

TANZANIA

Beneath Suluhu's blackout, a blanket of violence



PHOTO: AFP

SAMIA Suluhu Hassan ran all but unopposed in Tanzania's presidential elections on 29 October. Her would-be main challenger, Tindu Lissu, was in prison on treason charges and his party was barred from the ballot.

And so it came to pass that the incumbent, Suluhu, received nearly 98% of the vote, according to the official results. The only surprise came from the streets when protests broke out

on election day. Under the cover of an internet blockade, security forces met the protesters with force. Official statements now claim it was all nothing but a few skirmishes with "foreign" rioters.

We asked our readers in Tanzania what happened where they were. Thirty-seven responded. The people's side of the story is very different from the government's.

Here are a few of their responses – in their own words.

DAR ES SALAAM

TABATA

Protests began around 2pm on election day. About 50 protesters were involved in our neighbourhood and some were on boda-bodas. At that time, there were no injuries.

We could see smoke from car tyres. We heard our local government office – where the polling station was – had been invaded and ballot boxes destroyed. We saw a burning building from afar. The internet was shut down, then a curfew was declared.

In the evening, police started shooting bullets and teargas canisters. Many police cars arrived and people scurried to safety. In the night, and the following days, we continued to hear gunshots

and heard stories of people shot while buying food in the streets.

The curfew did not just start at 6pm: we were scared to leave the house all day. Shops would open only briefly as shopkeepers weighed the risk to sell basics like water and flour. Calls were not coming in or going out.

The majority of the people would have also wanted to go to the streets. We need reforms badly but the situation turned violent. It's unfortunate that people died. We salute those young people who sacrificed their lives for the sake of change.

Daily activities are now slowly resuming but schools have not [as of Tuesday]. (Woman, 35-44 years)



Smoke rising: Burning buildings and barricades in Dar es Salaam on 29 October.

PHOTO: AFP

KARIAKOO

I live in Kariakoo which is one of the spots where intense protests happened. It was really not a beautiful sight to see – the officers really let loose on these protesters. My sister and I were very shocked to see the ruthlessness. I saw a lifeless body on the ground.

Some schools, supermarkets, and gyms have reopened [as of Wednesday]. People are buying food and other supplies in bulk. Cooking gas is going for 15,000Tsh (about \$6) on the black market instead of the usual 3,000Tsh (*Resident, 18-24*)

BAGAMOYO ROAD

I was afraid and stressed because I couldn't access the internet. I also heard a lot of shootings. I saw pictures of a shop owner who was shot dead trying to close his shop. My friend was nearly shot but hid with other people. After a silence the men who were shooting – said to be secret service and sent by the president's son – must have thought they were dead.

Many fuel stations were burned, especially Lake Oil stations which allegedly belong to the son of the former president Jakaya Kikwete. A bus allegedly owned by Finance Minister Mwiguli Mchumba, was burned and people stole cooking-gas cases from a business owned by Rostam Aziz, a businessman and politician.

A shop belonging to rapper Billnas was burned. So too was a restaurant belonging to musician Shilole. Both celebrities had praised the government before the election. I heard police

stations and local government offices were burned in the city centre, Mabibi, Ubungu, Mabibo, Sokoni and Mwisho. We were supposed to go back to college on Monday but we didn't go and there has been no news on when we can. (*An engineering student*)

A HOSPITAL

There was anger and despair at my workplace – one of the hospitals in Dar es Salaam – where I was trapped for days. I saw about 80 bodies and hundreds of casualties, mostly due to gunshots. Even children as young as four weren't spared. Normal life has started resuming but in my neighbourhood families are grieving the dead and looking for missed ones. There was no election in Tanzania. We are used to unfair elections in this country but this time even that was snatched away. (*Man, 25-34*)



Viral violence: Protesters attack a polling station in Dar es Salaam on 29 October.

PHOTO: AFP

ARUSHA

ARUSHA TOWN

In Arusha alone, more than 500 people may have been killed. We are in a state of mourning, filled with rage and a great deal of uncertainty. We are afraid to stand out in case we are perceived as a threat. We believe that our daily activities are closely monitored and anything can trigger a devastating response.

There is also an overwhelming amount of information coming out – lies from the government and sobering truths from the few people who are brave enough to speak and share.

The protests started peacefully in Sakina. Then the police began to shoot live bullets towards the protesters to separate them. The protesters retaliated

by burning police stations, government buildings, and businesses linked to the government, including hotels and petrol stations allegedly owned by the president's son and the former president's family.

The retaliating masses overpowered the violent police and this was when a new force came into the mix: soldiers allegedly from Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe. They entered the scene with white cruisers or vans and killed people en masse, whether they were protesting or not. This was mainly true at night when the government imposed a curfew. By this time, the internet was shut down and information was not easily accessible,



Wet work: Police use a water canon to force protesters to disperse in Kigoma on 30 October.

PHOTO: AFP

so a lot of people died from not knowing about the curfew. Influencers did their best to inform those who still had internet access about the situation on the ground.

The first night was a massacre – we heard bullets and bombs throughout. After a few days, the Tanzanian army began patrolling the town. It is the first time we have seen that many guns on the street. Small groups of protesters were still demonstrating and we were told other regions were also rioting.

We have now been told to go about our usual business and that there were a few Tanzanian deaths. The government says foreigners came into the country to riot and is even deporting some Kenyans and others to prove the point. They say influencers organised by Kenyans, Malawians, and other neighbours rallied us into rioting but they have sorted this out and they are all gone now.

The opposition party, Chadema, has declared a seven-day mourning period. The ruling party and its supporters – nicknamed Chawa (“lice” in KiSwahili) – are posting celebratory and other out-of-touch messages on social media.

The government is rumoured to be collecting the dead from hospitals to keep the death count unknown and small. (*Woman, 25-34*)

KISONGO

I am not sure we have collectively ever felt the anguish and helplessness as brought by the events of 29 October and ensuing days. I live in a suburban area of Arusha, the safari capital of Tanzania.

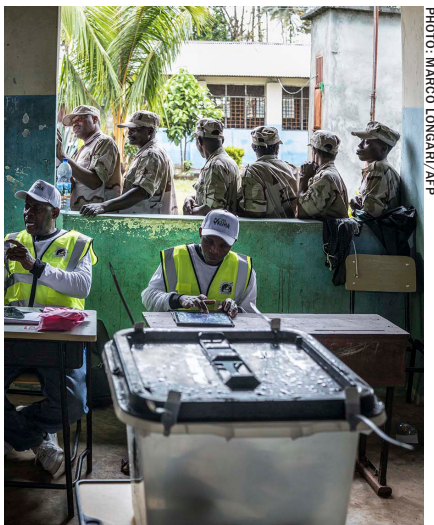


PHOTO: MARCO LONGARI/AFP

Lined up: Security forces queue to cast their ballot at an early voting centre in Langoni on 28 October.

All was quiet here but tourists are scarce now because most airlines chose to avoid our destination.

My family in Dar es Salaam did not leave the house for six whole days. When we spoke to check in, I could hear bullet sounds in the background. For four days, day and night, bullets and tear gas were going non-stop. On one call, my three-year-old niece asked “na huko kuna bunduki” – are there guns there too? It felt like my family was in the midst of a bleak civil war and there was nothing I could do to help.

Now people are getting back to business but with limited internet access, long lines at fuel stations, and soldiers everywhere. It will be a while, I feel, before Arusha’s tourism sector fully bounces back. (*Woman, 25-34*)

ELSEWHERE

MBEYA

A bullet landed just outside my front door. For five days, my house echoed with the relentless sounds of gunfire and explosions. We couldn't sleep: fear gripped us in ways words can hardly describe. Death and injury have swept through our community, and as I write this, countless families are mourning their loved ones. (*Man, 35-44*)

ZANZIBAR

We are in disbelief, sadness, and shock. In Zanzibar there were no protests. The election process here went smoothly although, as expected, it was way more blatantly rigged than usual. Armed groups called Mazombis were rumoured to be beating up people in poorer areas.

The ferry shut down because of the chaos in Dar es Salaam, affecting us economically, especially with our growing tourism industry. We depend on mainland Tanzania for produce like vegetables and meat. With the internet shut down, ATMs barely worked and card-payment systems were down. We are getting back to business with a slow and throttled internet. Many websites are barely usable and even the use of a VPN doesn't always help.

As a woman, I cannot believe we have come to this with our first female president. The abductions and torture of foreign and local activists is completely disheartening. We need



PHOTO: MARCO LONGARI/AFP

Sea-list security: *Navy men practice marching ahead of the Zanzibar presidential inauguration.*

the [International Criminal Court or International Court of Justice] to look into all these horrific events. (*Woman, 35-44*)

NZEGA

Most people are not happy but won't say it because they fear their lives will be in danger. In some areas, relatives are being denied the right to take the bodies of loved ones who were shot during the chaos. In Kahama town, they were forced to sign a document declaring their relatives lost their lives to natural causes.

Normal activity is slowly resuming but people are in disbelief that the president-elect can remorselessly resume office. (*Man, 35-44*) ■

For their safety, most people who responded asked not to be named