of opposition figures, journalists, human rights activists.

Security forces may be used for crowd control, violently dispersing opposition rallies and voter demonstrations.

They may be used for covert operations to manipulate poll results in favour of the incumbent administration. The politicisation and partisanship is enabled by the lack of oversight as the status quo allows them to

operate in legal grey zones with overlapping mandates and little, if any parliamentary or judicial supervision.

## **WEAKENING AND REPRESSION OF FOREIGN OBSERVERS AND CIVIL SOCIETY**

Lately the Tanzanian state has demonstrated a capacity to target foreign observers and human rights defenders who seek to monitor the climate ahead of the 2025 elections. The May 2025 abductions, detentions and torture of Ugandan human rights activist, Agather Atuhaire and her Kenyan counterpart, Boniface Mwangi, clearly shows an increasingly paranoid regime under Hassan, which views external scrutiny as a threat to sovereignty and its survival. It also demonstrates the regime's confidence that it can engage in impunity without diplomatic consequence. This may lead to an escalation of harassment and intimidation with foreign visitors being surveilled, profiled, and detained upon entry. Foreign human rights observers and journalists may be denied entry, arrested, or deported.

Should these tactics succeed, the government may then be able to control the electoral narrative and even downplay irregularities with little or no scrutiny from credible foreign observers

# CONCLUSION

*The history and evolution of state repression in Tanzania reveals a disconcerting narrative of a democracy in decline—one in which counterterrorism has become a euphemism for authoritarian consolidation.*

Through successive administrations, most notably Jakaya Kikwete, John Magufuli and the incumbent Samia Hassan, Tanzania's legal and security infrastructure have all been repurposed into formidable instruments of repression. Under the guise of ensuring national security, successive leaders have normalised arbitrary arrests and detentions, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, digital surveillance, and the silencing of dissent. This trend has not only eaten away at the foundations of democratic participation but also facilitated an authoritarian system characterised by fear, opacity, and impunity.

The brief moments of optimism under President Hassan's early presidency, when reformist rhetoric suggested a push towards democratic renewal, have quickly given way to the weaponisation of terrorism legislation against opposition leaders such as Tundu Lissu. The brutal treatment of foreign human rights defenders, and the systemic targeting of journalists and activists indicate an intensification of the repressive apparatus honed under President Magufuli. The concentration of power in the presidency, the lack of independent judicial oversight, and the partisanship and impunity within the security services reinforce a political architecture in which dissent is ruthlessly dealt with.

Crucially, this report illustrates that the architecture of repression is no longer a mere physical phenomenon, but it has also become digital, transnational, and increasingly sophisticated. The incorporation of surveillance technologies sourced from Israel, China, Russia and other external actors, coupled with the complicity of multinational telecommunications firms, has elevated Tanzania's repression into the digital sphere. Digital authoritarianism is no longer a theoretical concept spoken of by

scholars in academic settings, it has become a lived reality for political opponents, human rights defenders, religious groups, journalists and ordinary Tanzanians. Tools acquired ostensibly for the counterterrorism fight are routinely deployed to monitor political opponents, manipulate public discourse, and suppress collective mobilisation. This 'smart repression' works invisibly yet powerfully to erode civic space, pre-empting the need for overt displays of force, thereby insulating the state from accountability while deepening authoritarian control.

Held in such an atmosphere of digital authoritarianism and the attendant fear and repression, the October 2025 elections are unlikely to produce an outcome reflecting the democratic will of Tanzanians. Even at this point, the dangers are clearly identifiable and increasingly active. These dangers to a free and fair poll stem from the fusion of executive power, foreign-backed surveillance, politicised security forces, and a legal framework designed for repression rather than justice and the enhancement of democracy. Unless there is urgent and coordinated domestic and international pressure to reverse these trends, the election will only consolidate a model of governance that replaces democratic expression with surveillance-induced fear, peaceful dissent with politicised terror, and democratic legitimacy with brute control.

Without urgent reforms, Tanzania is poised to slide deeper into a governance model where counterterrorism is a permanent justification for authoritarianism. This trajectory, left unchecked, sets a dangerous precedent for the wider region. Other states, facing similar pressures, may adopt this template—using digital tools and securitised legislation to eliminate democratic competition in the name of public safety. The convergence of

foreign surveillance technologies, weakened legal institutions, and partisan security forces constitutes a potent threat to democratic norms across all of Africa.

Tanzania's descent into digital authoritarianism is neither inevitable nor irreversible. It is the logical outcome of deliberate policy decisions, enabled by legal impunity, foreign complicity, and international neglect. But an authoritarian regime and its tools of repression are not invincible. It can be held up to scrutiny and subjected to pressure and reform. The period leading up to the 2025 elections and the polls themselves

offer a critical juncture—either to legitimise a repressive digital state or to reclaim the democratic promise which the majority of Tanzanians aspire to.

The international community, regional partners, and Tanzanian citizens must not remain passive observers. If unchallenged, the Tanzanian model will become a blueprint for future repression across Africa. If addressed with urgency and resolve, it can become a turning point—a chance to restore rights, revive rule of law, and resist the rise of authoritarianism operating under the guise of counterterrorism.