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**Beyond Consensus: Institutional Erosion, Electoral Legitimacy, and Conflict Risk in
Tanzania's 2025 General Elections**



By

Mohamed Hussein Hamud

University for Peace

Somalia

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Executive Summary

The 2025 General Elections in Tanzania pose a decisive point in the process of the democratic evolution in the country, with the erosion of the institutions over time, putting the risk of the loss of electoral legitimacy and the escalation of the conflict. Although Tanzania has a long tradition of stability, the country has been experiencing a crisis of growing proportions in the systematic undermining of the two pillars of state legitimacy: Juridical and Instrumental. The 2024 electoral

reforms did not guarantee the real independence of Electoral Management Bodies, thus continuing to promote executive power and procedural injustice, which undermined juridical legitimacy. On the same breath, social exclusion and ineffective delivery of services to youths is indicative of deeper structural failure, in which unemployment increases the political dissatisfaction. Although the attempts by President Hassan in the promotion of negotiated legitimacy by opening up the politics in a limited way shows the institutional adaptability, these actions are not sustainable and do not combat the structural flaws. Devoid of constitutional entrenchment of electoral independence, a formal system of Union-level conflict resolution, as well as specific investments in inclusive governance, Tanzania is likely to run further along the path of institutional decay and the further possibility of large-scale conflict, which only transformative reforms based on accountability, inclusivity, and human security can help.

Situational Analysis: Institutional Fragility and Causal Drivers of Conflict

Conceptual Framework: The Legitimacy Crisis in Context

Tanzania electoral risk environment analysis is based on an institutional framework that goes beyond the superficial political interactions, and is more concerned with the premises of state legitimacy and institutional capacity, which is consistent with the methods of African governance literature (Ewusi et al., 2014). According to the contributions offered in *Beyond State-Building*, the quality of governance is measured through the prism of two pillars of critical legitimacy, which are Juridical, and Instrumental (Ewusi et al., 2014). Both the two pillars must reinforce each other in order to achieve political stability.

Having a long-standing reputation of stability, Tanzania functions under the structural tension where political power, symbolized by the supremacy of CCM and the heritage of ujamaa, came before the rise of a binding national capitalist economy and strong sense of national identity (Kostelyanets, 2022). According to Ewusi et al. (2014), such a reverse sequence is characteristic

of the African state formation that requires management style to be founded on the elite control and patronage instead of formalised accountability. A different model, developmental governance, demands both forms of democratic contestation and institutional restraints on executive discretion (Alence, 2004). The system characterised by a form of politics called consensus politics in Tanzania systematically reduces the actual contestation and proactively maintains the dominance of the executive, undermining the stability of the institutional structure required to establish sustainable democracy.

The Erosion of Juridical Legitimacy: The Flawed 2024 Electoral Reforms

During the 2020 General Election, the procedural integrity of Tanzanian democracy was at a critical low with rampant fraud, intimidation, arrests, and use of force, which in effect undermined the perception of procedural fairness among the people (U.S. Department of State, 2021; Paget, 2025). The government in its turn reacted by proposing the 2024 electoral bills such as The National Election Commission Act 2023, Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government Elections Bill (2023), The Political Parties Affairs Laws (Amendment) Bill (GEPC, 2024). These reforms were put forward as a solution, but by expert analysis, this did not significantly help in the bone of contention, which is the independence of Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), transparency, and access to justice in electoral disputes (GEPC, 2024).

Such a legal manipulation is a severe Juridical failure, where formal procedures are turned into a mechanism of justification of non-competitive results that have been decided in advance (Ewusi et al., 2014). By refusing to establish truly independent and accountable election organizations, Tanzania cannot qualify to meet the primary requirement of stable and legitimate governance and preconditions the emergence of new procedures of complaints that soon develop into the conflict. The action plan, consequently, has been to institutionalize electoral regulations and intentionally weaken them, where they lack fairness, and as such, they are institutionalized to breed a sense of juridical illegitimacy.

Instrumental Failure: Youth Exclusion and the Human Security Imperative

Similar to most developing countries in Africa, Tanzania is affected by a high economic growth paradox that did not result in decent job creation or alleviate social inequality (Ewusi et al., 2014). Poverty and marginalization of the economy leads to high rural-urban migration and unemployment among youths which leads to widespread unemployment. Instrumental failure within the state lies in the fact that the state is deficient in service delivery and low quality of governance (Ewusi et al., 2014). Many cases of political crises demands which are associated with low economic status are mainly fuelled by the demands concerning wages, improved delivery of the public services and employment opportunities (Ragolane and Malatji, 2024). The inability of the state to introduce effective and inclusive social policy which satisfies the human security needs directly increases the political volatility coefficient. The demonstrations and the resultant violence witnessed after the 2025 electoral proces proves that certain instances of electoral fraud are but the tipping affect of wider and cumulative Instrumental dissatisfaction. This large reservoir of economically aggrieved and stigmatized city youth serves as the final trigger of the heightening of the political situation and turns procedural gripes (Juridical failure) into mass anti-regime violence.

Solutions Implemented: Assessing Institutional Resilience and Capacity

President Hassan's Strategy of 'Negotiated Legitimacy'

After the coercive stability established by her predecessor, President Hassan took decisive actions in reopening the political space such as re-establishing dialogue between the elites, lifting the ban on political rallies, and bringing back exiled opposition members (El Ouassif, 2025). This is a strategy to achieve the so-called negotiated legitimacy, then attracting the symbolic pillar to the use of consensus and accommodation to contain the risks of the elites and to stabilize the situation (El Ouassif, 2025).

The strategy shows a great deal of institutional adaptability, an important institutional attribute characterised as the ability to foresee, evolve and interfere with evolving demands amidst

crisis. The shift towards overt repression demonstrates the reaction to the pressure of the international community and the national political reality after 2025. However, this strategy ends up not being stable at an institutional level, which is what makes the institutional innovations become a matter of routine, as opposed to a matter of temporary events.

Institutional Capacity for Stabilization and Coherence

A high institutional capacity in terms of performance, flexibility, and stability of core systems, such as Public Financial Management (PFM) and the Civil Service is needed to be able to manage crises and develop sustainably. Efficiency and effectiveness in delivering services to the people are some of the determinants of institutional performance (Zubchik et al., 2024). The institutional challenge facing Tanzania is the lack of practical implementation between the high level policy commitments and the long term capacity development. Although it is crucial that policy-making needs to perform stakeholder consultation and coordination at multiple levels of government, the state usually uses short term, ad-hoc solutions, e.g. the creation of multi-sectoral task forces, instead of long-term, systematic investment in policy analysis departments where highly professional employees work. This inability to entrench good practices into the institutional fabric is a manifestation of low institutional stability, which is threatening in the long-term of resiliency.

Policy Recommendations: Strategies for Institutional Resilience

This policy recommendations aim at change in governance paradigm of Tanzania that focuses on individualized control and fragile stability to formalized, performance based accountability by enhancing Juridical and Instrumental pillars of legitimacy.

Pillar I: Securing Juridical Integrity – Towards *De Jure* EMB Independence

Constitutional reforms that ensure the appointment of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) selection is shown to be non partisan and subject to the oversight of the legislature and structurally independent of the executive. Such a step is required to bring the state

into line with the generally accepted Independent Model of EMB management observed in the rest of Africa and also to regain trust in the electoral process.

Pillar III: Enhancing Instrumental Legitimacy – Pro-Poor and Inclusive Governance

The youth marginalization is a common issue that should be tackled to reduce the intensity of the political protests. Introduce localised, immediate, and quantifiable works and vocational training programmes - that are specifically aimed at marginalized urban youths and demotivated persons. These programmes should be run in a transparent way with an emphasis on high-impact public goods (e.g. urban sanitation, road infrastructure) to deliver the quick wins in the creation of jobs. It is a short term, focused investment in Instrumental legitimacy to decimate the easily accessible pool of dissatisfied actors that drive mass political demonstrations.

Conclusion and Policy Outlook

The instability of the Tanzanian 2025 General Elections is attributed to the transition of the personalized system of governance and rhetorical symbolism to institutionalized, resilient systems. The failure of the 2024 reforms to build juridical legitimacy indicates that it was aimed at dealing with electoral risks, as opposed to structural conflict (El Ouassif, 2025; Alence, 2004). Sustainable peace implies the destruction of neo-patrimonial systems in which the interests of elites prevail over institutional regulation (Ewusi et al., 2014) and the creation of sustainable institutional capacity that does not depend on the personal leaders. This would involve sorting out the integrity of electoral procedures and investing in Instrumental Legitimacy to diminish socioeconomic sources of violence. Such institutional transformation reform is based on the political goodwill of the leadership in power and their decisions will either empower Tanzania to enhance its ability to maintain human security or it may result in the institution plunging into the crisis of systems.

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