

Tanzania

AMMINA KOTHARI

INTRODUCTION

Tanzania has made significant economic and social progress over the last few decades; however, this growth has not been enough to reduce the high poverty rate observed in 2025. Economic growth is primarily concentrated in urban areas and driven by the private sector, while the country remains predominantly agricultural. On the social front, the government has invested in education to improve access to primary schooling and has worked to enhance access to basic health services. Nevertheless, significant disparities in social services persist, and these, combined with economic barriers, hinder the country's development opportunities. Politically, Tanzania has held multiparty elections since the 1990s, but the Chama cha Mapinduzi party (CCM) has retained power throughout this period. The opposition has been fragmented, and during the tenure of the late John Magufuli, there was a ban on political assemblies. This ban was lifted in 2023 by Tanzania's first female president, Samia Suluhu Hassan.

Tanzania has historically had a vibrant media environment, with both state-owned and private media companies that produce content in Swahili and English. Radio serves as the primary source of news for nearly half of the population, and there is a strong presence of newspapers, online news sites, and television stations. However, laws and regulations established between 2016 and 2020 have significantly limited press freedom and diminished the watchdog role of journalists. Additionally, journalists have limited job security and are often paid very little for their work.

The data were collected in late 2023, following the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the presidency of Samia Suluhu Hassan, Tanzania has begun to experience an economic revival, and press freedom has seen some improvement. However, the news media continues to face economic challenges, and journalists and newsrooms often still practice self-censorship as they navigate the new socio-political environment.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

The sample of Tanzanian journalists was gender-balanced, with 46.5% identifying as female and 53.5% as male. The average age of the journalists was 31.8 years (SD = 6.9; Median = 31). They were generally well-educated; 44.3% held a bachelor's degree or equivalent, 3.5% had a master's degree or equivalent, and 1.0% had obtained a doctorate. Additionally, 86.7% of respondents had received formal education or professional training in journalism. This education or training is typically acquired at universities or colleges (46.1%), through apprenticeships or cadetships (65.8%), and via short-term courses (67.6%).

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

Over one-third of Tanzanian journalists (32.7%) were employed in outlets with a radio background, while 23.0% worked in television outlets. Additionally, 16.0% were employed by organizations focusing on newspaper publishing, 7.8% by native online media, and 7.1% by news agencies. A small number of journalists worked for magazine companies (2.0%) and outlets with a telecommunications background (1.1%). Notably, 10.2% of the surveyed journalists indicated that they do not have a main employer. Regarding their employer status, 52.3% of journalists reported that they primarily worked for private or commercial media, while 27.5% worked for state-run media, and 10.8% were involved with community media. In terms of area coverage, 53.4% of the journalists reported they mainly worked for (trans)national media, while 42.1% primarily catered to local or regional media.

Tanzanian journalists, on average, had 6.4 years of professional experience (SD = 4.9; Median = 5). The majority of these journalists (75.1%) reported on a variety of beats or subject areas rather than focusing on just one. Additionally, more than two-thirds (57.8%) were members of a union.

About one-third of the surveyed journalists in Tanzania had a full-time contract, with 37.9% being permanently employed and 1.7% temporarily employed. In addition, 38.6% held a part-time permanent contract, while 3.2% had a part-time temporary contract. Moreover, 15.2% worked as freelancers or were self-employed, and another 3.2% were engaged in other forms of employment. These results indicate a precarious employment situation, as 86.8% of respondents reported having additional jobs outside of journalism.

The average working week for Tanzanian journalists was 45.4 hours (SD = 18.8; Median = 45; for those in full-time employment). However, only 3.6% of the respondents reported feeling stressed at work often or very often during the previous six months, while 79.8% indicated they had never or rarely felt this way.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Verbal attacks, including demeaning or hateful speech, public discrediting of journalists' work, and surveillance, were among the most common safety threats experienced by journalists in Tanzania (see Table 1). However, more dangerous threats, such as stalking, sexual or physical assault, and sexual harassment, although less frequent, are still alarming. While journalists did not express strong concerns about job loss or their physical and emotional well-being (see Table 2), some were particularly worried that those who harm journalists would go unpunished.

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	865	0.9%	2.1%	9.4%	21.6%	66.0%
Public discrediting of your work	865	0.2%	3.1%	9.5%	25.2%	62.0%
Surveillance	865	1.6%	4.5%	9.6%	19.4%	64.9%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	865	1.3%	2.7%	5.8%	15.6%	74.7%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	865	0.9%	2.8%	4.5%	6.0%	85.8%
Legal actions against you because of your work	865	1.0%	2.1%	4.2%	9.5%	83.2%
Stalking	865	0.5%	3.0%	6.9%	18.7%	70.9%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	865	1.2%	2.9%	8.0%	16.6%	71.3%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	865	0.8%	4.3%	7.6%	14.1%	73.2%
Other physical attacks	865	0.2%	3.7%	5.8%	12.7%	77.6%

Question: "In the last five years, how often have you experienced any of the following actions related to your work as a journalist?"

TABLE 2. WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Worried about losing job in journalism within the next 12 months	865	10.2%	2.11	1.00
Concerned about physical well-being	865	8.0%	2.04	0.94
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	865	12.2%	2.13	1.03
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Tanzania go unpunished	865	37.2%	2.92	1.23

Question: "Thinking about your work, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

JOURNALISTIC ROLES

Tanzanian journalists expressed strong support for both accommodative and interventionist roles in their profession. While more traditional approaches are still relevant, they were not as highly valued. Collaborative roles, on the other hand, were among the least appreciated. However, it's worth noting that an approximately a quarter or more of the surveyed journalists considered these collaborative roles to be extremely or very important.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	865	16.3%	2.14	1.21
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	865	31.4%	2.78	1.22
Shine a light on society's problems	865	68.9%	3.85	1.09
Motivate people to participate in politics	865	33.6%	2.93	1.19
Provide analysis of current affairs	865	60.8%	3.67	1.07
Let people express their views	865	71.4%	3.90	0.98
Provide information people need to form political opinion	865	54.9%	3.53	1.07
Advocate for social change	865	69.0%	3.85	0.96
Influence public opinion	865	59.3%	3.61	1.02
Set the political agenda	865	35.8%	2.93	1.20
Promote peace and tolerance	865	73.1%	3.96	0.98
Educate the audience	865	72.0%	3.97	0.96
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	865	71.9%	3.94	0.99
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	865	71.6%	3.92	1.00
Support national development	865	72.6%	3.90	0.97
Support government policy	865	49.5%	3.32	1.11
Convey a positive image of political leaders	865	36.8%	3.05	1.16
Provide entertainment and relaxation	865	52.9%	3.47	1.02
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	865	58.7%	3.63	1.02
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	865	58.8%	3.63	0.99
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	865	65.1%	3.74	1.00
Support efforts to protect public health	865	70.9%	3.91	0.99
Counteract disinformation	865	71.4%	3.93	0.96
Discuss future implications of current events	865	63.1%	3.69	0.92

Question: "Please tell me how important it is to do each of the following in your daily work." (Scale: 5 = Extremely important; 4 = Very important; 3 = Moderately important; 2 = Slightly important; 1 = Not at all important.)

JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

There was notable variance among Tanzanian journalists in their views on journalistic epistemology (see Table 4). However, respondents agreed on the critical role of interpretation in understanding facts. They also acknowledged the vital connection between journalists and the communities they serve, highlighting the necessity for reporters to engage deeply with the contexts they cover. This recognition underscores the importance of a nuanced approach to journalism that goes beyond mere reporting.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	865	70.1%	3.74	1.02
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	865	21.8%	2.64	1.08
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	865	45.9%	3.15	1.15
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	865	50.2%	3.34	1.05
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	865	55.5%	3.42	0.99
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	865	35.3%	2.83	1.16
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	865	60.7%	3.47	1.03
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	865	61.3%	3.51	1.10
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	865	73.5%	3.90	0.95
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	865	59.1%	3.48	1.07
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	865	56.5%	3.40	1.09

Questions: "The following statements deal with beliefs related to how journalists know what they know. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree." / "Using the same scale, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following beliefs." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

JOURNALISTIC ETHICS

Journalists in Tanzania strongly agreed on the importance of upholding professional standards in ethical reporting, prioritizing these standards over personal biases or situational influences (see Table 5). While they largely reject controversial practices such as accepting money or gifts from sources and publishing unverified information (see Table 7), a significant number found certain ethically ambiguous methods acceptable. Over half were willing to employ hidden recording devices, impersonate individuals for the sake of a story, pay for confidential information, and use confidential documents without authorization.

TABLE 5. ETHICAL ORIENTATIONS

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
What is ethical for journalists should always be determined by professional standards regardless of situation and personal judgment	865	66.4%	3.61	1.09
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	865	57.1%	3.39	1.05
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	865	55.2%	3.41	1.03
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	865	21.4%	2.47	1.14

Question: "The following statements describe different responses journalists may have to ethical problems. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

TABLE 6. JUSTIFICATION OF CONTROVERSIAL REPORTING METHODS

	N	Always justified	Justified on occasion
Claiming to be somebody else	865	12.0%	47.9%
Using hidden recording devices	865	13.4%	56.3%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	865	13.2%	47.1%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	865	12.4%	42.5%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	865	12.5%	41.2%
Paying people for confidential information	865	12.0%	45.0%
Accepting money from sources	865	11.6%	33.6%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	865	10.6%	36.3%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	865	13.1%	48.9%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	865	10.9%	30.6%

Question: "Which of the following, if any, do you think may be always justified, or justified on occasion, and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?"

EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

Tanzanian journalists reported a limited amount of freedom in their work (see Table 7). About two thirds claimed to have some freedom in selecting their stories and in deciding which aspects to emphasize in a story. While the overall perception of media freedom remains low among respondents, more than half recognized the existence of some press freedom.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	865	21.6%	2.93	0.92
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	865	20.7%	2.87	0.93
Media freedom in Tanzania	852	24.3%	3.01	0.94

(Scale: 5 = Complete freedom; 4 = A great deal of freedom; 3 = Some freedom; 2 = Little freedom; 1 = No freedom at all.)

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Tanzanian journalists identified journalism ethics and the availability of news-gathering resources as the most significant internal factors influencing news production (see Table 8). In terms of external factors, many journalists noted that audience feedback, access to information, public relations, and relationships with news sources were extremely or very influential in their work.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	837	31.5%	2.99	1.03
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	836	48.6%	3.34	1.04
The business managers of the news organization	820	39.9%	3.20	1.04
The owners of the news organization	806	49.9%	3.43	1.06
Editorial policy	824	49.3%	3.45	1.04
Advertising considerations	803	47.8%	3.38	1.08
Profit expectations	792	44.3%	3.27	1.10
Audience research and data	838	53.2%	3.49	1.05
Availability of news-gathering resources	843	55.0%	3.56	0.98
Time limits	818	41.0%	3.27	1.04
Journalism ethics	838	59.8%	3.65	0.98
Self-censorship	791	46.3%	3.30	1.06
Personal values and beliefs	781	50.8%	3.42	1.10
Colleagues in other media	845	36.1%	3.10	1.05
Friends, acquaintances and family	800	40.4%	3.13	1.12
Feedback from the audience	840	64.5%	3.80	0.99
Competing news organizations	841	53.4%	3.54	1.02
Media laws and regulation	832	53.1%	3.53	1.03
Access to information	844	56.6%	3.58	0.93
Government censorship	815	45.8%	3.33	1.10
Government officials	818	37.4%	3.15	1.10
Politicians	829	36.1%	3.12	1.10
Business people	841	40.5%	3.24	1.07
Public relations	839	55.4%	3.56	1.06
Relationships with news sources	837	54.4%	3.56	1.03
Police	813	34.8%	3.02	1.14
Issue advocacy groups	838	44.0%	3.27	1.08
Scientists or health experts	828	43.6%	3.32	1.06

Question: "Here is a list of potential sources of influence. Please tell me how much influence each of the following has on your work as a journalist." (Scale: 5 = Extremely influential; 4 = Very influential; 3 = Moderately influential; 2 = Slightly influential; 1 = Not at all influential.)