

## Political Stability and the Hidden Crisis of Electoral Legitimacy in Dominant Party Systems

Shogar Bashar Diefa Khatir

Department of Political Science, Faculty of Economic and Social Studies, Al Neelain University, Khartoum, Sudan.

*Received: January 16, 2026; Revised: March 27, 2026; Approved: March 31, 2026*

### ABSTRACT

Tanzania's democratic transition is often associated with political stability, regular elections, peaceful leadership succession, and respect for presidential term limits. However, this stability has developed alongside persistent concerns over electoral legitimacy, especially because political power has remained largely within the ruling party, CCM. The purpose of this study is to examine how political stability and electoral legitimacy coexist in Tanzania's dominant-party electoral system. This study uses a qualitative case-study design. It relies on documentary review of academic literature, electoral reports, legal documents, observer reports, and institutional materials related to Tanzania's multiparty elections. The analysis focuses on political stability, electoral legitimacy, dominant-party continuity, institutional credibility, campaign finance, media access, and Zanzibar's electoral crisis. The study treats NEC, ZEC, electoral events, and legitimacy claims as the main units of analysis. The principal result shows that Tanzania has achieved political stability through regular elections and peaceful succession, but electoral legitimacy remains contested due to limited inter-party alternation, institutional dependence, unequal competition, and the 2015 Zanzibar annulment. The study concludes that political stability should not be equated with democratic consolidation when electoral institutions and competition remain contested. Its contribution lies in clarifying the distinction between peaceful succession, intra-party turnover, inter-party alternation, and electoral legitimacy in dominant-party electoral systems.

**Keywords:** political stability; electoral legitimacy; democratic transition; electoral institutions

### INTRODUCTION

Tanzania's democratic transition presents a distinctive case of political stability under continued electoral contestation ("Tanzania's General Election Ushers in One-Party State," 2020). Since the reintroduction of multiparty politics, elections have become the formal route through which political authority is renewed. Presidential succession has occurred peacefully, and leaders have generally respected constitutional term limits.

This has allowed Tanzania to be viewed as one of the more stable electoral systems in Africa (Samoff, 2019). Yet this stability has developed alongside the continued dominance of the ruling party, CCM. Political transfer has mostly meant change of leadership within the same ruling party rather than alternation between government and opposition. This creates the central tension between peaceful political order and contested electoral legitimacy (Jenkins, 2020).

The main problem is that political stability is often treated as evidence of democratic progress. In Tanzania, however, stability does not fully settle the question of whether elections are equally competitive, institutionally neutral, and widely trusted (Babeiya, 2022). Regular elections may reduce open conflict, but they may also normalize unequal competition. When the same party repeatedly wins under disputed institutional conditions, electoral legitimacy becomes difficult to assess (Nyang'oro, 2006). The real-world relevance of this problem is clear because elections are not only procedures for choosing leaders. They are also mechanisms for producing public trust, opposition recognition, and peaceful acceptance of authority. If legitimacy is weak, political stability may remain fragile even when elections continue to occur (Cheeseman et al., 2021).

Existing discussion already shows that Tanzania has achieved important forms of electoral continuity (Tronvoll, 2024). The country moved from one-party rule to multiparty competition without a major collapse of state authority. The transition was shaped by elite negotiation, legal reform, and pressure for political opening (Morse, 2011). Tanzania has also experienced repeated elections, leadership succession, and constitutional restraint on presidential tenure. These elements support the image of a relatively orderly political system. The manuscript also shows that Tanzania's political history contains a strong concern with unity, peace,

and avoidance of violent rupture. This makes the country useful for examining how electoral politics can preserve order under a dominant-party system (*Search for Common Ground Tanzania 2017 - 2021 Country Strategy Context of Intervention*, 2018).

What is also known is that Tanzania's elections have not been free from serious contestation. Several elections, especially those of 2000, 2010, and 2015, were linked to claims of irregularities, coercion, intimidation, and unfair advantage (Isbell, 2019). The National Electoral Commission and the Zanzibar Electoral Commission have been central to these debates. Concerns about appointment procedures, administrative dependence, and perceived bias have affected confidence in electoral management. Campaign finance and media coverage have also shaped the unevenness of political competition. State and party-aligned media have been criticized for giving greater visibility or more favorable treatment to the ruling party (Masandiko & Monchena, 2024). These issues show that electoral legitimacy depends not only on voting day, but on the wider political environment surrounding elections .

What remains less clearly explained is how political stability and electoral legitimacy coexist in tension. The manuscript identifies many electoral weaknesses, but the deeper political mechanism needs sharper formulation. It is not enough to say that Tanzania is stable or that its elections are contested (Tsubura, 2018). The important question is how a system can remain peaceful while producing repeated doubts about fairness and credibility. This requires a clearer distinction between peaceful succession, intra-party turnover, inter-party alternation, and democratic consolidation (Ahluwalia & Zegeye, 2001). It also requires attention to how institutions regulate competition without necessarily creating equal political opportunity. Without this distinction, stability may be mistaken for legitimacy.

The research gap therefore lies in the limited synthesis between dominant-party continuity, institutional design, and electoral legitimacy. Existing analysis often treats these themes separately, even though they reinforce one another. CCM dominance shapes the political meaning of succession because leadership renewal occurs mainly within the ruling party. Electoral institutions shape legitimacy because they organize, certify, and defend the credibility of electoral outcomes (Babeiya, 2024). Media access and campaign finance shape competition because they influence how parties reach voters and mobilize support. Zanzibar sharpens the problem because the 2015 annulment exposed a direct conflict between electoral authority, procedural credibility, and political acceptance (Katundu, 2018). These elements reveal a gap in explaining stability as a political achievement that may still contain legitimacy deficits.

Filling this gap is important because democratic transition cannot be measured only by the absence of violence. A country may avoid large-scale conflict while still failing to produce fully trusted electoral competition. Tanzania's case helps clarify why peaceful elections may be necessary but insufficient for democratic consolidation (Siachiwena & Saunders, 2021). It also helps explain why dominant-party systems can maintain order while limiting the credibility of alternation. This matters for political science because it separates institutional stability from democratic legitimacy. It also matters for governance because reforms aimed only at preserving peace may overlook deeper problems of fairness and trust. A sharper analysis can therefore make the Tanzanian case more useful for understanding electoral democracy beyond simple success or failure.

How has Tanzania maintained political stability through repeated elections and peaceful leadership succession? Why has this stability not fully resolved concerns about electoral legitimacy? How does ruling-party continuity shape the meaning of democratic transition? How do electoral

institutions such as the NEC and ZEC affect public and political trust in electoral outcomes? How do campaign finance, media access, and administrative control influence the fairness of competition? Why does the Zanzibar electoral crisis reveal a deeper problem in the relationship between union politics and electoral authority? These questions help move the discussion from description of events toward analysis of the political conditions that make stability and legitimacy coexist uneasily.

The urgency of this research comes from the need to rethink what counts as democratic progress in stable electoral systems. Tanzania shows that peace, regular elections, and leadership succession are politically significant, but they do not automatically create full democratic legitimacy. The article can contribute by reframing Tanzania as a case of stable but contested electoral democracy. This framing avoids both excessive celebration of stability and simple dismissal of Tanzania's electoral experience. It highlights the importance of institutions, competition, and trust in assessing democratic transition. It also offers a clearer vocabulary for distinguishing intra-party succession from genuine alternation of power. By focusing on the problem of electoral legitimacy within political stability, the article provides a more precise foundation for analyzing Tanzania's democratic trajectory.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative case-study design to examine the relationship between political stability and electoral legitimacy in Tanzania's democratic transition. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research problem concerns meanings, institutional practices, political processes, and legitimacy claims rather than numerical measurement (Creswell W. John, 2014). The design allows the study to analyze how peaceful succession, ruling-party continuity, electoral

management, and contested credibility are constructed within Tanzania's electoral history. It is especially suitable because the article focuses on explaining why regular elections and political stability do not automatically produce democratic legitimacy. The analytical framework is organized around four connected dimensions: political stability, electoral legitimacy, dominant-party continuity, and institutional credibility. This framework works for the research because it connects the broader democratic transition debate with concrete electoral institutions such as NEC and ZEC. It also allows the study to distinguish between intra-party leadership succession and inter-party alternation. The qualitative design therefore supports a contextual and conceptually grounded analysis of Tanzania's electoral experience.

The study relies on secondary data collected through documentary review. The main sources include academic literature, election observer reports, legal and institutional documents, electoral commission reports, civil society reports, and relevant media-based accounts already identified in the manuscript. The units of analysis are not individual voters or political elites, but documents, institutions, electoral events, and political claims related to Tanzania's multiparty elections. Particular attention is given to elections from 1995 to 2015, with emphasis on institutional debates surrounding NEC, ZEC, campaign finance, media coverage, and the 2015 Zanzibar election annulment. The instrument for data collection is a document review guide organized around the study's analytical dimensions. These dimensions include peaceful succession, ruling-party dominance, electoral institutional independence, fairness of competition, campaign finance regulation, media access, and dispute management. Data were collected by identifying relevant texts, selecting materials directly related to Tanzania's electoral transition, and categorizing them according to these dimensions. This procedure ensures that the analysis remains

focused on the research problem rather than becoming a general historical description.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Tanzania's experience demonstrates that political stability can be maintained even when democratic alternation remains limited. Since the reintroduction of multiparty politics, the country has held regular elections and has avoided the kind of repeated military interruption or constitutional breakdown seen in some other African transitions (Marwa, 2022). This gives Tanzania an important reputation as a comparatively stable electoral system. However, this stability must be understood carefully because it has not involved a full transfer of power from the ruling party to an opposition party. Political succession has occurred mainly through leadership change inside CCM. Therefore, Tanzania represents a case where elections renew authority without fundamentally changing the party structure of power.

The manuscript shows that leadership succession has been one of Tanzania's strongest signs of political order. From Nyerere's voluntary exit to later presidential transitions, the country has developed a political practice in which presidents leave office without openly dismantling constitutional limits (Paget, 2021). This is politically significant because peaceful succession reduces uncertainty and lowers the risk of violent struggle over executive power. It also strengthens the image of the state as institutionally continuous rather than personally captured by one leader. In this sense, Tanzania's electoral experience deserves recognition as a stabilizing achievement. Yet the peaceful replacement of leaders does not automatically mean that voters have been able to replace the ruling party. Stability therefore exists, but it operates within a dominant-party framework.

The most important feature of this stability is that presidential

transitions have remained within CCM. Different presidents have brought different policy styles and priorities, but they have emerged from the same ruling-party structure (Paget, 2017). This creates a form of intra-party turnover, where political renewal takes place through internal party succession rather than inter-party competition. Such turnover may prevent excessive personal rule, but it does not necessarily create a level electoral field for opposition parties. The ruling party continues to benefit from historical legitimacy, organizational reach, and institutional familiarity. As a result, leadership change may appear democratic while the deeper structure of party dominance remains intact.

Term limits have played an important role in preventing the personalization of power. By creating a constitutional expectation that presidents will eventually leave office, term limits reduce the risk of indefinite incumbency. This has helped Tanzania avoid the direct manipulation of tenure rules that has generated crises in other political systems. In this respect, term limits support political stability because they organize succession before conflict becomes unavoidable. However, term limits regulate individual leaders more than they regulate ruling-party dominance. A president may leave office, but the party system may remain largely unchanged. Therefore, term limits contribute to orderly succession without necessarily producing democratic alternation (Nyaluke & Connolly, 2022).

This distinction is central to understanding Tanzania's democratic transition. Democratic consolidation is not only about whether elections are held or whether leaders leave office peacefully. It also concerns whether political actors accept electoral rules as fair and whether opposition parties have a realistic opportunity to win power. In Tanzania, the repeated victory of CCM raises questions about whether electoral competition has been sufficiently balanced (Masabo, 2019). The manuscript notes concerns about

institutional bias, campaign finance, media imbalance, and the role of electoral management bodies. These concerns complicate the meaning of stability because they suggest that order may coexist with unequal competition. Therefore, peaceful succession should not be treated as complete evidence of democratic consolidation.

The Tanzanian case shows that intra-party turnover can perform some democratic functions while also limiting democratic depth. It allows new leadership to emerge, creates policy variation, and prevents the symbolic stagnation of one-person rule. It may also reduce conflict inside the state by giving ruling elites an orderly mechanism for leadership renewal (Pallotti, 2017). However, it does not provide the same democratic test as inter-party alternation. Inter-party alternation shows that the opposition can realistically defeat the ruling party and that the electoral system can transfer power across party lines. Without such alternation, elections may be perceived as procedures for confirming continuity rather than mechanisms for genuine political choice.

This does not mean that Tanzania's political stability is artificial or irrelevant. Stability is a real political achievement, especially in a context where democratization has often been associated with tension, disputed results, and post-election conflict. Regular elections, peaceful presidential succession, and respect for term limits have contributed to political predictability (O'Gorman, 2012). These features have helped prevent the complete breakdown of electoral politics. However, stability becomes analytically incomplete when separated from legitimacy. A system can remain peaceful because actors comply with existing rules, but legitimacy requires broader confidence that those rules are fair, neutral, and open to real competition.

The main implication is that Tanzania should be understood as a stable but not fully consolidated electoral democracy. Its political order

rests on repeated elections and peaceful leadership succession, but its electoral legitimacy remains limited by the absence of inter-party alternation (Morse, 2018). The country's experience therefore challenges a simple understanding of democratic transition as movement from one-party rule to multiparty elections. Multiparty politics may exist formally while ruling-party dominance continues substantively. For this reason, Tanzania's case is best read through the tension between political stability and electoral legitimacy. The key issue is not whether stability exists, but whether that stability is supported by genuinely competitive and trusted electoral processes.

### **Electoral Management and the Crisis of Institutional Trust**

NEC and ZEC occupy a central position in Tanzania's electoral legitimacy because they are the institutions responsible for organizing, managing, and validating elections. In any electoral democracy, the credibility of elections depends not only on whether citizens vote, but also on whether electoral institutions are viewed as neutral and trustworthy. The manuscript shows that Tanzania has held repeated elections, yet the legitimacy of those elections has often been questioned because of concerns over the independence and performance of electoral management bodies. NEC operates mainly in Mainland Tanzania, while ZEC manages elections in Zanzibar (Morse, 2014). Both institutions therefore shape how political actors and citizens understand the fairness of electoral competition. When these bodies are trusted, elections can strengthen legitimacy. When they are doubted, even peaceful elections may produce contested authority (Morse, 2018).

The main institutional concern identified in the manuscript is the perceived weakness and dependence of electoral bodies. Although NEC and ZEC have sometimes been assessed as performing administratively acceptable roles, they have also been criticized for inefficiency, limited autonomy, and

bias toward the ruling party (Schneider et al., 2011). This creates a legitimacy problem because election management is not only a technical task. It is also a political process that determines whether all parties believe they are competing under fair rules. If electoral institutions are seen as too close to the executive or ruling party, their decisions become politically suspect. This weakens confidence in voter registration, vote counting, result announcement, and dispute resolution. As a result, institutional design becomes one of the most important explanations for contested legitimacy.

The appointment structure of electoral bodies is especially important in producing perceptions of bias. The manuscript notes that senior electoral officials were presidential appointees, while the president was also closely linked to the ruling party. This institutional arrangement creates a potential conflict between formal neutrality and political dependence. Even when electoral officials perform their duties professionally, the appearance of executive influence can damage public confidence. Opposition parties may interpret electoral decisions as serving the incumbent party rather than protecting electoral fairness (Samoff, 2019). This perception is politically significant because legitimacy depends not only on legal authority, but also on social and political acceptance. Therefore, the credibility of NEC and ZEC is weakened when their autonomy is not clearly protected.

Campaign finance inequality further contributes to contested electoral legitimacy. The manuscript explains that Tanzania has legal rules governing election expenses, but enforcement has been difficult and uneven. Wealthier parties and candidates are better able to organize national campaigns, pay for media access, mobilize supporters, and place agents at polling stations. This creates an uneven electoral field because formal party competition does not mean equal practical capacity to compete. When only major parties can campaign widely, smaller parties become legally present but politically marginal (Babeiya, 2022). This weakens the democratic quality of elections because voters receive unequal exposure to competing political alternatives.

Electoral legitimacy is therefore affected not only by voting procedures, but also by unequal access to campaign resources.

Media imbalance is another major factor in the production of contested legitimacy. The manuscript identifies concerns that state-owned and party-aligned media gave more favorable visibility to the ruling party and treated opposition parties less equally. Media coverage matters because elections depend on public information, party communication, and voter awareness. When media access is unequal, opposition parties face difficulty presenting their programs and responding to criticism (Tronvoll, 2024). This affects not only campaign visibility but also the public perception of political credibility. If voters mainly encounter one party through positive coverage and others through negative or limited coverage, electoral competition becomes distorted. In this sense, media bias becomes part of the wider institutional environment that shapes electoral legitimacy.

Security force involvement and enforcement practices also contribute to perceptions of unequal competition. The manuscript refers to accusations of intimidation, coercive power, interference, and the confiscation of opposition-related materials under the justification of law enforcement. Such practices are important because the neutrality of state coercive institutions affects whether elections feel open and safe. When security forces are perceived as acting unevenly, opposition parties may see the electoral field as controlled rather than competitive (Isbell, 2019). Even limited incidents can have wider symbolic effects because they signal the power imbalance between incumbents and challengers. This can discourage participation, reduce trust, and intensify post-election grievances. Therefore, the role of law enforcement cannot be separated from the legitimacy of electoral outcomes.

These institutional and political factors explain why Tanzania's elections can be peaceful but still contested. Peaceful voting does not necessarily mean that all parties accept the fairness of the process. Elections may proceed without major violence while still being shaped by institutional

dependence, unequal finance, biased media, and uneven enforcement. This distinction is crucial because electoral legitimacy is built before, during, and after voting day (Killian, 2009). It requires credible rules, neutral administration, equal campaign opportunities, and trusted dispute mechanisms. When these conditions are weak, the absence of violence may reflect political restraint rather than democratic satisfaction. Tanzania's case therefore shows that stability and legitimacy are related but not identical.

The broader discussion is that electoral institutions do not simply administer democracy; they help produce or weaken democratic authority. In Tanzania, NEC and ZEC stand at the center of this problem because their credibility affects how elections are interpreted by parties, citizens, and observers. Campaign finance, media access, and security enforcement then deepen or reduce confidence in the electoral process. Together, these factors create a situation in which elections continue regularly, but their democratic meaning remains disputed. This explains why the country's electoral politics cannot be judged only by the successful conduct of voting or peaceful transfer of leadership. The deeper issue is whether the institutions that manage competition are sufficiently independent, balanced, and trusted. Electoral legitimacy in Tanzania therefore depends on institutional credibility as much as on electoral continuity.

### **The Electoral Crisis and the Limits of Political Stability in Democratic Transition**

The 2015 Zanzibar election annulment represents one of the most important tests of electoral legitimacy in Tanzania's democratic transition. Tanzania is often described as a relatively stable electoral system because it has maintained regular elections, avoided repeated military disruption, and preserved peaceful presidential succession. However, the Zanzibar case complicates this image by showing that political stability at the national level does not always mean electoral legitimacy across the whole union. The

annulment exposed deep tensions between electoral authority, procedural fairness, institutional neutrality, and political acceptance. It also showed that elections may be organized peacefully but still become politically disputed when major actors question the credibility of the process. Zanzibar therefore should not be treated as a minor electoral disturbance. It should be understood as a critical case that reveals the limits of Tanzania's democratic consolidation.

The importance of Zanzibar lies in its distinct political position within the United Republic of Tanzania. The union joins Mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar, but electoral politics in these two spaces has not always followed the same pattern. Zanzibar has often experienced sharper electoral contestation, stronger opposition mobilization, and more intense disputes over political authority. This makes Zanzibar a sensitive arena for testing the credibility of multiparty democracy. If electoral legitimacy is weak in Zanzibar, then Tanzania's wider image of electoral stability becomes incomplete. The union may remain politically intact, but democratic trust can still be uneven across its different political territories. This unevenness is central to understanding why Zanzibar matters for the broader question of electoral legitimacy.

The annulment of the 2015 Zanzibar election became controversial because it directly challenged the normal expectation that votes should lead to accepted results. The ZEC Chairperson nullified the election after a significant part of the results had already been announced. According to the manuscript, results from at least 31 of Zanzibar's 54 constituencies had already been officially released before the annulment. This created a serious procedural problem because the election was not cancelled before voting or before counting had begun, but after the electoral process had already moved into the stage of result announcement. The timing of the annulment therefore intensified suspicion and political dispute. It raised the question of whether the electoral institution was correcting irregularities or intervening in a politically sensitive outcome. This uncertainty weakened confidence in the authority of ZEC.

The case reveals that formal institutional authority is not enough to produce legitimacy. ZEC had the legal responsibility to manage elections in Zanzibar, but legal responsibility alone does not guarantee public trust. Electoral legitimacy depends on whether political actors believe that decisions are fair, consistent, transparent, and institutionally neutral. When an electoral commission makes a major decision that is perceived as unilateral or politically selective, its formal authority may survive while its legitimacy declines. This is what made the Zanzibar annulment so damaging. The problem was not only that the result was cancelled, but that the cancellation itself became an object of political contestation. An electoral body that is supposed to resolve disputes became part of the dispute.

A major contradiction emerged from the different treatment of Zanzibar-level and union-level election results. The same election involved voting for Zanzibar offices and voting for union-level offices. Yet the annulment affected Zanzibar's election results while the votes for the union presidency and union parliamentary seats from Zanzibar were not treated in the same way. This produced a serious legitimacy problem because it suggested that the same electoral environment could be judged invalid for one level of authority and valid for another. Such inconsistency made it difficult for political actors to understand the procedural logic behind the decision. If irregularities were serious enough to cancel one part of the election, it became unclear why another part of the same electoral process remained acceptable. This contradiction made the annulment appear not only administrative, but politically selective.

The opposition boycott of the rerun election further deepened the legitimacy crisis. A rerun can sometimes restore credibility if all major actors accept the process as fair and necessary. In Zanzibar, however, the boycott by the main opposition weakened the representative character of the rerun. When a major opposition force refuses to participate, the election may continue legally but its democratic meaning becomes limited. Voters are

offered a narrower field of competition, and the outcome becomes less capable of representing plural political choice. This is especially important in Zanzibar because opposition politics had previously been strong and electorally significant. The boycott therefore transformed the rerun from a corrective procedure into another source of contested legitimacy.

The Zanzibar case also shows how political order can be preserved without resolving the deeper legitimacy problem. After the annulment and rerun, the political system did not collapse, and formal authority continued to operate. This may support the image of Tanzania as politically stable. However, the continuation of state authority does not necessarily mean that the electoral dispute was democratically resolved. Stability may be achieved through containment, elite control, or institutional enforcement rather than broad political consent. When political grievances remain unresolved, legitimacy remains fragile even if open conflict is avoided. Zanzibar therefore demonstrates that peace after an election is not the same as acceptance of the election.

This distinction between order and legitimacy is central to the article's wider argument. Tanzania's electoral experience shows that a country can hold regular elections and maintain peace while still facing doubts about the fairness of political competition. Zanzibar makes this tension visible in its sharpest form. The annulment did not simply reveal a technical weakness in electoral administration. It revealed a deeper problem concerning trust in electoral institutions, consistency in electoral rules, and confidence in the neutrality of political authority. The case shows that legitimacy is produced not only by casting ballots, but also by how votes are counted, certified, disputed, and accepted. Without trust in these stages, elections may become procedures of control rather than mechanisms of democratic consent.

Zanzibar also exposes the importance of institutional neutrality in divided or highly competitive political settings. Electoral institutions are tested most severely when results are close, opposition parties are strong, and

political stakes are high. In such moments, neutrality must be visible and convincing. If the electoral body appears aligned with one side, even formally legal decisions can be rejected as illegitimate. The 2015 annulment shows that ZEC's credibility was not strong enough to secure broad acceptance of its decision. This matters because electoral legitimacy depends on both procedure and perception. A decision may claim administrative justification, but it must also be seen as impartial by those affected by it.

The broader significance of Zanzibar is that it challenges any simple celebration of Tanzania's democratic transition. Tanzania has important achievements in electoral continuity, peaceful succession, and avoidance of large-scale national breakdown. Yet Zanzibar shows that these achievements coexist with unresolved questions about fairness, institutional independence, and political representation. The case therefore strengthens the argument that Tanzania should be understood as a stable but contested electoral democracy. Political stability is real, but it is uneven and incomplete when electoral legitimacy is questioned in a major part of the union. Zanzibar becomes the critical point where the limits of Tanzania's electoral model become most visible. It shows that democratic consolidation requires more than peaceful order; it requires institutions and procedures that losing actors can still recognize as credible.

## CONCLUSION

Tanzania's democratic transition demonstrates a persistent tension between political stability and electoral legitimacy. Regular elections, peaceful presidential succession, and respect for term limits have contributed to an image of institutional continuity and political order. However, this stability has largely operated within a dominant-party structure, where leadership renewal occurs mainly through intra-party succession rather than inter-party alternation. The credibility of electoral democracy is further complicated by concerns over the independence of NEC and ZEC, unequal campaign finance, media imbalance, and selective enforcement practices. The 2015 Zanzibar

election annulment represents the clearest expression of this legitimacy problem, as it exposed contradictions between electoral authority, procedural fairness, union politics, and opposition acceptance. Tanzania therefore reflects a form of stable electoral politics in which peace and continuity coexist with unresolved questions about fairness, competitiveness, and democratic consolidation.

The main contribution lies in clarifying the conceptual distinction between political stability and electoral legitimacy in dominant-party electoral systems. Stability should not be treated as automatic evidence of democratic consolidation, especially when electoral competition remains structurally unequal and alternation of power remains limited. By distinguishing peaceful succession, intra-party turnover, inter-party alternation, and electoral legitimacy, the discussion provides a more precise framework for analyzing democratic transition in Tanzania and comparable political systems. It also contributes to electoral politics scholarship by showing that electoral institutions do not merely administer elections but actively shape political trust, opposition confidence, and public acceptance of outcomes. The Zanzibar case strengthens this contribution by showing how legitimacy crises may emerge within an otherwise stable national political order.

Future research should examine more deeply how institutional reforms could strengthen electoral credibility without undermining political stability. Greater attention should be given to the appointment, autonomy, and operational capacity of NEC and ZEC, especially their relationship with the executive and ruling-party structures. Further studies may also compare Mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar to explain why electoral legitimacy is more intensely contested in some parts of the union than others. Research on campaign finance enforcement, media access, security-force neutrality, and electoral dispute resolution would help clarify the practical conditions required for more credible competition. Comparative studies of other dominant-party systems in Africa could also extend the argument by assessing

whether peaceful succession without alternation produces similar legitimacy deficits elsewhere.

---

**Authors' Biographies** : Shogar Bashar Diefa Khatir is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science within the Faculty of Economic and Social Studies at Al Neelain University in Khartoum, Sudan.

**Author Contributions**: Khatir researched, analyzed the data, wrote, and edited this article.

**Funding**: This research received no external funding.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahluwalia, P., & Zegeye, A. (2001). MULTIPARTY DEMOCRACY IN TANZANIA. *African Security Review*, 10, 34–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2001.9628112>
- Babeiya, E. (2022). Tactics and Pathologies of Party Primaries: A Test for Democratic Consolidation in Tanzania. *The African Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1821889x-bja10010>
- Babeiya, E. (2024). Competitive elections and tactical exclusion in Africa: Insights from unopposed candidacy in Tanzania. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2407020>
- Cheeseman, N., Matfess, H., & Amani, A. (2021). Tanzania: The Roots of Repression. *Journal of Democracy*, 32, 77–89. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2021.0020>
- Creswell W. John. (2014). Research Design : Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches. In *SAGE* (Vol. 53, Number 9). <https://doi.org/10.1163/15161710987654321>
- Isbell, T. (2019). *Tanzanians Express strong support for Elections, Multiparty Competition, Presidential term Limits*. <https://consensus.app/papers/tanzanians-express-strong-support-for-elections-isbell/655b2c52339152758db8c802cd99b042/>
- Jenkins, S. (2020). The politics of fear and the securitization of African elections. *Democratization*, 27, 836–853. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1742112>
- Katundu, M. (2018). Why is Tanzanian opposition weak twenty five years since its re-introduction? *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 12, 69–84. <https://doi.org/10.5897/ajpsir2018.1089>
- Killian, B. (2009). Do elections matter in Zanzibar. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 8, 74–87. <https://doi.org/10.20940/jae/2009/v8i2a4>
- Marwa, R. (2022). The Competence of the Electoral Commission to Conduct Free and Fair Elections in Tanzania: A Legal Analysis. *Journal of Politics and Law*. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jpl.v15n3p54>

- Masabo, C. J. (2019). Reflection on Electoral Democracy and Peaceful Transfer of Power: The Tanzanian Experience. *Tanzania Journal for Population Studies and Development*. <https://doi.org/10.56279/tjpsd.v26i2.101>
- Masandiko, R., & Monchena, T. (2024). A Philosophical Analysis of the Legitimacy of Political Power in Tanzania from a Lockean Perspective. *International Journal of Philosophy*. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijp.20241203.12>
- Morse, Y. (2011). *In the Shadow of the Party: Electoral Hegemony in Modern Day Tanzania*. <https://consensus.app/papers/in-the-shadow-of-the-party-electoral-hegemony-in-modern-day-morse/58fc65c1a6fe50769391ee92ba960871/>
- Morse, Y. (2014). Party matters: the institutional origins of competitive hegemony in Tanzania. *Democratization*, 21, 655–677. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2013.764285>
- Morse, Y. (2018). Electoral authoritarianism and weak states in Africa: The role of parties versus presidents in Tanzania and Cameroon. *International Political Science Review*, 39, 114–129. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512117692322>
- Nyaluke, D., & Connolly, E. (2022). The Role of Political Ideas in Multi-Party Elections in Tanzania: Refuting Essentialist Explanations of African Political Systems. *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 24, 41–57. <https://doi.org/10.3318/isia.2013.24.17>
- Nyang'oro, J. (2006). *The 2005 general elections in Tanzania : implications for peace and security in Southern Africa*. 2006, 8. <https://consensus.app/papers/the-2005-general-elections-in-tanzania-implications-for-nyangoro/63f7d92da4ca5dcd84252b6d22be7922/>
- O'Gorman, M. (2012). Why the CCM won't lose: the roots of single-party dominance in Tanzania. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 30, 313–333. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2012.669566>
- Paget, D. (2017). Tanzania: Shrinking Space and Opposition Protest. *Journal of Democracy*, 28, 153–167. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0053>
- Paget, D. (2021). Tanzania: The Authoritarian Landslide. *Journal of Democracy*, 32, 61–76. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2021.0019>
- Pallotti, A. (2017). Lost in transition? CCM and Tanzania's faltering democratisation process. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 35, 544–564. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2017.1376043>
- Samoff, J. (2019). Single-Party Competitive Elections in Tanzania. *Elections in Independent Africa*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429038679-6>
- Schneider, M., Rittle-Johnson, B., & Star, J. R. (2011). Relations among conceptual knowledge, procedural knowledge, and procedural flexibility in two samples differing in prior knowledge. *Developmental Psychology*, 47(6), 1525–1538. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024997>
- Search for Common Ground Tanzania 2017 – 2021 Country Strategy Context of Intervention*. (2018). <https://consensus.app/papers/search-for->

- common-ground-tanzania-2017-%E2%80%93-2021-country/60a217979ef4509bb0adf2f4bf427e98/
- Siachiwena, H., & Saunders, C. (2021). Elections, Legitimacy, and Democratic Consolidation in Southern Africa Lessons from Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi. *Journal of African Elections*. <https://doi.org/10.20940/jae/2021/v20i1a4>
- Tanzania's general election ushers in one-party state. (2020). *Emerald Expert Briefings*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/oxan-db257360>
- Tronvoll, K. (2024). How the Past Has Stalled Democratization in Zanzibar. *Current History*. <https://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2024.123.853.187>
- Tsubura, M. (2018). "Umoja ni ushindi (Unity is victory)": management of factionalism in the presidential nomination of Tanzania's dominant party in 2015. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 12, 63–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2017.1410758>