

The Slow Shutdown: Information and Internet Regulation in Tanzania From 2010 to 2018 and Impacts on Online Content Creators

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A slow shutdown is an ensemble of flexible state regulations implemented over time that have the effect of prohibiting, interrupting, or making too costly online content creation. A slow shutdown differs from a technical shutdown in which a state authority blocks access to the Internet or platforms within its sovereign boundaries, usually for a short period. This article conceptualizes and delineates a slow shutdown in Tanzania. Using the method of process tracing, the article describes the Tanzania government's adoption of a series of repressive information and Internet regulations from 2010 to 2018 and analyzes its controversial 2018 online content regulations, which led many Tanzanians to cease expressive activities on the Internet. Drawing on Tanzanian policy documents, English-language national and international press coverage, nongovernmental organization reports, and Tanzanian blogs and websites, the study highlights the social impacts of the Chama Cha Mapinduzi party-led government's laws. It also extends research on media control and networked authoritarianism by demonstrating the variable forms, temporalities, and affects of Internet shutdowns and considering their relation to gender and class differences.

Keywords: Tanzania, online content creators, Internet regulation, Internet shutdown, networked authoritarianism

State regimes around the world are turning to new methods to assert their power, including Internet shutdowns. For more than a decade, China, Iran, and Turkey have used Internet shutdowns to disrupt citizens' access to online information. These and other governments also have filtered Internet content, blocked access to Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp, and carefully monitored Internet users' activities. Such measures have compelled users to invent and adopt circumvention tactics, including use of

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Date submitted: 2019–02–02

¹ This article is based on work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 1755106. We thank Eleanor Marchant, Nicole Stremlau, and three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments, and are grateful to Diego Cerna Aragon for research assistance and Arlene Luck for editorial assistance.

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virtual private networks (VPNs), proxies, multiple accounts, platform jumping, or encryption software. By now, Internet shutdowns in China, Iran, and Turkey are well known among international media and communication scholars. Less research, however, has focused on Internet shutdowns in East and Southern Africa. In 2018 alone, Internet shutdowns occurred in 13 African countries (Taye, 2019). As mobile Internet and social media have become part of daily life in countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Zambia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania over the past decade, leaders of these countries have implemented an array of policies to regulate online expression, particularly during elections (Freyburg & Garbe, 2018; Matfess & Smith, 2018).

To contribute to scholarly research in this area, this article conceptualizes a “slow shutdown” in Tanzania. Known early on for its “innovative” Internet regulations and emphasis on capacity building (van Gorp & Maitland, 2009), Tanzania has become a site of growing concerns over expressive freedoms (Amnesty International, 2019; Bussiek, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2019). Ruled by the socialist Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party for decades, the current government, led by President John Magufuli, has asserted state power more forcefully in recent years, resulting in “widespread authoritarianism” and strident political protest (Paget, 2017). In the context of these conditions, citizens, bloggers, and independent journalists have flocked to online spaces to question and critique the ruling government, as in other countries throughout the region (Chachage, 2010; Nyabola, 2018; Srinivasan, Diepeveen, & Karekwaivanane, 2019). Oppositional voices in Tanzania, predominantly in Swahili but also in English, often gain political traction and influence when shared via social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. Because of this, the Tanzanian government has implemented a series of regulations over the past decade to manage information flow in the country’s growing IT market, where 23 million of the country’s 56 million citizens used the Internet in 2017—82% of them via mobile phones (“Tanzania Internet Users,” 2018). Paramount to these regulatory maneuvers has been consolidating the CCM’s power.

Media and communication scholars typically address such issues within the rubric of media control (Chomsky, 2002), exploring how states assert power over the means of mediated communication—the Internet or Web-based platforms—with the intention of monitoring and controlling expressive outputs. In the digital era, the Internet shutdown has become another technique of media control, but shutdowns vary from country to country and have different temporalities, scales, forms, and impacts. An Internet shutdown can be short term and temporary or protracted over time. A shutdown can impact a limited or vast number of Internet users within given territory; its effects may be focused or extensive, and their severity can be minimal or severe. A shutdown can involve mobile networks or be targeted at specific social media platforms. Whatever the case, critical conceptualizations of Internet shutdowns, we argue, should exceed “flip of the switch” or technologically determinist thinking and account for the legal and socioeconomic conditions that undergird and lead to shutdowns as well.

The Tanzanian government’s adoption of repressive information and Internet policies over the past decade has produced a slow shutdown. By *slow shutdown*, we are referring to an ensemble of regulatory mechanisms implemented over time, which have the effect of shutting down—whether by prohibiting, interrupting, or making too costly—online content creation, including blogging, alternative news production, public archiving, and user-generated content. A slow shutdown differs from a technical shutdown in which a state authority electronically switches off or blocks access to the Internet or platforms within its sovereign

boundaries, usually for a short period. More politically ambiguous than state actions characterized as “push-button autocracy” (Wagner, 2012), a “full Internet blockade” (Mukeredzi, 2017), platform blocking (Grinberg, 2017), or “deliberate large-scale black outs of digital communication” (Rydzak, 2018, p. 13), a slow shutdown is operationalized when a government incrementally uses state information and Internet policies to inhibit, preempt, or criminalize certain kinds of online content creation in a place where such practices had previously flourished.

In this way, a slow shutdown can also be understood as a specific dynamic of “networked authoritarianism,” which takes shape “when an authoritarian regime embraces and adjusts to the inevitable changes brought by digital communications” (MacKinnon, 2011, p. 33). Like other authoritarian states, Tanzania has encouraged citizens to use the Internet and social media while also monitoring and maintaining strict control over their uses. What distinguishes Tanzania, however, is its gradual stacking up of information and Internet regulations, which have been leveraged and combined to pinpoint regime critics and quash political dissent. Collectively, these regulations bolster the state’s power and authority over information flow and equip the state with flexible “legal” options in silencing and preempting opposition. These practices enable the state’s ruling CCM party to make public examples of those who defy it, a characteristic of networked authoritarianism noted in other contexts as well (Pearce & Kenzidor, 2012).

To delineate the slow shutdown in Tanzania, we draw on national policy documents, English-language national and international press coverage, NGO reports, policy analyses, and Tanzanian blogs and websites. Using the method of process tracing² (George, Bennett, Lynn-Jones, & Miller, 2005), we discuss information and Internet regulations adopted in Tanzania from 2010 to 2018 and analyze social impacts of controversial 2018 online content regulations. Although it would have been ideal to include Swahili sources in our analysis, we had concerns about engaging local partners and translators in our research, given risks that emerged. When our research began in 2018, we hoped to interview affected content creators, but we were warned not to broach these issues during a 2019 visit to Tanzania. Investigating Internet regulations and their impacts became challenging for foreigners and locals alike. In November 2018, Angela Quintal and Muthoki Mumo, staff members of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), were detained and interrogated by state security forces during a fact-finding mission in Dar es Salaam. Their devices were confiscated, and Mumo was beaten (Quintal, 2018). Earlier that year, Quintal, CPJ’s Africa coordinator, had issued statements critiquing Tanzania’s 2018 Internet regulations. Thus, the slow shutdown in Tanzania must be understood within a broader context of repressive state power and efforts not only to control the circulation of online content, but to impede investigations of or commentaries on information and Internet policies as well.

To explore these issues further, we first provide an overview of Tanzanian information and Internet policies from 2010 to 2018, highlighting provisions that have bolstered the state’s power to circumscribe Internet use and content creation. The section also points out what is known as “regulatory creep” in the application of these laws. The article’s second half discusses social impacts of the country’s 2018 online content regulations and explains how these conditions signal a slow shutdown. Through this Tanzanian case

² Process tracing is a helpful “analytic tool for drawing descriptive and causal inferences from diagnostic pieces of evidence—often understood as part of a temporal sequence of events or phenomena” (Collier, 2011, p. 824).

study, the article extends research on media control and networked authoritarianism by demonstrating the variable forms, temporalities, and effects of Internet shutdowns and by exploring their relation to gender and class differences.

Stacking Up Information and Internet Regulations, 2010–2018

Information and Internet policies adopted in Tanzania over the past decade have laid the groundwork for a slow shutdown in Tanzania. Between 2010 and 2018, the CCM-led government stacked up a series of regulations to bolster state control over information flow and Internet-related activities. Provisions of these laws reveal a pattern of intensifying state repression and control over information and are consistent with increasing authoritarianism in Tanzania (Cross, 2019; Paget, 2017; Pedersen & Jacob, 2019). In this section, we summarize these laws and provisions of concern. The slow shutdown involves the capacity to leverage various aspects of these regulations to suppress or preempt content creation that threatens the CCM and to inhibit online expression by diverse social groups.

In 2010, Tanzania's Parliament passed the Electronic and Postal Communications Act (EPOCA) as an update to two pieces of legislation—the Broadcasting Services Act and the Tanzania Communications Act—both from the 1990s. The EPOCA charged the Tanzanian Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) with integrated oversight of the information and communication sectors as digital technologies emerged. The act, which has nearly 200 sections, empowered the Minister of Communications to establish regulations regarding communication infrastructure, competition, and content, and vested the Ministry with wide-ranging discretion to enforce those regulations. The EPOCA also addressed licensing requirements and associated fees for network and content services as well as any other service "as may be determined by the Authority" (Electronic and Postal Communications Act [EPOCA], 2010). Section 103(1) stipulated, "The Minister may make regulations upon recommendation of the Committee on content related matters" (p. 71), which provided the legal basis for the 2018 EPOCA amendments, discussed later.

An important provision of the EPOCA granted the state power to identify users of mobile phone communication. One section focused on mandatory SIM card registration, a now common practice in African countries, which enables mobile operators and governments to track content creators who use mobile phones (Donavan & Martin, 2014). Legal scholar Alex Makulilo argued that the EPOCA's establishment of a mandatory SIM card registration database violated constitutional rights to privacy (2011). The EPOCA not only prohibited individuals from using unregistered mobile phones, but also stipulated that failure to report a nonregistered or missing device was also a punishable offense. Among other "Offences and penalties relating to SIM card," the act included the sharing of false or misleading information within its punitive framework (EPOCA, 2010, p. 86). The section allowed the state not only to identify particular users with particular phones, but also to prohibit SIM card use to circulate information that the state deemed "misleading" or "false." Thus, the EPOCA emphasized the states' authority of identification as well as its power to adjudicate true or false, accurate or misleading information.

In 2015, Tanzania adopted another policy to mitigate the flow of "false" information. The Statistics Act (2015) set forth regulations for categorizing specific types of information and punishing those who violated them. The act charged the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) with administering the collection and

publication of official statistical information. A 2018 amendment to the law (The Written Laws [Miscellaneous Amendments] [No. 3] Act, 2018) also required outside agencies, including research institutions, news outlets, or NGOs, to receive permission before publishing official statistics or conducting surveys or opinion polls to ensure that their practices conformed with NBS guidelines. The penalty for those who questioned official numbers was at least a 10 million shillings (US\$4,370) fine and/or three years in jail (Dausen, 2018).

Although the act set out to ensure accuracy of official statistical information, it placed an undue burden on content creators. NGO workers or journalists were accustomed to citing government statistics without permission or generating their own statistical information to compare and contrast with official numbers. Vague by design, the act's language left interpretive space for the government to accuse almost any content creator of producing false or distorting information. In 2019, a provision of the amendment was repealed after the World Bank threatened to withhold a \$50 million grant for Tanzania's statistical activities ("It Is No Longer a Crime," 2019). This act and its amendments not only extended the state's power to adjudicate true from false, but also allowed the government to track those who cited official statistics, creating obstacles for researchers in Tanzania.

While the Statistics Act limited the creation and circulation of statistical information, the Cybercrimes Act of 2015 defined criminal activities related to computers and information communication technologies (ICTs). This act cast a wide net in an attempt to prevent and penalize a variety of activities, including online fraud, cyberbullying, and dissemination of child pornography. Many states have implemented similar such policies, but the Tanzania legislation allowed a host of other online activities to fall within its scope (Cybercrimes Act, 2015). As a result, the act aroused concerns about abuse of state power. The Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition and the Policy Forum critiqued the act's potential for unchecked applications (Cornell, 2015; Shibata, 2015). Civil society groups complained that the Cybercrimes Act authorized police to perform searches and seizures in citizens' homes or businesses and procure data from Internet service providers when there were reasonable grounds to suspect a device could be used as evidence in proving an offense (Macha & Baerendsen, 2015). Legal critics lamented the lack of official police oversight; any "police officer in charge of a police station or a law enforcement officer of a similar rank" (Ndumbaro, 2016, p. 27) can compel citizens to supply data, reveal information, and forfeit devices.

In the months after the Cybercrimes Act's adoption, Tanzanian citizens, including opposition political party staff, were charged with spreading false information in the form of insults to the president and of violating Section 16, which forbids publication of false information (Macha, 2015, 2016a; Nanfuka, 2016). In response, Tanzania's development partners, including the European Union Head of Delegation, the Heads of Mission of Belgium, Denmark, Canada, and the U.S., among many other nations, issued a joint statement condemning Tanzania's application of the act. The statement suggested that the "arrest of members of staff of the Legal and Human Rights Centre [where election results were reported and tallied] and confiscation of key technical outfits" (European Union Head of Delegation, 2015, p. 1) contradicted the government's assurance that the Cybercrimes Act would not breach people's freedom of expression.

Foreign aid organizations too criticized Tanzania's use of the Cybercrimes Act in the context of elections. The Millennium Challenge Corporation, a U.S. government aid agency, canceled a \$470 million

project in Tanzania following the contentious 2015 and 2016 Zanzibar elections (Aglionby, 2016) and cited the government's application of the Cybercrimes Act as reason for doing so (Millennium Challenge Corporation, 2016). The Tanzanian government used the Cybercrimes Act to extend police power across a variety of domains, including elections, NGOs, and opposition parties. The act emboldened policing online and offline and changed the status of private ISPs, mobile devices, and databases as they increasingly became part of law enforcers' purview.

While the EPOCA, the Statistics Act, and the Cybercrimes Act incrementally strengthened state control over the Internet and information, subsequent legislation targeted media sector workers. The 2016 Media Services Act addressed the accreditation of media organizations and journalists and charged the Director of Information Services and the Journalists Accreditation Board, respectively, with the power to shut down noncompliant media institutions and oversee journalists' credentials (Media Services Act, 2016). The act prohibits individuals from engaging in journalistic activities unless they are included in the Journalists Accreditation Board's list, outlawing anonymous reporting.

The legislation also broadly defines "media services," which can range from Tanzanian print newspapers to e-mailed NGO newsletters, and states,

any person who makes use by any means, of a media service for the purposes of publishing . . . any statement the contents of which is threatening the interests of defence, public safety, public order, the economic interests of the State, public morality or public health (Media Services Act, 2016, p. 34)

can be fined 20 million Tanzanian shillings (US\$8,654.00) or face imprisonment for five years.

The Media Services Act might have been a laudable effort by the Tanzanian government to support journalistic integrity and standards in media organizations, but it also introduced yet another way of bolstering state power over information. This time, that process involved patrolling the work of journalists and media service organizations in the guise of accreditation, and discouraging the publication of critical, alternative, or dissident perspectives.

The accumulation of repressive regulations cultivated a climate in which Tanzania in 2018 could pass its most controversial rules yet. That year, the government updated the 2010 EPOCA with new laws pertaining to online content. The new laws, officially known as the Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations [EPOCA, 2018] forced many online content creators to cease their activities and threatened to shut down portions of the Tanzanian Internet. Before adopting the 2018 content regulations, the TCRA released drafts of the proposed laws in September 2017 and held forums to discuss them. Respondents suggested that definitions and wording were ambiguous, and they warned that the laws violated individuals' privacy, impeded citizens' right to free speech and expression, and contradicted the spirit of an open Internet (Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa [CIPESA], 2017; Kiunguyu, 2018).

The 2018 regulations define "online content providers" as "application services licensees, bloggers, Internet cafes, online content hosts, online forums, online radio or television, social media, subscribers and users of online content, and any other related online content" and establish general obligations for content providers and users. Section 5 requires content providers to "ensure that online content is safe, secure and does not contravene the provisions of any written law," to "use moderating tools to filter prohibited content," to "have in place mechanisms to identify source of content," and to "ensure prohibited content is removed within twelve hours upon being notified" (EPOCA, 2018, p. 6). The regulations apply to providers both within and beyond the country's territorial borders, encompassing "Tanzania residents, Tanzanian citizens outside the country, noncitizens of Tanzania residing in the country, blogging or running online forums with contents for consumption by Tanzanians" (EPOCA, 2018, p. 8). Thus, the regulations impact NGOs and other organizations within and beyond Tanzania.

Beyond the general obligations, the law enumerates requirements for different kinds of content providers. Section 7 indicates that bloggers and online radio and television services must identify their owners, addresses of operation, human resource development plans, and technical descriptions of their facilities, and also provide resumes of their staff members. These provisions make online activities based on anonymous reporting or whistleblowing virtually impossible. These laws built on the Media Services Act and worked to formalize and professionalize online content creators. This meant that bloggers could only survive if they became what some called "blogentrepreneurs" (Olewe, 2018). Section 9, pertaining to Internet cafes and business centers, mandates that owners install surveillance cameras, keep a complete record of all users who must show proper ID, and maintain surveillance and registration records for a minimum of 12 months. Most Tanzanians now access the Internet via mobile phone (Sedoyeka, 2016), but Internet cafes still exist in less affluent areas. The regulations burdened Internet café owners with new equipment purchases and higher overhead costs, and deputized them to monitor Internet users.

In addition to these general and specific obligations, Section 12 of the 2018 law includes a comprehensive list of prohibited online content. The list ranges from fairly standard items, such as violent, sexual, or hateful material, to more vague restrictions, including "content that causes annoyance, threatens harm or evil, encourages or incites crime, or leads to public disorder" or "content that uses bad language" (EPOCA, 2018, p. 10-11). Recognizing the power of defamatory rumors and "fake news," the list also includes "false content which is likely to mislead or deceive the public unless where it is clearly pre-stated that the content is—(1) satire and parody; (2) fiction; and (3) where it is preceded by a statement that the content is not factual" (EPOCA, 2018, p. 11).

Finally, the 2018 law vests the TCRA with oversight of online content providers. Section 14 requires "any person who wishes to provide online content services" (EPOCA, 2018, p. 11) to complete an application form, attach supporting documents, and pay an application fee of 100,000 Tanzanian shillings (US\$44), an initial license fee of 1 million shillings (US\$440) for a three-year license, and an annual license fee of 1 million shillings, amounting to a total of more than US\$900 (EPOCA, 2018). This provision, in particular, had a chilling effect on content providers and users. It was expected to effectively shut down much independent online content creation in Tanzania because most small groups, individual bloggers, and media makers could not afford the high fees.

With this stacking of regulations, Tanzania's version of "networked authoritarianism" relied heavily on what is known as regulatory creep. On the one hand, Tanzania's laws resembled those of other authoritarian nations; they authorized the state to identify users, authenticate statistical information, administer accreditation and licensing of media organizations and journalists, embolden policing, and adjudicate true or false information. On the other hand, what distinguished Tanzania was the way the CCM government invoked these laws while expanding their scope and application. These practices enabled the CCM, for instance, to interfere in elections, NGO work, journalism, and opposition party activities, and, more generally, to restrict online expression in and about Tanzania.

Such acts of regulatory creep involve both overzealous enforcement of regulations and creation of a state of uncertainty about the status of particular regulations (Renda, Kurpas, Kaczyński, Montoya, & Schrefler, 2009). Regulatory creep emerges when regulations are used to assert influence into areas and activities that were not originally intended or warranted. Tanzania's 2010–2018 regulations not only strengthened state power over information and Internet activities, but also normalized overreach. The laws also exemplified a progression from institutional procedures and levels of oversight to policies that were more behavioral in focus. Such measures allowed for targeting of specific individuals, forms of speech, and online practices. In the next section, we explore how the social impacts of Tanzania's online content regulations signaled a slow shutdown.

Social Impacts of the 2018 Online Content Regulations

When Tanzanian Information Minister Harrison Mwakyembe announced the country's new online content regulations on March 13, 2018, content creators and digital activists expressed discontent. The press, NGOs, and bloggers too responded with frustration and dismay, and headlines marked this as a turning point for Internet users in Tanzania. Proclamations such as "Free Press, Freedom of Expression and an Open Internet Are Now in Tanzania's Past" (Kiunguyu, 2018), "Tanzania Issues Regressive Online Content Regulations," (Kalemera, 2018), and "Tanzania Shuts Down Unregistered Blogs" (Chaparadza, 2018) characterized the event in online media. Reporters Without Borders (2018) warned that the law would "kill off Tanzania's blogosphere." Global Voices claimed that "scores of independent blogs and social media pages" shut themselves down (Baerendtsen & Egbunike, 2018, para. 1). And digital commentator Cory Doctorow's (2018) headline declared, "Tanzania's independent websites, podcasts and video channels have gone dark" as the new laws took effect.

Other online news commentaries critiqued the "exorbitant costs" and "exhaustive documentation" required by the new laws (Kiunguyu, 2018). Tanzania Bloggers Network Secretary-General Krantz Mwantepele explained that many bloggers could not afford the fees because the "license applications and annual subscriptions are way beyond earnings of many bloggers" ("What New Regulations," 2018). Compounding the fee concerns, the law stated that any person convicted of violating the regulations would be liable to pay a minimum fine of 5 million Tanzanian shillings (US\$2,200) or serve 12 months in prison, or both. This served as a deterrent because many content creators would not dare take such a risk.

Soon after the 2018 regulations were announced, human rights and legal organizations challenged them in court on grounds that the laws violated the free speech and privacy of Internet users. In May 2018,

the plaintiffs, which included Tanzania Human Rights Defenders, Media Council of Tanzania, Jamii Media, Tanzania Media Women Association, and Tanzania Editors Forum, won a temporary injunction, and the court ordered the state to halt enforcement of the regulations until another hearing was held (Ng'wanakilala, 2018). In June 2018, however, the court ultimately decided to uphold the new regulations and ordered online content providers to register and pay application and licensing fees by June 15, 2018, or have their sites taken down (Dahir, 2018; Ndal, 2018).

African bloggers from nine countries responded to the regulations on June 15, 2018, with a statement that called on the African Union, East African Community, Southern African Development Community, and Economic Community of West African States to urge Tanzania to reverse its decision (Kolumbia, 2018). CPJ asked President Magufuli to rescind the 2018 regulations. CPJ's Africa Coordinator, Angela Quintal, argued that the law would erode the country's online media content, stating, "We urge authorities to scrap these problematic regulations and allow the free press to thrive online" (Kakah, 2018, para. 11). Finally, a Tweet from Tanzanian musician @NiiteSonga succinctly observed, "Blogging is no longer a free affair in Tanzania" and named the regulations the "blogger tax" (Giles, 2018). Even though this was not a technical Internet shutdown, press discourses suggested that members of Tanzania's online community thought of and experienced these regulations as a shutdown and chose to abide by the regulations to avoid being fined.

Beyond the headlines, independent bloggers delivered messages to their readers as they shut down their blogs, platforms, and websites. Elsie Eyakuze, whose Mikocheni Report blog negotiated "the intersection of Tanzania, feminism and politics" for more than 10 years, said goodbye on May 3, 2018, writing,

Tanzania has passed laws and regulations this year requiring bloggers to register and pay a punitive fee in order to keep offering their content. The flimsy excuse is taxation. The real reason is standard restriction of free speech. The Tanzanian blogosphere is too minute to generate anything worth taxing, but it has punched above its weight lately.

Emphasizing the free labor of blogging, Eyakuze (2018) also confessed that she was "exhausted in the true sense of the term. As in used up and burned out." Another female blogger, Aikande Kwayu (2018), shut down her six-year old website, tweeting,

In respect to the online content regulations of #Tanzania, I've suspended my website. Since 2012 the website served as an open platform for learning & sharing knowledge - through a blog, #BookReviews & #flashfictions sections. I'll keep sharing through other means. Thank you.

This comment revealed that some bloggers intended to continue their communication via "other means." These have included Twitter and other journalistic and scholarly outlets.

A YouTube content creator, Faith Hilary, who calls herself Tanzanian Vlogger, began her channel in September 2015 to share "all things Tanzanian from my eye, from my experience" while doing her studies in London (Hilary, 2015). By 2018, *Tanzanian Vlogger* had more than 4,500 subscribers and earned a small

income from Google ads. Responding to the new online content regulations, Hilary noted, "With all of these regulations, [vlogging] is not worth it. . . . The money I got is nowhere near the licensing fee that is being asked" (Dark, 2018, para. 3). Her vlog ended in 2018 after she had posted a total of 29 vlogs, using English and Swahili and her mobile phone to share her perspectives during her travels abroad and in Tanzania. The content ranges from footage of her graduation, to demonstrations of how to make coconut oil and sponge cake, to a review of a beach resort on her home island of Zanzibar. Vlogging became a space for Hilary to share her thoughts and experiences with several thousand subscribers.

Research on network authoritarianism requires further investigation of the ways that social differences, such as gender/sexuality, intersect with repressive information and Internet policies. Too often, research focuses on male digital activists or hackers fighting against authoritarian regimes even though conditions of Internet freedom and digital inequalities are much more socially nuanced and complex. Given gender inequalities in income and unemployment rates in Tanzania (Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics, 2017), the 2018 regulations and fees likely had differential impacts on female and male content creators. The regulations emerged in the context of an already existing "gender digital divide" in Tanzania (Sedoyeka, 2016, p. 105), where only 18% of women use mobile Internet (Rowntree, 2018). Based on the specific cases discussed, the 2018 regulations worked to further exclude women from online content creation.

Beyond gender, class differences are crucial too. Given the cost barriers imposed by the 2018 laws, they disproportionately affected low-income users in Tanzania. While middle-class Tanzanian bloggers or established news organizations could afford the new fees, the majority of Tanzanians, who live in conditions of poverty, were effectively rendered "digital illegals." Not only do low-income users already face everyday challenges involving the affordability of mobile devices, network time, and battery charging, but the 2018 law's exorbitant fees made it almost impossible for low-income individuals or groups to legally engage in blogging or other online expressive practices.

Despite this, some high-profile blogs managed to find ways around the new restrictions, including *Udadisi*, online since 2007. After Tanzania announced its 2018 content rules, independent blogger and Zimbabwean Takura Zhangazha assumed ownership and hosting of this multilingual, diasporic blog (Zhangazha, 2018). Other outlets that have not been substantially affected by the 2018 laws include established Swahili-language Tanzanian news organizations that tend to publish press releases or pro-state or CCM news coverage.

The point here is that shutdowns are implicated in the politics of social difference and affect individuals, groups, and organizations in uneven ways. To demonstrate this, we have offered anecdotal, qualitative evidence. Policies such as the Statistics Act, which regulate access to national statistical information, make research on such matters all the more challenging. We have been unable to find information from the Tanzanian government regarding the number of content creators who ceased online activities after the 2018 regulations or a list of shut-down blogs and websites. But Tanzania's drop in the World Press Freedom Index from 70 of 180 countries in 2013 to 118 in 2019 speaks to the state's repressive information regulations over the past decade (Reporters Without Borders, 2020). Its clampdown on journalists, opposing political parties, public interest organizations, and social minority groups has inhibited or halted much online content creation, resulting in a slow shutdown of the Tanzanian Internet.

While Tanzania's 2018 regulations impacted a diverse array of online content creators, they were also arguably targeted at a particular online organization—Jamii Forums—known as the “Swahili Wikileaks” (Dahir, 2018; Jacob, 2018). Launched in 2006, Jamii Forums operates under the motto, “Where we dare to talk openly” and has been on the radar of the Tanzanian government since 2008. That year, its cofounders Maxence Melo (also known as Maxence Melo Mubyazi) and Mike Mushi were detained by police without charge for 24 hours in Dar es Salaam, and three of their computers were confiscated (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2008). Government attacks on Jamii Forums continued in 2011, when then CCM vice chairman, Pius Msekwa, publicly accused the website of undermining the government (Political paranoia, 2011). In 2012, Jamii Forums moderators claimed that CCM supporters had “conducted cyberattacks on their site, overloading it with traffic to disrupt service” (Nolasco, 2016, p. 32). By 2015, Melo had been interrogated 17 times and arrested twice (Lopez, 2015).

In December 2016, the government charged Maxence Melo and Mike Mushi with violating section 22(2) of the Cybercrimes Act. Melo had refused to comply with a police order to disclose electronic communication and IP addresses, e-mails, and phone numbers of two users of the platform—whistleblowers who exposed corruption in the oil and banking industries (CIPESA, 2016b; Kalemera, 2018; Macha, 2016b). Jamii Forums' computers were confiscated causing the site to go offline for five days (CIPESA, 2016a). Melo and Mushi were acquitted of the Section 22(2) violation, but a separate charge remained, accusing Melo of managing an unregistered domain, which breached section 79(c) of the 2010 EPOCA (CIPESA, 2016b).

For more than a decade, the Tanzanian government deployed various strategies to try and shut down Jamii Forums, including Internet service interruptions, equipment confiscations, and prosecutions. These strategies were largely ineffective. When the 2018 regulations were announced, Jamii Forums was still receiving 600,000 views per day (Dark, 2018), up from 188,550 in 2013 (spartacus, 2013). In June 2018, Maxence Melo spoke out against the new laws and claimed they targeted websites such as his (Mngodo, 2018), and Jamii Forums was temporarily shut down again. A June 12, 2018, statement on the website explained,

We must comply with the mandate and therefore this service will not be available temporarily as we make efforts to ensure that it returns. For our clients in other countries, this service will come back sooner but the Tanzanian return to service will depend on the outcome of the efforts of our representatives in Tanzania. We are sorry we have to reach this point suddenly but we hope that our customers will continue to be tolerant during this period. (“Concern Grows,” 2018)

The staff of Jamii Forums struggled to keep their website going in the midst of political and financial pressures. Though targeted by the CCM government in a variety of ways, the salience and significance of Jamii Forums compelled and gratified its international user community. In 2019, Melo received the International Press Freedom Award from CPJ. By 2020, Jamii Forums remained the fourth most visited website in Tanzania (Alexa, 2020).

Although Jamii Forums has not been fully shut down, the state has used the website as a public example. Melo appeared in court 81 times in 2017 alone (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2019). The

government's unsuccessful efforts to eliminate Jamii Forums ultimately resulted in broad regulatory measures that applied to an array of Tanzanian content creators. News outlets associated with opposition parties or corruption investigations, independent bloggers, and other content creators were adversely impacted by the Tanzanian government's stringent regulations. The 2018 mandated fees were detrimental because they were prohibitively expensive for most Tanzanian users. Online casualties of the 2018 laws included already discussed female bloggers, some of whom created and sustained online spaces for women's political and cultural expression for more than a decade. The slow shutdown also halted content creation by Tanzanians who were not affiliated with registered businesses, lack credentials, or are unemployed. Such content creators have functioned as an important part of an informal media economy (Lobato & Thomas, 2015); they often work without formal training or a license and are uncompensated for their labor, yet they make vital contributions to the digital public sphere. In Tanzania and elsewhere in Africa, such content creators have been motivated to use the Internet and platforms to share perspectives and thoughts about matters ranging from corruption to cooking.

Much more than a temporary Internet blackout or platform blockage, the slow shutdown occurred as a result of the regulatory frameworks of the Tanzanian government during the past decade. Elements of the slow shutdown include the stacking up and adoption of multiple, flexibly mobilized regulations, usage of labor formalization and costly fee structures, and persistent state efforts to target particular high-profile content creators such as Jamii Forums and publicly use them as examples. The overall effect of such moves was to constrain, inhibit, and shut down diverse and CCM-critical or opposing online content creation in Tanzania.

Conclusion

In this article, we have critically engaged with information and Internet regulations and their social impacts to delineate a slow shutdown in Tanzania. During the past decade, the government adopted a series of laws, including the EPOCA of 2010, the Statistics Act of 2015, the Cybercrime Act of 2015, the Media Services Act of 2016, and the EPOCA of 2018, which generated a multi-tiered, flexible, and broad framework for regulating online content creation in Tanzania. The aggregative effect of these regulations has been to constrain and shut down online content creation by Tanzanians, particularly websites, blogs, and forums produced by small groups and individuals without organizational affiliations, professional training, or financing.

Dynamics of networked authoritarianism resulting from the adoption and application of the 2010–2018 regulations are arguably intensifying in Tanzania. As further evidence of the slow shutdown, we point to special reports released by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International in 2019 regarding state repression in Tanzania. These reports, which we had the opportunity to read before finalizing this article, provide important qualitative data and testimonies that further substantiate our claims. The Human Rights Watch report, "As Long as I Am Quiet, I Am Safe," based on 80 interviews with reporters, news editors, and NGO staff in Tanzania, details examples of regulatory overreach before concluding,

The impact of repression is far-reaching, effectively silencing organizations promoting rights to health, women's rights, children's rights, access to education, LGBT rights and

the rights of persons with disabilities, as well as those working on land, extractive industries, and electoral reforms. This report finds that the media are not covering the activities of these groups or the restrictions placed on them, for fear of government reprisals. (Human Rights Watch, 2019, p. 63)

The assessment of Amnesty International's report "The Price We Pay: Targeted for Dissent by the Tanzanian State," is similarly bleak. Drawing on 68 interviews with government and nongovernment officials, lawyers, academics, religious leaders, and diplomats, the report warns, "While it is too early to know how these new, restrictive laws will be applied and enforced, people are increasingly afraid of freely expressing themselves online." After enumerating serious human rights concerns, the report concludes,

Systematic interference with the rights to freedom of expression, information, association and peaceful assembly continue to have a chilling effect on the political opposition, media outlets, journalists and bloggers. People are now denied their rights to seek, receive and impart information. Poor and marginalized people stand to pay the greatest price for dissent through heavy court fines, bail and bond terms for people arrested under many of these new repressive laws. (Amnesty International, 2019, p. 34)

Both reports describe how the CCM government has used particular regulations to undermine the country's content creators, compound social disadvantages, and violate basic human rights.

As we finalized this article, the COVID-19 pandemic was spreading at a frightening pace around the world. The availability of credible information in nations worldwide rapidly became a matter of life or death. In March 2020, news reports emerging from Tanzania suggested that Magufuli's regime was not taking the coronavirus threat seriously enough. As transmission and death rates climbed and other world leaders issued strict lockdown and physical distancing orders, on March 23, 2020, President Magufuli reportedly encouraged citizens to continue congregating in churches, explaining, "We are not closing places of worship. That's where there is true healing. Corona is the devil and it cannot survive in the body of Jesus" (Edwards, 2020, para. 1). Concerned about these comments, Tanzanian member of parliament and opposition leader (of the Alliance for Change and Transparency party) Zitto Kabwe published a strongly worded letter to President Magufuli in *The Daily Maverick*, a South African newspaper. Kabwe stressed the importance of medical science, noted the extremely limited health care resources in Tanzania, and insisted, "the only route for us to take is PREVENTION." Kabwe closed his letter with a call for political unity:

The coronavirus does not care about political party ideology, religion, tribe or race. It will strike us all. . . . It is therefore imperative to bring together all political parties, religious institutions, civil societies and other groups, to jointly agree on how to protect ourselves as a nation, prevent the spread of the virus and mitigate the effects on the most vulnerable in our society. (Kabwe, 2020)

We close this article with this issue not to be alarmist, but to suggest what is at stake in the CCM's government's control of information and the slow shutdown in Tanzania. At a time when Tanzanian citizens most urgently need access to scientifically informed leadership, accurate statistical information, and detailed

public health guidelines, they may not have it. During this unprecedented crisis, opposition party leaders are forced to express urgent messages in the newspapers of other countries. Sources of alternative online news and information have already been shut down. And the CCM government has vowed to "crack down on peddlers of fake news" (SABC Digital News, 2020), which is likely to augur further repression. The flow of accurate and detailed online information, in Tanzania and elsewhere, matters now more than ever.

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