+27 21 202 4071
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THE IJR LENS ON AFRICA

24 November 2025 Column

By Crystal Oderson

WILL PRESIDENT SAMIA SULUHU HASSAN REGAIN THE TRUST OF TANZANIANS AFTER BLOODY ELECTION?

It has been a bloody November for Tanzanians following the brutal violence from security forces during the October 29th election. The reality is outsiders will never truly know the extent of the mayhem and violence that took place during the last days of October, as there has been no independent verification of the violence, any independent media reports or what the death toll is, as the government has been silent on this.

A blanket internet shutdown occurred, preventing local media from reporting on events nationwide; towns were also placed under curfew, effectively trapping residents in their homes. As tensions escalated, whispers of dissent grew louder, resulting in the vandalism of several businesses associated with the ruling party.

> "UP TO 1,000 PEOPLE KILLED BY POLICE AND UNIDENTIFIED SECURITY FORCE PERSONNEL

According to a Human Rights Watch report that quoted John Kitoka, the Director of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs of the Opposition, Chama Cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo, Chadema, the party had collected reports of up to 1,000 people killed by police and unidentified security force personnel in the aftermath of the elections in eight of Tanzania's 31 regions.

Rights groups and the main opposition, however, have said that the number of casualties could be more. Tanzanians have expressed their outrage and shock at the extent of the violence meted out by security forces and the brutal crackdown against innocent people.

Will there be Accountability?

The calls for accountability against the government have also intensified, with activists and the UN High Commission for Human Rights demanding an investigation into the violence, and there's fear that without proper oversight, such atrocities may continue to occur, leaving communities devastated and seeking justice. But this is unlikely to happen unless there is international pressure on the regime.

The ruling party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi, won the election amid an unprecedented violent crackdown on protests and an election boycott. Tanzania has always prided itself on relatively peaceful elections in the past, but this crackdown has shredded and shattered this notion. What is clear is that the ruling party wants to remain in power despite facing criticism, and what this election has shown is that they are willing to do whatever it takes to achieve this, even if it means resorting to extreme measures.

This has also raised serious concerns about the future of democracy in Tanzania. Observers fear that the ongoing repression will only deepen divisions within the country and lead to further unrest. The potential for civil disobedience and resistance movements is growing among young people, who are increasingly disillusioned with the government's tactics and failure to address socio-economic issues.

Activists now fear that without intervention, the cycle of violence and repression could deepen, leading to further instability not only in the country but also in the region.

President Hassan sworn in amid crackdown

The criticism did not deter the electoral body from declaring a new president. In stepped the electoral body, the Independent National Electoral Commission, which speedily announced that the incumbent president, Samia Suluhu Hassan, won the election with 97.66% of the vote.

Hassan was hastily sworn in on November 3 for a second term at a ceremony excluding millions of people that was closed to the public amid continuing protests.

Human Rights Watch's senior Africa researcher, Oryem Nyeko, said that "The Tanzanian authorities' violent and repressive response to election-related protests further undermines the credibility of the electoral process." He added that the Tanzanian government had a responsibility to maintain security, but it needs to respect rights and ensure that all those responsible for violence are investigated and appropriately prosecuted." Prior to the election, HRW had warned that the government had 'intensified political repression, suppressed political opposition and critics of the ruling party, and stifled the media.'

It is clear that citizens did not trust the government to deliver a fair election, and this undemocratic behaviour raises serious concerns about the future of democracy in the country. Without accountability and respect for people, the foundations of a fair electoral system will continue to erode, leaving citizens with limited avenues for expressing their dissent.

The will of the people not expressed

Regional bodies, including the SADC Electoral Observation Mission and the African Union, raised serious concerns about the vote and subsequent crackdown but stopped short of calling for a new vote. SADC said the poll fell short of the requirements set by the bloc's own principles for democratic elections. The election group reported harassment of its own monitors, including an incident in Tanga where security forces seized passports, interrogated observers, and forced them to delete photographs. An official from the SADC Electoral Observation mission remarked that "These actions remove legitimate competition, discourage public participation and limit voters' ability to express their democratic will." The group also recorded gunfire from police, low voter turnout, and an internet blackout that severely hindered election monitoring.

These troubling developments raised serious concerns about the integrity of the electoral process and the overall commitment to democracy within the region. Without adequate safeguards and respect for fundamental rights, the prospects for a fair and transparent election diminish significantly.

The AU mission, which was led by former Botswana President Mokgweetsi Masisi, said the elections "Did not comply with AU principles, normative frameworks, and other international obligations and standards for

for democratic elections." Masisi urged Tanzanian authorities to exercise restraint and pursue 'thorough investigations' into violence against protesters.

The Mo Ibrahim Foundation took a more forthright and critical stance in a letter titled "Madam President, This Is Not Acceptable," addressed to the President, stating: "We are watching developments in Tanzania with alarm and misgivings. The violence against the demonstrators is unacceptable."

> AT LEAST 145 PEOPLE WERE CHARGED WITH TREASON FOR THEIR ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROTESTS, AND IN ADDITION TO TREASON,

Mass arrests of Opposition parties

On November 10, authorities arrested several activists and members of opposition parties. At least 145 people were charged with treason for their alleged involvement in the protests, and in addition to treason, the suspects also face charges of criminal conspiracy. Given the widespread arrests of activists, the ongoing crackdown could further escalate tensions and provoke even larger demonstrations, as people want justice and accountability in the face of governmental repression. At the same time though, the police released several senior officials of the opposition party CHADEMA, among them the party's Deputy Chairperson of the Mainland, John Heche on bail.

What now for the country?

There are some questions as to what is next for the country following the violence. Will Tanzania - once a symbol of optimism in a region by neighbours like Kenya and Uganda, who have historically struggled with post-election violence - be able to recover from this election's violence? How will the opposition respond amid mass arrests of party supporters?

Will there be accountability for the human rights violations and abuses? It has been reported that hundreds were simply rounded up and disappeared, with families desperately looking for their loved ones. The security forces acted with impunity; will they be held responsible, and will the country's political leadership also take responsibility for this? Currently, it seems that the President, the ruling party, and the security apparatus have tightened their control.

> THERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS AS TO WHAT IS NEXT FOR THE COUNTRY FOLLOWING THE VIOLENCE.

Interestingly, in a sign of some reconciliation, the Vice President addressed the media and said, "It is President Samia Suluhu Hassan's intention to ensure that we begin a process of reconciliation so that even the minority can be heard, building a nation of peace, unity, and stability that continues to serve as a model for Africa and the world," said Vice President Emmanuel Nchimbi, addressing reporters in Dar es Salaam. However, the President herself did not address the nation.

The path to recovery will likely depend on the government's willingness to engage in dialogue with the opposition and address the underlying issues that sparked the unrest. As the situation unfolds, the international community may also play a crucial role in pressuring the government for reforms and transparency.

THE IJR LENS ON AFRICA

29 October 2025

By Nyasha Mpani

DEMOCRACY FATIGUE AND THE RETURN OF THE STRONGMAN TEMPTATION

When South Africans went to the polls earlier this year, the Government of National Unity (GNU) was heralded as a new dawn, a moment of collective renewal for a weary democracy. After years of division and dysfunction, the GNU promised stability, collaboration, and a shared national purpose. Yet, only months later, the latest Afrobarometer data reveals a more sobering reality: South Africans are losing faith not just in their leaders, but in democracy itself.

According to the survey, fewer than half of South Africans now support democracy, while nearly seven in ten are dissatisfied with how it works. Even more alarming, almost half of respondents say they would support military rule, a sharp increase from just 28% in 2022. This data should ring alarm bells. In a region where South Africa has long stood as a beacon of hope and a model of democratic governance.

The GNU was conceived as a pragmatic response

THE GROWING FLIRTATION WITH MILITARY RULE IS NOT JUST A NATIONAL CONCERN, IT IS A REGIONAL WARNING

to political gridlock,a coalition built not on ideology but on necessity. It brought together rivals in the hope of stabilizing governance and signaling to citizens that leaders could put the nation first. For a moment, it rekindled the possibility that South Africa could overcome partisanship to deliver for its people. But Afrobarometer's findings suggest that promise is quickly evaporating.

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18 September 2025 Column

By Asifiko Mpako

YOUNG AFRICANS ARE SPEAKING. ARE POLICY-MAKERS LISTENING?

With a median age of just 19, Africa has more young people than anywhere else in the world. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the median age is 31, 32 in Asia, 33 in Oceania, 38 in North America, and 42 in Europe - the oldest continent globally.

Forecasts suggest that by 2100, Africa will be home to nearly half of the world's youth population, and young Africans will make up twice the size of Europe's entire population (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2020).

The decisions that policy-makers take today will determine whether Africa leverages its unique demographic dividend or squanders the opportunity. Are policy-makers listening to young Africans?

The latest Afrobarometer findings from across 35 countries on the African continent highlight the priorities, evaluations, and expectations of African youth.

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[Young Africans are Speaking. Are Policy-makers Listening?]

THE IJR LENS ON AFRICA

17 October 2025 Column

By Crystal Orderson

HOW GEN Z ARE UPPING THE ANTE ON AFRICAN LEADERS

Watching live images on social media of the Gen Z protests in Madagascar's capital, Antananarivo, alongside President Andry Rajoelina fleeing the country, underscores a critical point: African leaders who ignore the socio-economic issues facing young people will provoke anger that could ultimately lead to their removal from office. The significant Malagasy youth population called for change similar to that seen in other parts of Africa and Asia. The protests have also revealed how Gen Z is challenging traditional power structures, questioning political elites, confronting corruption and poor governance. Furthermore, this generation has lost trust in ruling political parties and is not shy in expressing frustration over the lack of opportunities. This growing discontent has ignited a wave of local grassroots activism and has reshaped the political landscape in some countries.

Over the past few months, we have witnessed young people challenging dominant political powers across various regions, from Kenya to Nepal, Morocco to Indonesia, and now in Madagascar. They have effectively utilised social media as a tool for mass mobilisation, confronting traditional media and political elite power structures.

In Madagascar, where the median age is just 19, protests have erupted, primarily led by Generation Z. Initially focused on the pressing issue of electricity and water shortages, the demonstrations then broadened to encompass a range of critical concerns. These included unemployment, corruption, poor governance, and inadequate basic services for millions of people.

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[How Gen Z are upping the ante on African leaders?]

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