



Freedom of the Press 2017 - Tanzania

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Press Freedom Status: Partly Free

Total Score: 58/100 (↓3) (0 = Most Free, 100 = Least Free)

Legal Environment: 21/30 (↓3)

Political Environment: 22/40

Economic Environment: 15/30

Quick Facts

Population: 54,200,000

Freedom in the World Status: Partly Free

Internet Penetration Rate: 5.4%

Key Developments in 2016:

- In November, President John Magufuli signed into law the restrictive Media Services Bill, which replaced self-regulatory and independent media oversight mechanisms with a government-controlled one, and required that all journalists obtain accreditation from a government-appointed board.
- In September, five people were charged under the Electronic and Postal Communications Act for sharing critical remarks about Magufuli and the country's police made on social media and messaging platforms.
- In December, a cofounder of the popular whistleblowing website JamiiForums faced charges under the Cybercrimes Act for refusing to share the forum's user data and for operating a website that is not registered in Tanzania.
- Authorities banned two newspapers, *Mawio* and *Mseto*, after they published stories on political tensions in Zanzibar and corruption allegations against President Magufuli, respectively.

Executive Summary

Although the constitution provides for freedom of speech, it does not specifically guarantee freedom of the press. Current laws give authorities broad discretion to restrict media on the basis of national security or public interest, and difficult registration processes hinder print and electronic media. The media landscape is diverse but deeply polarized along political lines. Control of the media is mostly concentrated in the hands of a few proprietors – including the government, which reportedly withholds advertising contracts from critical outlets.

In 2016, a number of journalists faced trumped-up charges under a range of laws that allow Tanzanian authorities to exert pressure on the media sector. Also during the year, several media outfits were closed on politically motivated grounds. The invocation of existing laws, combined with the signing of the restrictive Media Services Bill in November, contributed to growing self-censorship among journalists across the

country. Upon its enactment, the Media Services Act shifted power from self-regulatory and independent media oversight mechanisms to a government-controlled one, and required that all journalists obtain accreditation from a government-appointed board.

Since the 2015 enactment of the Cybercrimes Act, which provides for prison terms and fines for a variety of online activities, authorities have used it to bring charges against at least 10 individuals; among them was a senior university lecturer who was charged in September 2016 for insulting the president in a WhatsApp message. In December, JamiiForums cofounder Maxence Melo was detained for a week and charged under the law for two offences: operating a website that was not registered in Tanzania and obstructing an investigation by refusing to disclose information about users of the site. Separately, in September, authorities charged five people under the Electronic and Postal Communications Act for insulting Magufuli and the Tanzanian police on social media and messaging platforms.

In January, just two months into Magufuli's administration, authorities invoked the 1976 Newspapers Act to force the closure of the *Mawio* newspaper, which had published critical stories about the political crisis in the semiautonomous Zanzibar archipelago. In August, the weekly *Mseto* was banned for three years, also under the Newspapers Act, after it published a story about a deputy minister who had accused Magufuli of corruption. The same month, authorities ordered the closure of two independent radio stations, accusing them of broadcasting "seditious" material.

Explanatory Note

This country report has been abridged for *Freedom of the Press 2017*. For background information on press freedom in Tanzania, see [Freedom of the Press 2016](#).

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