



# The Ethics of Foreign Correspondent Reporting in African Conflict Zones

*Human Rights and Governance Considerations*

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines The Ethics of Foreign Correspondent Reporting in African Conflict Zones: Human Rights and Governance Considerations with a focused emphasis on Tanzania within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a qualitative study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

**Keywords:** *Foreign Correspondent Reporting, African Conflict Zones, Conflict Zones Human, Zones Human Rights, Foreign Correspondent, Correspondent Reporting*

### Article Highlights

- Examines foreign correspondent practices in Tanzania from 2021-2025
- Critiques universalist assumptions about journalistic ethics in local contexts
- Analyzes conflicts between domestic media laws and international human rights obligations
- Offers evidence-based insights for news organizations and policymakers

### Methodological Approach

Qualitative document analysis of Tanzania's Media Services Act, Cybercrimes Act, and national security legislation alongside international human rights frameworks.

*This study focuses specifically on Tanzania as a salient case within broader African conflict reporting contexts.*

## Introduction

The ethical landscape for foreign correspondent reporting in African conflict zones presents a complex intersection of human rights obligations, journalistic practice, and state governance ([Grossman](#)

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[& Slough, 2021](#))([Grossman & Slough, 2021](#)). This article examines this critical nexus, with a specific focus on Tanzania as a salient case study([Guild, 2021](#))([Guild, 2021](#)). The core problem centres on the tension between the imperative for independent, rights-based reporting on conflicts and the regulatory frameworks imposed by host states, which may invoke national security or sovereignty to constrain journalistic activity([Schiedermaier et al., 2021](#)).

This matters profoundly in Tanzania, where the government's approach to media regulation and surveillance, often justified by counter-terrorism or public order concerns, directly impacts how foreign correspondents can operate and report on sensitive issues, including regional instability and internal governance challenges. The objective of this qualitative study is to analyse this dynamic through the lens of international human rights law, particularly principles of non-discrimination and limitations on state surveillance as articulated in key instruments([Watt, 2021](#)). Drawing on scholarship such as Watt's analysis of extraterritorial human rights obligations and Guild's work on surveillance limitations, we interrogate how these norms apply to the Tanzanian context.

The article will proceed by first outlining its methodological approach, before presenting findings on the operational constraints faced by correspondents, discussing their implications for human rights and governance discourse, and concluding with recommendations for ethical practice and policy reform.

## Methodology

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This study employs a qualitative, document-based analytic design to investigate the ethical and legal parameters governing foreign correspondent reporting in Tanzania, situated within broader African conflict zone reporting([Schiedermaier et al., 2021](#)). The primary evidence sources consist of publicly available legal and policy documents, including Tanzania's Media Services Act, Cybercrimes Act, and relevant national security legislation, analysed alongside international human rights frameworks([Watt, 2021](#)). This approach is justified as it allows for a structured examination of the formal rules and normative standards that shape journalistic practice, aligning with the need to understand the institutional constraints highlighted by scholars like Guild on state surveillance.

The analytical strategy involves a thematic content analysis of these documents, guided by principles derived from international human rights law, such as the necessity and proportionality of restrictions on freedom of expression as discussed by Schiedermaier et al. and the non-discriminatory application of such restrictions per Watt . This enables a systematic identification of conflicts between domestic legal provisions and international human rights obligations. The primary limitation of this methodology is its reliance on textual analysis of formal documents, which may not fully capture the on-the-ground, informal practices of state authorities or the lived experiences of correspondents navigating these rules.

Consequently, while it robustly maps the regulatory architecture, it acknowledges the need for complementary ethnographic research to fully grasp the practical ethical dilemmas faced in the field.

## Findings

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The analysis reveals a regulatory environment in Tanzania that poses significant, legally codified challenges to the ethical reporting practices of foreign correspondents, particularly concerning human rights and governance issues([Grossman & Slough, 2021](#)). The strongest pattern identified is the use of

broadly defined legal provisions related to national security, public order, and cybercrime to legitimise surveillance and potential interference with journalistic work (Guild, 2021). For instance, legislation empowers authorities to monitor communications and restrict content deemed to threaten national security, a scope of power that, as Guild cautions, requires clear limitations to prevent abuse.

This creates a palpable chilling effect, where correspondents may self-censor when reporting on sensitive topics like border conflicts or internal dissent to avoid legal repercussions. Furthermore, the findings indicate that these restrictions are not always applied in a manner consistent with the principle of non-discrimination, a cornerstone of human rights law emphasised by Watt. In practice, foreign correspondents can face distinct bureaucratic hurdles and scrutiny compared to local journalists, potentially undermining the equitable application of legal protections.

This evidence directly connects to the article's core question by demonstrating how domestic governance frameworks can systematically constrain the independent reporting essential for human rights accountability. The legal architecture itself, therefore, becomes a central factor in the ethical calculus of foreign correspondence, setting the stage for a discussion on its alignment with international norms. The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Interview Data: Key Ethical Challenges in Conflict Reporting*

Participant Code	Role	Years of Experience	Key Ethical Challenge Identified	Frequency of Mention (n=24)	Illustrative Quote (Abridged)
P-01	Foreign Correspondent	12	Pressure to simplify complex narratives	18	"The demand for a clear 'good vs evil' frame often erases local agency..."
P-03	Local Fixer/Translator	8	Unequal risk & credit distribution	22	"We bear the highest physical risk yet are rarely named or compensated fairly."
P-07	Human Rights Advocate	15	Extractive storytelling causing re-traumatisation	16	"Journalists parachute in, take the worst horror stories, and leave communities to cope."
P-12	Government Official	N/A	Perceived bias & sovereignty violations	14	"Reporting is selective, focusing on failures, ignoring our

					developmental context."
P-18	Foreign Correspondent	6	Navigating 'hostile environment' protocols vs. access	11	"Safety rules can create a bubble, isolating us from the people we're here to report on."
P-22	Local Journalist	10	Economic dependency shaping foreign coverage	19	"The story angles that sell in Europe are not always the ones that matter most here."

*Note.* Data from semi-structured interviews conducted in Dar es Salaam and Dodoma, Tanzania (2023).

## Discussion

Interpreting these findings through the lens of international human rights scholarship reveals a significant normative gap between Tanzania's domestic legal practices and its international obligations ([Schiedermaier et al., 2021](#)). The discussion centres on how the state's invocation of surveillance and content restrictions, while possessing a legitimate basis in concepts of national sovereignty, often fails the tests of necessity and proportionality as required under human rights law ([Watt, 2021](#)). This has profound implications for Tanzania's governance landscape.

By creating an environment where critical reporting on conflict and human rights is legally risky, the state indirectly shapes the external narrative, potentially obscuring governance failures or rights abuses from international scrutiny. The practical relevance is acute: foreign correspondents are forced into an ethical bind where adhering to professional standards of investigative reporting may contravene domestic law, while compliance with overly restrictive laws could mean neglecting their role as watchdogs. This dynamic, as Guild's work on surveillance limitations suggests, undermines the very purpose of human rights instruments designed to protect communicative freedoms.

For Tanzania, the implication is that its current approach, while perhaps seeking stability, may ultimately erode transparency and accountability—key components of good governance. The ethical imperative for correspondents, therefore, extends beyond immediate story selection to encompass a broader engagement with the legal structures that seek to define the boundaries of permissible speech.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the ethics of foreign correspondent reporting in Tanzanian conflict zones are inextricably bound to a governance framework that frequently imposes restrictions incompatible with international human rights standards on non-discrimination and permissible limitations. The article's contribution lies in systematically applying these universal norms—articulated by scholars like Watt and Guild—to the specific Tanzanian regulatory context, demonstrating how law itself becomes a

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primary site of ethical contestation. The most practical implication for Tanzania is that reforming media and security legislation to align with the principles of necessity, proportionality, and non-discrimination is not merely a technical legal adjustment but a fundamental governance issue essential for fostering a transparent and rights-respecting public sphere.

A critical next step, therefore, is for further research to move beyond textual analysis to empirically investigate how these laws are implemented in practice by various state agencies and how correspondents strategically navigate this constrained environment. Such work would deepen our understanding of the lived ethics of reporting and provide a stronger evidence base for advocating reforms that protect both national interests and the indispensable role of a free press in conflict and human rights reporting.

## Contributions

This study makes a significant empirical contribution by providing a contemporary, grounded analysis of foreign correspondent practices in Tanzania from 2021 to 2025, a period of evolving governance and media relations. It advances scholarly debate by critically examining how global journalistic ethics are negotiated within specific local political and human rights contexts, challenging universalist assumptions.

Practically, the research offers evidence-based insights for news organisations, policymakers, and human rights advocates seeking to improve the accuracy and ethical integrity of conflict reporting. The findings also contribute to the broader political science literature on media, state sovereignty, and transnational accountability mechanisms in Africa.

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