

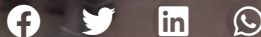
2024/2025 ELECTION , OP-ED , POLITICS

Attempted Disenfranchisement of Maasai in Ngorongoro Proves that Tanzania's Election Management Bodies Are Neither Free Nor Fair

NEC's scandalous decision to attempt to disenfranchise thousands of people under the government's instruction needs to be assessed objectively to safeguard electoral integrity in Tanzania.



Joseph Moses Oleshangay December 10, 2024



On November 29, 2024, the National Electoral Commission (NEC)—I prefer to use its constitutional name instead of adding the meaningless 'Independent' to its name—publicly announced that it would reinstate voting rights in 11 wards, 25 villages, and 96 sub-villages in Ngorongoro.

This meant that the national electoral body was taking a U-turn following a similar [decision](#) by the Ministry of State, President's Office for Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG), whose [Notice No 796 of 2024](#) of September 6, 2024, revoked another [Government Notice No 673](#).

The notice, published on August 2, 2024, delisted all villages, wards and sub-villages in Ngorongoro just a month earlier. It was the first time since Tanzania's political independence that Ngorongoro and its inhabitants became ineligible for voter registration exercise. This wasn't surprising, however, as it reflected authorities' attitude towards the people of the heritage site for the last four years.

We found ourselves out of the voting plans. While our fellow compatriots think of their

development, we found ourselves fighting for the right to vote after sixty-three years of what many call independence. What does independence mean if my right to choose the government that decides over my life is not guaranteed?

Then, while trying to digest the decision to delist Ngorongoro as a constituency in July, another glaring irregularity emerged.

It emerged that all registered voters in Ngorongoro in 2020 had their particulars unilaterally transferred by NEC to the Msomera village, Handeni district, in Tanga, over six hundred kilometres from their actual registered polling stations!

READ MORE: [Tanzania's CCM Wins Big in Local Govt Elections That Opposition Parties Dismissed as a 'Sham'](#)

Msomera is the same village that the government is forcibly relocating Maasai into. What was once started as a conservation problem reinvented itself to exclusion. How does this relate to conservation? Only NEC knows. NEC wouldn't have implemented it without President Samia Suluhu Hassan's directive.

Some people discovered that their late relatives, deceased three or many years ago, have mysteriously "relocated" to far-flung polling stations in Msomera. Some passed on long before the Msomera scam started in 2022. This is not just deliberate, which, of course, it is, but also an unmatched degree of incompetence on the part of the NEC in understanding basic rules related to election management.

Many questions

It does not require anyone to have some basic understanding of the law to ask, What's the point of registering to vote if an electoral management body can move your particulars from one polling station to another without your knowledge and consent?

Why would the NEC tamper with voters' registration without consequences? How can the credibility of the election be ensured if the NEC could swing voter registration more than a flag flap? How can we trust the NEC to manage free and fair elections

when it openly undermines voting rights?

If they can do it now to Maasai of Ngorongoro, what will they do against the incumbent president's competitors in the next October 2025 general election? If they are this brazen now, what will they do on election day?

The revelations must spark outrage about NEC's impartiality. This is clear evidence that NEC is a tool of voter suppression, unable and unwilling to resist executive pressure. The NEC's actions have left many questions about the state of Tanzania's democracy. As the election approaches, the legitimacy of the election management bodies is at stake.

READ MORE: [A Myth of Free and Fair Elections in Tanzania: Reflections from the Hospital's Window](#)

Elections are about trust. Once that trust is broken, the entire democratic framework begins to crumble. But the broader question remains: how can a nation ensure free, fair, and credible elections when its electoral body is accused of betraying the very principles it is meant to uphold?

When NEC becomes an arm of the executive, democracy is in peril. Elections are meaningless if the executive can decide who gets to vote. The right to vote is equally protected under Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Under the Tanzanian constitution and the law, the NEC's primary duty is to the people, not the presidency. Article 5(1) of the Tanzania Constitution states, "Every citizen of the United Republic who has attained the age of eighteen years is entitled to vote in any election held in Tanzania."

Incompetence or fear?

NEC might have acted on PO-RALG's instruction, but how can they forget what the law says in unambiguous terms? What is the use of sitting judges leading the NEC if an explicit provision of the law is not followed and some unknown government

departments are waiting for them to instruct them on what to do with voters' registration?

The presence of lawyers and sitting judges at the NEC should, in theory, safeguard against executive overreach. These individuals are expected to uphold the rule of law, counterbalance political influence, and avoid excuses for ignorance of the law. Their apparent concession to the NEC's erratic decisions reflects a troubling abdication of responsibility.

Why have these legal professionals failed to challenge the disenfranchisement of eligible voters from Ngorongoro and its broader erosion of electoral integrity generally? Their silence undermines public confidence in the commission and the judiciary that they continue serving as judges and raises doubts about their commitment to constitutional principles. If lawyers and judges within the NEC cannot resist executive pressure, how can citizens trust the legal system to protect their rights?

READ MORE: [Reports of Violence, Fake Ballots Dominate Local Govt Elections Exercise in Tanzania](#)

The constitution clearly states that citizenship, mental illness, prisoners of specified offences, and uncertainty of either age or registration should be the only factors considered when barring someone from voting.

Which of these was missing in Ngorongoro so its people could be collectively excluded from voting? Is Ngorongoro a prison? Are we aliens to this country? Is Ngorongoro a presumed mental hospital in the minds of NEC and Tanzania's government officials? Does anyone think Ngorongoro is inhabited by only children who are unqualified for voter registration? What kind of a blunder is this?

NEC's scandalous decision to attempt to disenfranchise thousands of people under the government's instruction needs to be assessed objectively to safeguard electoral integrity for independent oversight of NEC, transparency, and accountability.

NEC's ability to impartially manage elections is fundamentally compromised when it

aligns with the executive's preferences. If, in three months, the NEC can swing registered voters from one polling station to another, who guarantees the sanctity of the ongoing voter registration? Who knows what will happen in opposition strongholds such as Mwanza, Pemba, Songea, and other places if Ngorongoro voters can be transferred?

The cornerstone of any functioning democracy is an impartial electoral commission that guarantees free, fair, transparent, accountable, and inclusive elections. The NEC's recent actions in excluding the people of Ngorongoro from participating in the voters' registration exercise just because the government wants them gone from their ancestral land have called into question its integrity and independence.

A grave assault

The disenfranchisement of eligible voters from Ngorongoro, justified on thinly veiled political grounds, constitutes a grave assault not only on the Maasai but also on democratic principles and institutions that affect all citizens of this country.

READ MORE: [Campaigns for Local Govt Elections Close in Tanzania. Here's What We Observed for Seven Days](#)

In a democracy, the executive's open hostility towards specific communities or classes of people would not warrant their exclusion from exercising their democratic rights, including voting for or against such government.

NEC's initial denial of their voting rights in Ngorongoro suggests a deliberate attempt to suppress dissent. The subsequent reversal, granting them voting rights only after the president announced she would meet with Maasai representatives to discuss the four-year dispute in Ngorongoro, highlights the commission's lack of autonomy.

An electoral body that prioritises the interests of the incumbent over the electorate cannot be trusted to deliver credible results. This raises urgent questions about the NEC's capacity to administer elections that reflect the people's will rather than the desires of those in power.

This sets a dangerous precedent that voting rights can be weaponised to serve political ends. Such actions fracture the social fabric, exacerbating divisions and undermining the legitimacy of electoral outcomes.

What just transpired in Ngorongoro is a symptom of more profound institutional failings. A national electoral body that cannot stand up to the executive cannot be trusted to administer free and fair elections. The involvement of legal professionals in perpetuating these failures only deepens the crisis of confidence.

To restore its credibility, the NEC must urgently be reformed not only as proposed by the current laws but in a manner that demonstrates its independence except as against Judicial checks, institutional autonomy, and accountability.

It is imperative that the NEC recommit to its constitutional mandate, ensuring that all citizens, regardless of their political or social standing, can exercise their right to vote. Anything less is a betrayal of democracy itself.

Joseph Moses Oleshangay is a lawyer, advocate and human rights activist from Ngorongoro, Tanzania. He is available at joseshangay@gmail.com or on X [@Oleshangay](#). These are the writer's own opinions, and they do not necessarily represent the viewpoint of *The Chanzo*. Do you want to publish in this space? Contact our editors at editor@thechanzo.com for further inquiries.

Journalism in its raw form.

The Chanzo is supported by readers like you.

Support The Chanzo and get access to our amazing features.

Support Us

Joseph Moses Oleshangay

Did you enjoy this article? Consider supporting us

The Chanzo is supported by readers like you.

Support Us

3 responses

Ben Barka says:

11 December 2024 at 8:04 PM

"N EC temper with voters' registration"

temper? NO it is tamper!

Reply



Joseph says:

11 December 2024 at 9:45 PM

its tamper — error

Reply

JUMBE O JUMBE says:

15 December 2024 at 2:29 PM

T

Tanzania is slowly but surely heading towards where many an African countries have flipped off the cliff. To have a weak president at this dangerous epoc of her history does not help. My prayers for Tanzania to conclude the 2025 presidential election not like the just-ended municipall elections.

Reply

Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment *

Name *

Email *

Website

☐ Save my name, email, and website in this browser for the next time I comment.

Post Comment

Related Posts

News

Tanzania VP Stresses Energy Transition in Fight Against Climate Change

September 9, 2025

News

The Chanzo Morning Briefing Tanzania News – September 9, 2025

September 9, 2025

News

Tanzanian Luxury Cars Content Creator Al-Hajj Nourdin Mushi (25) Reported Missing After Abduction Ordeal

September 9, 2025

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER!

Subscribe Now!

FEATURED TAGS

DEMOCRACY

GOOD GOVERNANCE

HUMAN RIGHTS

DIGITAL RIGHTS

GENDER

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

FEATURED CATEGORIES

Politics

Justice

Gender

Digital Rights

