



Human Rights in the Digital Context Tanzania

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SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES FROM PREVIOUS CYCLES

During Tanzania's third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in November 2021, the country received 252 recommendations, of which it accepted 167, partially accepted 20 and noted 65. Several States raised concerns about persistent restrictions on freedom of expression and called on Tanzania to protect journalists and media workers and end harassment, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances of journalists and human rights defenders. Since the previous review, Tanzania has adopted important reforms in data protection, media regulation, digital transformation and child online protection. However, implementation of commitments to protect freedom of expression, privacy, access to information, peaceful assembly and association remains inadequate, while digital repression intensified around the 2025 general elections.

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Tanzania has established several legal and policy frameworks relevant to digital rights. The Personal Data Protection Act, 2022 created the Personal Data Protection Commission and was followed by implementing regulations in 2023. Amendments to the Media Services Act in 2023 decriminalised defamation and introduced measures intended to strengthen media self-regulation. The Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations, 2020, however, remains a major instrument regulating online speech, despite amendments in 2022 and 2025 that removed some of the earlier restrictive provisions.

Tanzania has also advanced its digital transformation agenda through the Digital Economy Strategic Framework 2024–2034, expanded the use of the National Identification Authority system across public and private services, and undertaken a UNESCO Artificial Intelligence Readiness Assessment. A national AI strategy framework is also under development. Internet penetration was reported at 85.3% by December 2025, with 58.1 million internet subscriptions, demonstrating substantial expansion in connectivity.

In 2024, amendments to child protection legislation strengthened protections against online child sexual exploitation and abuse, including by criminalising online grooming and the production, distribution and possession of child sexual abuse material. Nonetheless, these digital governance advances have occurred alongside a continued contraction of civic space affecting journalists, activists, political actors, civil society organisations and ordinary internet users.

CHALLENGES

1. Restrictive Legal Framework on Freedom of Expression

Section 16 of the Cybercrimes Act, 2015 criminalises publication of information considered “false, deceptive, misleading or inaccurate”, without adequate safeguards such as a requirement to demonstrate intent to cause harm. The Online Content Regulations also retain mandatory licensing requirements for online content providers and grant the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) wide discretion over licensing, content removal and sanctions. Non-compliance can attract imprisonment of up to 12 months, a fine of at least five million Tanzanian shillings, or both. These broad powers encourage self-censorship and enable restrictions on legitimate online expression.

2. Internet Shutdowns, Platform Blocking and Restrictions on Civic Mobilisation

Online restrictions have increasingly been used to interfere with access to information and civic participation. Clubhouse experienced apparent blocking in 2023, while TCRA subsequently required VPN users to register. In July 2025, access to Facebook and YouTube was disrupted during a politically sensitive press conference, while JamiiForums was suspended in September 2025 and remained inaccessible beyond the stated 90-day suspension. Most significantly, Tanzania experienced a five-day nationwide internet shutdown between 29 October and 3 November 2025 during the general elections, cutting access to major communications and social media services.

3. Arrests, Harassment and Disappearances of Journalists and Online Critics

Journalists, online commentators, activists and political actors continue to face arrest, intimidation and prosecution. At least 10 incidents involving arrests, attacks, harassment or detention of journalists were recorded in 2024. TikTok creator Shadrack Chaula was convicted under the Cybercrimes Act in July 2024 after posting a video critical of the President; although his fine was paid and he was released, he was reportedly abducted in August 2024 and remained missing at the time of the submission. Opposition figures and activists have also faced serious criminal charges linked to online political expression.

4. Surveillance and Weak Privacy Safeguards

The adoption of the Personal Data Protection Act, 2022 represents progress, but privacy protections remain vulnerable to state overreach. Online Content Regulations undermine anonymity and have facilitated monitoring of online activities. The requirement introduced in 2023 for VPN users to register with TCRA creates risks of identification and surveillance, particularly for journalists, activists and political actors. Surveillance of online content and private communications intensified during the 2025 election period, contributing to fear and self-censorship.

5. Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is increasingly affecting women journalists, politicians, activists and other women participating in Tanzania’s digital public sphere. Documented harms include doxxing, sexualised abuse, cyberstalking, coordinated trolling, non-consensual image sharing, deepfakes and gendered disinformation. Risks increase during election periods, when gendered abuse intersects with platform restrictions, censorship and political intimidation. Weak reporting and redress mechanisms discourage survivors from seeking accountability and contribute to the exclusion of women from public discourse.

IMPACTS

1. Restrictive Legal Framework on Freedom of Expression

- Broad and vague offences encourage journalists, bloggers and ordinary citizens to self-censor.
- Mandatory licensing and punitive sanctions reduce diversity and pluralism in the online information ecosystem.
- Wide regulatory discretion enables selective enforcement against critical or dissenting voices.
- Criminal sanctions for legitimate expression undermine Tanzania's obligations under Article 19 of the ICCPR.

2. Internet Shutdowns, Platform Blocking and Restrictions on Civic Mobilisation

- Shutdowns disrupt access to timely election information and independent reporting.
- Restrictions on social media weaken opportunities for peaceful assembly, association and public mobilisation.
- Platform blocking limits whistleblowing, public-interest discussion and citizen oversight.
- Information blackouts undermine transparency and accountability during critical democratic processes.

3. Arrests, Harassment and Disappearances

- Fear of arrest or disappearance discourages journalists and citizens from criticising authorities.
- Prosecutions linked to online expression reinforce a climate of intimidation and impunity.
- Attacks on journalists and activists weaken independent scrutiny of public institutions.
- Civic and political participation is diminished when digital expression carries serious personal and legal risks.

4. Surveillance and Weak Privacy Safeguards

- Restrictions on anonymity undermine the ability of journalists, whistleblowers and human rights defenders to communicate securely.
- Surveillance contributes to self-censorship and reduces public trust in digital services.
- Weak independent oversight creates opportunities for disproportionate or politically motivated monitoring.
- Expanding digital identity and digital public services without robust safeguards heightens risks associated with misuse of personal data.

5. Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence

- Online violence discourages women from journalism, activism, electoral politics and public debate.
- Gendered disinformation and sexualised abuse damage personal safety, reputation and professional participation.
- Shutdowns and platform restrictions can isolate survivors from reporting, support and remedy mechanisms.
- Continued impunity for online violence undermines gender equality and inclusive democratic participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Repeal or amend restrictive provisions governing online expression, particularly section 16 of the Cybercrimes Act, 2015, and vague provisions of the Online Content Regulations that criminalise “false”, “deceptive” or “misleading” information without adequate safeguards.
2. Reform the Online Content Regulations to ensure that licensing, content-removal, suspension and revocation decisions comply with the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality, provide adequate notice and opportunities to respond, and are subject to independent judicial oversight.
3. Prohibit nationwide internet shutdowns and require prior judicial authorisation for any exceptional restriction on internet access, together with strict necessity and proportionality tests and effective rights of appeal.
4. End arbitrary platform blocking and suspension, including restrictions targeting social media platforms, online media and civic forums such as JamiiForums, and establish transparent, rights-based procedures for any restriction affecting access to online services.
5. Investigate all cases of arbitrary arrest, harassment, attacks and enforced disappearance involving journalists, activists and online critics, ensure accountability for perpetrators and provide effective remedies to victims.
6. Repeal Regulation 9(c) of the Online Content Regulations, which restricts online content relating to the organisation of assemblies and demonstrations, and ensures protection of peaceful assembly and association in both offline and online spaces.
7. Strengthen the independence and capacity of the Personal Data Protection Commission, including adequate financial and technical resources, and expand nationwide digital rights and privacy literacy programmes so that individuals understand and can exercise their data protection rights.
8. End unlawful and disproportionate digital surveillance and establish safeguards requiring prior judicial authorisation, clear legal thresholds, necessity and proportionality assessments, independent oversight, data-minimisation and retention requirements, transparency reporting and accessible remedies for abuse.
9. Strengthen protections against TFGBV by fully integrating digital harms into implementation of the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children 2024/25–2028/29, adequately resourcing digital-safety interventions, training law enforcement and judicial officers, and amending relevant laws to explicitly address technology-facilitated violence without enabling those laws to be used to silence women journalists, politicians and activists.

QUESTIONS

1. What concrete steps will the Government of Tanzania take to amend the Cybercrimes Act and Online Content Regulations to ensure that restrictions on online expression comply with international standards of legality, necessity and proportionality?
2. What measures will Tanzania adopt to guarantee that nationwide internet shutdowns, arbitrary platform blocking and restrictions on digital civic spaces do not recur, particularly during elections and periods of public protest?
3. What action has the Government taken to investigate attacks, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances involving journalists and online critics, including the reported disappearance of Shadrack Chaula?
4. How will Tanzania ensure that digital surveillance, VPN regulation and access to citizens' personal information are subject to independent judicial oversight, and how will the independence and capacity of the Personal Data Protection Commission be strengthened?
5. What legal, institutional and financial measures will Tanzania adopt to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated gender-based violence, particularly against women journalists, politicians, activists and human rights defenders?

SOURCES

Primary source:

Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA), Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU) and JamiiAfrica, *Joint Stakeholder Submission to the Fourth Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review of the Republic of Tanzania – 4th Cycle, 53rd Session of the UPR, April 2026.*



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