



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Tanzania

July 2026

Context

Reporting period: October 2025-July 2026

Despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression, assembly, and association, Tanzania's civic space narrowed significantly before and after the 29 October 2025 [general election](#). The period was marked by the [reported disappearance](#) of former ambassador Humphrey Polepole, the [discovery of unidentified dead bodies](#), the [arrest of CHADEMA Leaders](#), and widespread post-election protests. A Commission of Inquiry [reported](#) 518 deaths, while 641 people, mostly young protesters, were arrested on treason-related charges. In June 2026, the government also [suspended public political gatherings](#) nationwide, citing security concerns.

Civil society organisations continue to operate under the [Non-Governmental Organisations Act](#) of 2002, which grants broad oversight powers to an executive-appointed NGO Coordination Board, raising concerns about political influence. During the election period, pressure on civil society organisations (CSOs) increased through the suspension of JamiiForums, [warnings to NGOs](#) over alleged political financing, harassment of Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) staff, and heightened scrutiny of NGO activities. CHADEMA also faced possible deregistration over statements linked to planned demonstrations. A positive step was the increase in NGO representation in Parliament.

Financial sustainability remains a major challenge, with the [majority of CSO funding](#) coming from foreign donors. Funding cuts, donor withdrawals, and regulatory delays have forced many organisations to reduce staff, scale back operations, or close offices. Although CSOs participate in policy consultations, their recommendations are often not reflected in government decisions, limiting meaningful engagement.

Media freedom and digital rights also came under pressure. Tanzania experienced its first nationwide internet shutdown during the 2025 election, while reports indicated government pressure on social media platforms to remove critical content. Media organisations continue to face legal restrictions, financial pressures, and self-censorship, and youth-led activism has frequently been framed as a security threat rather than legitimate civic participation.

Overall, Tanzania's enabling environment for civil society from October 2025 to July 2026 reflects a widening gap between constitutional guarantees and practice. While the government has promoted dialogue and reconciliation, legal, administrative, and security measures have continued to restrict civil society, independent media, and political participation.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

[Tanzania's Constitution](#) protects freedom of expression (Article 18) and freedom of assembly and association (Article 20). In practice, however, civic and political space has narrowed sharply, especially ahead of the 29 October 2025 general election. [Amnesty International reports](#) that authorities stepped up repression of opposition figures, journalists, civil society groups, and human rights defenders through arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings. The following string of incidents deepened concerns about the country's human rights record:

- On 6 October 2025, former Ambassador to Cuba Humphrey Polepole, a [vocal government critic](#) was [reportedly abducted](#) and remains missing. Authorities have made no statement on his disappearance.

- Ten days later, on 16 October 2025, the [bodies of four](#) unidentified men, aged 19 to 22 and believed to be from Dar es Salaam, were found along the Mapinga–Kibaha road in Coast Region with severe facial and leg injuries, fuelling suspicion of extrajudicial killings.
- On 22 October 2025, CHADEMA Vice Chairman John [Heche was arrested](#) outside the Dar es Salaam High Court while attending party-related hearings and his whereabouts were unknown for two days. Although authorities had claimed he had crossed illegally into Kenya, he was later charged with terrorism and released on bail.
- During the [general election](#) itself, months of TikTok-organised [protests erupted](#) nationwide. Police [responded](#) with tear gas and live ammunition, and a Commission of Inquiry later put the death [toll at 518](#), though some [estimates are higher](#). Afterward, authorities [arrested 641 people](#) including influencers, journalists, and protest participants, many of them young people from Dar es Salaam, Dodoma, Njombe, and Mwanza, on [charges of treason](#) or conspiracy to commit treason.
- On 14 November 2025, at the opening of the 13th Parliament, President Samia Suluhu Hassan directed prosecutors to [drop charges](#) against young people who appeared to have simply joined the crowds without understanding the consequences. She did not address the underlying grievances, [instead blaming](#) the unrest on "youths from a neighbouring country" despite the fact that none of those arrested were foreign nationals, a point underscored by her own decision to withdraw many of the charges.
- On 26 June, Home Affairs Minister Patrobas Katambi told Parliament he had [ordered](#) Inspector General Camillus Wambura to stop issuing permits for political gatherings, citing political tension and intelligence about [planned protests](#) ahead of the [Sabasaba](#) trade fair (concluding 7 July).
- On 27 June 2026, the government [suspended](#) all political party gatherings nationwide, citing security concerns, planned demonstrations, and rising crime.

The government points to the Police Force and Auxiliary Services Act as legal grounds for these suspensions. [Section 43\(1\)](#) requires 48 hours' written notice before any public gathering; Section 43(3) lets police block gatherings deemed a threat to peace or order; and [Section 45](#) defines any group of three or more that ignores a dispersal order as an unlawful assembly. Critics argue the suspension undermines constitutional rights to assembly and political pluralism, and risks normalising tighter restrictions on political activity if prolonged, shifting the balance further toward executive and security control.

Together, the Polepole disappearance, the Coast Region deaths, and Heche's arrest point to a broader pattern of enforced disappearances, unexplained killings, politically charged arrests, and a lack of accountability, that have raised serious concerns about the rule of law and the safety of opposition figures, journalists, civil society actors, and ordinary citizens exercising their constitutional rights.

2. Supportive legal and regulatory framework

Tanzania's CSOs are regulated under the Non-Governmental Organizations [Act of s002](#) (as amended), which gives the NGO Coordination Board authority to approve, deny, or cancel registrations. Because the Board's Registrar, Chairperson, and members are appointed by the President and the Minister for Community Development, Gender, Women and Special Groups, concerns persist about political influence over organisations seen as critical of the government.

The legal and regulatory environment for civil society remained [increasingly restrictive](#) during the reporting period, with state authorities relying on regulatory, investigative and

administrative powers to monitor, sanction and constrain civil society organisations, media platforms and opposition actors. While the framework continued to provide formal avenues for participation, its application increasingly reflected a securitised approach to dissent, contributing to a climate of intimidation and heightened scrutiny of independent civic voices. This trend was evidenced by several developments during the reporting period:

- On 12 November 2025, staff of the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) were [detained and questioned](#) at White Sands Hotel in Dar es Salaam, with their electronic devices and identification documents confiscated before being returned. The incident [raised concerns](#) about intimidation, surveillance and the security of human rights defenders, particularly organisations supporting politically sensitive legal cases.
- In November 2025, senior Advocate Mpale Kaba Mpoki and Tanganyika Law Society President Boniface Mwabukusi [were questioned](#) by authorities regarding planned Independence Day demonstrations. Although neither faced further action, the incidents reflected increased scrutiny of prominent legal actors associated with civic mobilisation.
- On 20 November 2025, President Samia Suluhu [Hassan appointed a commission](#) to examine the causes of youth-led protests, the opposition's "No Election" campaign and the role of local and international NGOs. The directive to investigate alleged financing of protesters reinforced official narratives linking civil society actors to political unrest.
- On 12 March 2026, a presidential commission on land use in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area [recommended investigations into NGOs](#) operating in the district to assess compliance with registration conditions and sanction violations. The recommendation reflected growing state scrutiny of organisations involved in advocacy around relocation, land rights and conservation policies.
- On 7 May 2026, the Registrar of Political Parties [issued CHADEMA with a notice](#) to show cause why it should not face sanctions, including possible suspension or fines, for alleged breaches of [the Political Parties Act](#). The action was linked to [statements](#) advocating demonstrations and [criticising state institutions](#), illustrating the use of regulatory mechanisms to discipline opposition activity.
- On 1 June 2026, in a notable positive development, the [government announced](#) an increase in parliamentary seats allocated to NGO representatives from two to three. While this expanded formal civil society participation in policymaking, it occurred alongside broader trends of heightened oversight and regulatory pressure on civic actors.

Taken together, these developments point to a complex post-election landscape for Tanzanian civil society. While the government stresses regulation, security, and institutional inclusion, mounting concerns remain about shrinking civic space, intensified scrutiny of NGOs, and the broader implications for accountability, transparency, and fundamental freedoms.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

CSOs in Tanzania face significant financial and operational constraints due to restrictive funding arrangements and regulatory barriers. Most donor support is project-based, covering few core operational costs and limiting long-term planning. Foreign funding makes up [roughly 72%](#) of CSO resources. While international assistance has been vital to the sector's growth, it has also fostered dependency and constrained the development of locally driven, sustainable initiatives.

Recent [funding disruptions](#) highlight these vulnerabilities. In 2024–2025, a USAID funding freeze affected several Tanzanian CSOs, suspending awards, halting disbursements, and forcing organisations to re-plan projects. Similarly, the [World Bank suspended](#) disbursements for the REGROW tourism project over allegations of human rights abuses, requiring implementing partners and government institutions to adjust their approach. [CSO reports indicate](#) that such suspensions typically force organisations to pause activities, cut staff, shift to remote programming, or scale back monitoring and evaluation. [Donor guidance](#) and sector

analyses further show that crisis or contingency funding mechanisms allow rapid reprogramming in response to security or operational challenges, underscoring donors' ongoing flexibility to adjust funding terms as needed.

In December 2025, Sweden announced it is [phasing out](#) bilateral development cooperation with Tanzania, with the programme ending entirely by 31 August 2026. Sweden is redirecting these funds toward Ukraine and its domestic budget. While long-term aid will cease, Sweden aims to shift its relationship with Tanzania from aid dependency to a strategic partnership centred on trade, investment, and political dialogue. Meanwhile, many grassroots and community-based organisations (CBOs) remain [locked out](#) of large-scale international funding, as they struggle to meet donors' stringent financial accounting and compliance requirements.

Funding delays and interruptions have carried serious operational consequences for CSOs. Regulatory requirements such as mandatory government approval of donor-funded contracts often cause prolonged delays; some grant-funded projects have [reportedly](#) gone unapproved for more than three months, putting jobs and project timelines at risk. Media reports confirm the scale of the disruption: during the USAID funding suspension, more than 60 NGOs working in agriculture, youth development, and women's empowerment experienced [operational setbacks](#). Surveys found that over 40% of affected CSOs were forced to suspend or terminate staff contracts, [cut budgets](#) by as much as 90%, and in some cases close offices, halt projects, or suspend community services. These disruptions undermine long-term planning, weaken service delivery, and erode community trust in CSOs.

Despite these challenges, Tanzanian CSOs may access certain tax incentives under the [Income Tax Act](#), the [Value Added Tax Act](#), and the [Tax Administration Act](#). These benefits, however, are not automatic; they require formal application and compliance with strict eligibility criteria. To qualify, CSOs must demonstrate a public character and operate exclusively in areas such as poverty alleviation, education, health services, water supply, or infrastructure development. Approved organisations may deduct up to 25% of gross income, along with expenditures on charitable activities and approved savings earmarked for future projects.

4. Open and responsive state

Tanzania maintains formal mechanisms for civil society engagement through consultations, policy dialogues and development planning processes. An [Access to Information Act \(2016\)](#) provides a legal basis for requesting information from public bodies, although responses are often slow, inconsistent and subject to broad exemptions related to national security, public interest and confidential government information. While CSOs are regularly consulted on policy and legislative processes, engagement is largely procedural, with limited evidence that recommendations substantively influence final decisions. Government institutions rarely provide feedback on how CSO inputs are considered or incorporated, reducing transparency and accountability in public participation processes. Although direct communication between government officials and citizens has increased through social media and public outreach, openness remains constrained on politically sensitive issues.

[Regulation 16](#) of the 2025 Presidential, Parliamentary, and Local Government Election Regulations bars accredited CSO election observers from publicly commenting on irregularities or releasing reports without official approval. The [Statistics Act](#) of 2015 further restricts access to government data, imposing severe penalties for unauthorised publication. The Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC) has documented multiple cases of CSOs [prosecuted](#) under various legal provisions, further shrinking civic space.

Key developments during the reporting period include:

- On 28 October 2025, President Samia Suluhu Hassan [pledged](#) to strengthen collaboration between government, civil society, political actors and the private sector, [including establishing](#) a Commission for Dialogue and Reconciliation. This signalled rhetorical commitment to inclusive governance, though implementation remains limited.
- On 15 January 2026, President Samia [discussed the 2025 elections](#) and [national priorities](#) but made no reference to civil society participation or civic space concerns. The omission suggested limited prioritisation of civil society as a governance stakeholder.
- On 12 March 2026, a presidential commission recommended investigations into NGOs operating in Ngorongoro over alleged non-compliance and dissemination of misinformation. The recommendation reinforced growing state scrutiny of NGOs active in contentious policy areas.
- On 23 April 2026, President Samia [announced plans](#) to establish a National Reconciliation Commission involving key stakeholders, but indicated that further criminal investigations would precede its creation. The initiative offered a potential platform for engagement, although delays reduced its immediate significance.
- On 1 June 2026, the government increased parliamentary representation for NGOs from two to three seats. This modestly strengthened formal avenues for civil society participation in governance processes.

State openness to civil society therefore remained moderate but largely procedural during the reporting period. While legal frameworks and consultation mechanisms continued to provide opportunities for engagement, government responsiveness to CSO recommendations remained weak, and feedback mechanisms were largely absent. Positive reform commitments and expanded parliamentary representation for NGOs contrasted with growing scrutiny of civic actors in sensitive policy areas, suggesting that participation is generally welcomed when aligned with government priorities but becomes more constrained when linked to accountability, rights advocacy or politically contentious issues.

5. Supportive public culture and discourses on civil society

Public discourse on civil society in Tanzania remains contested. While CSOs are widely recognised for their contributions to development, service delivery, human rights and governance, organisations engaged in accountability, political reform and rights advocacy are frequently portrayed by state actors as advancing foreign interests or undermining national stability. This has contributed to public scepticism towards some segments of civil society and reinforced narratives that equate dissent with external influence. Although laws and policies provide for the inclusion of women, youth, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups, implementation remains uneven and participation is often consultative rather than influential. Civic and citizenship education is included within the formal education curriculum, particularly at primary and secondary levels, but civic engagement and the role of independent civil society receive limited emphasis in practice.

Key developments during the reporting period include:

- In September–November 2025 ahead of and after the elections, NGOs [were publicly warned](#) against facilitating political interests, while senior government officials alleged that youth protests and post-election unrest were externally financed. These narratives reinforced suspicion towards civil society and risked undermining public trust in civic actors.
- From 29 November–2 December 2025, [Prime Minister Nchemba](#) and President Samia [stated](#) that post-election unrest was funded and coordinated by external interests. The statements

strengthened securitised narratives around civic activism and increased pressure on NGOs operating in governance and rights sectors.

- On 22 January 2026, [Executive Director of the Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation](#), Joseph Butiku [convened](#) stakeholders including NGOs, religious leaders, political parties and media representatives to reflect on election-related violence and national cohesion. The [initiative](#) demonstrated continued recognition of civil society's role in national dialogue despite a polarised political environment.
- On 4 May 2026, President Samia [characterised](#) some youth activists as misusing democratic freedoms and threatening stability. The remarks risked delegitimising youth-led civic participation and narrowing acceptance of dissenting voices.
- On 7 May 2026, a parliamentarian [proposed expanded civic and patriotic](#) training for Gen Z youth through JKT programmes. While promoting civic values, the proposal reflected official concerns about youth activism rather than support for independent civic engagement.
- On 10 May 2026, Chief Justice George Masaju [criticised youth activists](#) for allegedly insulting judicial officers. The comments reflected growing institutional concern over digital activism and shrinking tolerance for confrontational civic expression.

Overall, political discourse during the reporting period reflected a mixed but increasingly securitised perception of civil society. While civil society continued to be recognised as a stakeholder in dialogue, development and national cohesion, governance-focused organisations, youth movements and independent media were increasingly associated with instability, foreign influence and threats to public order. These narratives contributed to a less supportive public environment for civic action, encouraged self-censorship and weakened public confidence in independent civic actors, particularly those engaged in advocacy and accountability work.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

Tanzania's digital environment remained partially accessible but increasingly constrained during the reporting period. Internet access continued to expand, with TCRA [reporting 84.2%](#) internet penetration (58.9 million users) by March 2026, although alternative estimates suggest [substantially lower usage levels](#) (29.1%), highlighting a persistent urban-rural digital divide. The legal framework provides constitutional protections for freedom of expression and access to information, while the Personal Data Protection Act (2022) establishes safeguards for privacy and data protection. Article 18(1) of [Tanzania's Constitution](#) and [Section 5](#) of the Access to Information Act guarantee citizens the right to seek, receive, and share information, rights that shutdowns directly undermine. However, online freedoms remain vulnerable to broad regulatory powers, content restrictions and platform controls. The government has relied on [Section 19\(b\)](#) of the Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations, which allows restricting "prohibited content," a term left vague and applied inconsistently. The reporting period was marked by Tanzania's first nationwide internet shutdown, growing pressure on digital platforms and administrative action against journalists over online content, raising concerns about the security and openness of digital civic space.

In June 2025, the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) [warned](#) it could ban any social media platform that failed to comply with national content rules. By December 2025, Meta [confirmed](#) it had restricted activist Maria Sarungi-Tsehai's Instagram account within Tanzania and removed the Instagram and WhatsApp accounts of U.S.-based activist Mange Kimambi, though Meta said the latter action wasn't driven by government pressure. Notably, Meta also disclosed that Tanzanian authorities had [threatened](#) to ban Facebook and

Instagram entirely during the election period unless certain critical posts and activist accounts, many documenting alleged human rights violations, were taken down. These developments highlighted increasing state influence over digital platforms and online civic discourse.

Later, from 29 October to 3 November 2025, Tanzania experienced its first recorded [nationwide internet shutdown](#) during the general election period. The disruption severely constrained election monitoring, civic coordination, independent reporting and access to information. As internet access was being restored, for example, police [warned citizens](#) against sharing images that could "cause panic", raising the question of whether footage documenting hundreds of deaths in election-related protests should really fall under that label. Given this pattern, another shutdown seems likely whenever the government feels overwhelmed by online activity; Telegram and X already [require a VPN](#) to access. The shutdown hit civil society organisations, [journalists](#), [opposition parties](#), and [election observers](#) such as SADC particularly hard, since all depend on online platforms to coordinate, monitor, and report irregularities in real time. Independent media couldn't verify or share updates, leaving an [information gap](#) that rumours and misinformation quickly filled. With WhatsApp, X, and Facebook all inaccessible, citizens were left isolated and uninformed. The economic toll was significant as online businesses, mobile banking, and logistics systems were all disrupted. Access Now's #KeepItOn Coalition estimates that shutdowns can [cost countries millions](#) of dollars a day in lost productivity and e-commerce revenue, while also damaging trust in digital infrastructure.

From a governance standpoint, the shutdown runs counter to Tanzania's own digital ambitions, laid out in its [Digital Economy Strategic Framework \(2024–2034\)](#) and [National ICT Policy](#) (2016), both aimed at building an ICT-driven economy. It also weakens the country's standing under the [AU Digital Transformation Strategy \(2020–2030\)](#), signalling to investors and development partners that internet freedom and rule of law are not guaranteed. Regionally, Tanzania risks normalising shutdowns as a governance tactic during political crises for its neighbours, undercutting continental commitments like the AU Declaration on Internet Governance as well as global standards such as the UN Resolution on Human Rights in Peaceful Protests ([A/HRC/RES/44/L.11](#)). Left unaddressed, this pattern points toward a shrinking civic space where state control over information increasingly overrides democratic openness and accountability.

There is currently no verified evidence that Tanzanian government agencies or other actors have carried out cyberattacks, deployed spyware, or hacked civil society actors' devices or communications, though such practices are widely suspected. On the privacy front, Tanzania's 2022 Personal [Data Protection Act](#), enacted in 2023, created the Personal Data Protection Commission (PDPC) to investigate and rule on data misuse and privacy violations. The Commission has already issued rulings: in August 2025, in Nyangoma Mwesingwa v. Cecilia Maliganya (PDPC/CMP/002/2025), it found the respondent liable for posting and commercialising images of a newborn without parental consent, classified the images as [sensitive personal data](#), and ordered their deletion within 14 days along with TZS 20 million in compensation to the complainant and a TZS 5 million fine to the Commission.

On 23 February 2026, the Journalists Accreditation Board (JAB) [warned](#) accredited journalist Kelvin Justine Raphael (known as Zungu/Matejoo) over posts about an ATCL flight delay, citing insulting and unbalanced language that violated journalistic ethics; JAB ordered the content removed from his personal accounts and warned that further violations could lead to suspension or loss of accreditation. The action reinforced incentives for self-censorship among journalists operating online.

In a separate case on 3 March 2026, JAB gave senior journalist Paschal Mayalla [24 hours](#) to substantiate a claim he made on Jambo Television's "Jambo Asubuhi" programme that Prime Minister Dr. Mwigulu Nchemba was upset after mourners at Cardinal Polycarp Pengo's funeral applauded former leaders including Kassim Majaliwa, Dr. Philip Mpango, Joseph Warioba, and Mizengo Pinda, but not him, and cautioned presenter Wilberforce Ngoto. JAB said the remarks drew unverified conclusions and presented personal opinion as fact without sufficient evidence. The intervention reflected growing regulatory scrutiny of commentary and opinion shared through digital and broadcast platforms.

Overall, access to digital technologies remained relatively high, and Tanzania continued to strengthen its data protection framework. However, the unprecedented internet shutdown, pressure on online platforms, restrictions on access to social media applications and regulatory actions against journalists point to a more controlled digital environment. These measures reduced the ability of CSOs, journalists and citizens to communicate, organise and share information freely, increasing risks for online civic engagement and weakening the digital foundations of an enabling environment for civil society.

Challenges and opportunities

The October 2025 election period saw a sharp decline in civic freedoms despite constitutional protections. Enforced disappearances, unexplained killings, politically motivated arrests, and the May 2026 nationwide suspension of political gatherings point to growing restrictions on freedom of assembly and expression.

NGOs operate under an executive-appointed board, raising concerns about political interference. Pressure on civil society has intensified through platform suspensions, scrutiny of NGO funding, harassment of human rights defenders, and investigations linked to allegations of foreign-backed protests.

The sector remains heavily dependent on foreign funding, making it vulnerable to donor cuts such as the USAID freeze and Sweden's planned aid withdrawal, which have forced many organisations to reduce operations. Although CSOs are consulted on policy, their recommendations are rarely reflected in government decisions. Official rhetoric increasingly portrays civil society and youth activism as security threats, discouraging independent advocacy and journalism.

Tanzania's first nationwide internet shutdown during the 2025 election disrupted civil society, media, and election observers, while growing regulation of online content and pressure on digital platforms signal expanding state control over civic space.

On the opportunities, the June 2026 decision to expand NGO representation in Parliament from two to three seats offers a modest but concrete channel for stakeholder voice. President Samia's proposed Commission for Dialogue and Reconciliation and National Reconciliation Commission, if implemented with genuine independence, could create space for structured civic dialogue on unresolved grievances.

Existing provisions under the Income Tax Act and VAT Act allow qualifying CSOs to deduct up to 25% of gross income for charitable work, offering an underused avenue for domestic resource mobilisation and reduced aid dependency. Despite restrictions, platforms like JamiiForums remain vibrant spaces for civic debate, and youth-led (Gen Z) organising demonstrated significant mobilising capacity. This civic energy, if channelled constructively, represents a long-term asset for democratic engagement.

Continued scrutiny from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, UN experts, and donors like Sweden (shifting toward a "trade not aid" partnership) creates external accountability pressure. Tanzania's stated digital economy ambitions (2024–2034 framework) and AU commitments offer normative leverage for advocacy against shutdowns and platform restrictions.

The Personal Data Protection Commission's early enforcement actions (e.g., the Mwesingwa v. Maliganya ruling) show a functioning, nascent mechanism for privacy redress that CSOs could build on for digital rights advocacy.

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