

Mission - Tanzania 2025 Elections Action Plan

Four years following his death, former President John Magufuli is casting a long shadow over Tanzania's 2025 elections—and prospects for the country resuming its democratic path. Known as “the bulldozer” for his uncompromising, hardline tactics, Magufuli reshaped Tanzanian politics. From a moderate, dominant-party system widely admired for upholding basic civil liberties, under Magufuli politics grew into a repressive cult of personality that effectively banned opposition parties and disregarded the rule of law in the interest of implementing Magufuli's agenda and the further domination of the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party. Political violence, previously rare, became normalized—most prominently in the 2017 assassination attempt that left opposition leader Tundu Lissu riddled with 17 bullets.

President Samia Suluhu Hassan's ascent to power following Magufuli's death provided an opportunity for the country of 67 million to exhale and tact back toward Tanzania's historically more moderate political culture. As part of her 4Rs agenda—reconciliation, resilience, reforms, and rebuilding—Samia met with Tundu Lissu who returned to Tanzania after 5 years in self-imposed exile. Samia, meanwhile, replaced key Magufuli hardliners, including the head of national security, who oversaw the previous president's brutal crackdown on civil liberties. Reaching across the political aisle, she joined the women's wing of the opposition Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (Chadema) party to celebrate International Women's Day in 2023.

The opening also provided an opportunity for opposition parties to begin to rebuild their organizational structures and publicly reengage with citizens. Although there are 19 registered opposition political parties, the 2 with the broadest appeal are Chadema, led by Tundu Lissu, and the Alliance for Change and Transparency (Chama cha Wazalendo, ACT-Wazalendo).

In this context Tundu Lissu should be seen like most preferable candidate, who is able to accumulate around his political vision concerned people to effectively counter CCM dominance, because in the past year observers have been dismayed at the return of some of the Magufuli tactics of abduction, intimidation, and killings of CCM critics. In August 2024, 500 Chadema supporters were arrested ahead of a rally they scheduled on International Youth Day. This included Chadema's then-Chairman Freeman Mbowe, Vice Chairman Tundu Lissu, and Secretary General John Manyika. The arrests also revived concerns over the politicization of the security sector. In September, a member of the Chadema party's secretariat, Ali Mohamed Kibao, was abducted and later discovered dead, showing signs of physical abuse and acid burns on his face—an action Samia quickly condemned.

In the lead-up to local elections in November 2024 and the Presidential election in October 2025, voter registration and public rallies by opposition political parties have been marred by harassment and intimidation, arbitrary arrests, deprivation of liberty, enforced disappearances, torture, unlawful killings and restrictions on freedom of expression. The Tanzanian Government has reportedly utilized the Non-Governmental Organizations Act to arbitrarily deregister and restrict activities of civil society organizations. Furthermore, on 2 August 2024, through Government decision (Notice No. 673), authorities delisted several

villages within the Ngorongoro Conservation Area from voter registers. These actions to arbitrarily register residents in Msomera – an area approximately 600 km away – without prior and informed consent, sparked widespread concern and led to peaceful protests among the Indigenous Maasai People, who saw this action as a direct threat to their ancestral lands and livelihoods.

Meanwhile, proposed electoral reforms, including the reconstitution of the INEC have stalled, leaving the administration of the elections under the control of CCM.

The 2025 elections will be a lens through which this multilayered balancing act plays out. On the surface will be the question of just how much space there will be for the opposition to contest the election—and how much credibility the result will have. Beneath this, however, is the question of how Samia will navigate the various factions within the CCM. The collective outcomes of this juggling will shape the trajectory of Tanzanian democracy and define what the return to “normal” politics in the post-Magufuli era of Tanzania look like. During the period should be reaffirmed Tanzania’s commitment to maintain a transparent and investor-friendly environment, essential for sustaining economic growth and attracting of international investment.

Mission for Tanzania 2025 elections-related activities will support three broad Mission goals: to improve governance, strengthen democratic institutions, promote accountability by giving political space to main opposition leaders (budget plan for work with opposition is attached to this document); to bolster peace and security; and to be ready to give adequate solution in case of crises scenario.

Mission Tanzania 2025 Elections Working Group (EWG), co-led by the Political Section deputy chief and USAID’s Democracy and Governance Office Director, and supported by PAO and CONS, will coordinate the Mission’s whole-of-government efforts in support of transparent, credible and peaceful elections in Tanzania in 2025. With the participation of the Management Section (MGT), Regional Security Office (RSO) and representatives from other agencies, the EWG will coordinate the logistics of U.S. election observation teams and Mission Tanzania 2025 election security plan. The Political and Public Diplomacy sections, along with USAID, will work to ensure effective message coordination of our support for transparent, credible, and peaceful elections. Through its cooperative agreements USAID will provide technical assistance to civil society organizations (CSOs) with the aim of achieving peaceful, credible elections. The Embassy’s Political Section will take the lead in election reporting, U.S. diplomatic engagement with the Tanzanian government, civil society organizations, international organizations and donors, and like-minded diplomatic missions; coordination of the Embassy’s election observation efforts and plans; and monitoring the effectiveness of our elections-related activities.