



Tanzania's Election Run-Up Suggests Backsliding Away From Democracy

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The lack of attention being paid to Tanzania's upcoming elections reflects a general tepid enthusiasm for what portends to be the country's closest election in its history. But in the details of the run-up to the election, one can see signs of the country's vulnerabilities: smoldering anti-democratic tendencies, and a political system shaken by rumors. The seeming respect for term limits in Tanzania belies a corrupt system of hand-chosen successors and insider-party politics. Does this mean that the country's stability is threatened, as its citizens prepare to cast their votes in October?

If an anti-democratic pattern is emerging in Tanzania, it would also reflect the regional democratic backsliding in East Africa; Rwanda's Paul Kagame contemplates a third term; Uganda considers constitutional reforms to strengthen the executive under Museveni; and Burundi is reeling from the effects of Nkurunziza's extended tenure, the international community can ill afford to neglect the political developments in the region

The incumbent party, the Chamba Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) has been in power since Tanzania gained its independence; lead by the charismatic Julius Nyerere (<http://archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/African%20Journals/pdfs/political%20science/volume8n1/ajpso08001004.pdf>), the party embarked on an ambitious, though ultimately unsuccessful, program of Pan-African Socialism, called *Ujama*. The failure of these programs led the country to adopt a series of neoliberal reforms at the behest of the international financial institutions; while the adjustment has been difficult for Tanzanians, the country has registered a growth rate near 7% over the past decade

(<http://databank.worldbank.org/data/home.aspx>). Accompanying the economic liberalization was a political opening; in 1992, the country instituted multi-party politics. CCM has been able to maintain its political dominance in large part due to the fractured opposition and little policy differentiation between the CCM and its opponents.

In fact, the opposition coalition was only able to mount a serious challenge this year because of the internal politics surrounding the CCM's nomination process. Lowassa, a former prime minister, who has contemplated presidential bids in the past, was passed over. There is speculation that incumbent President Kikwete favored the Foreign Minister Membe to succeed him and manipulated the nomination process (<http://southernafrican.news/2015/09/25/tanzania-gears-up-for-its-closest-ever-elections/>) to prevent Lowassa's name from being considered by the committee responsible for selecting a candidate. These reports suggest that, in response, Lowassa mobilized his supporters to prevent Membe from being selected. Regardless of the validity of these rumors, the committee ultimately chose the Minister of Works and Roads Dr. John Pombe Magufuli (<http://www.parliament.go.tz/index.php/members/mpcvs/1014/4>). Ambassador Johnnie Carson notes that, though Magufuli “has a reputation for being serious, honest, and hardworking (<http://southernafrican.news/2015/09/25/tanzania-gears-up-for-its-closest-ever-elections/>),” this “elevation to be the CCM's candidate was a political accident.”

While much of the CCM is now mobilizing behind Magufuli, Lowassa has decamped to the opposition. The four main opposition parties in the country (<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/08/04/uk-tanzania-election-idUKKCN0Q920P20150804>), Chadema, the NCCR-Mageuzi Party, the united Democratic Party, and the Tanzania Labour Party, have formed a coalition and have agreed to support him. Additionally, members of the CCM have followed Lowassa (<http://www.voanews.com/content/tanzania-ruling-party-suffers-yet-another-major-defection-as-campaigning-begins/2929788.html>); a number of northern politicians in Tanzania have decamped to the opposition in recent months. The unity of the previously fractured opposition, however, has not been accompanied by policy innovations that differentiate Chadema from the CCM. The monolithic nature of the Tanzanian political landscape reflects regional trends in which ‘opposition politics’ are more frequently based on political slights than robust differences in proposed policies.

This is all the more troubling when one considers recent legislative initiatives in Tanzania which suggest that the country is moving in an undemocratic direction. The country's proposed new constitution has been the subject of much debate; during drafting in April, three opposition parties walked out of the drafting session, stating that the CCM was not taking their proposals into account. (<http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFKCN0IB15F20141022?sp=true>) The referendum on the constitution was delayed, which casts an air of uncertainty over the general elections this October. Two other legislative initiatives spearheaded by the CCM this spring have given democracy activists pause. The first, the Statistics Act (<http://www.twaweza.org/go/stats-act-analysis>) penalizes the use of statistics not produced by the government and creates obstacles to whistleblowing; the punishments for conviction under the bill are “severe, indeed unlimited” according to the civil society group Twaweza. The second, the Cybercrime Act, introduced fines and prison sentences for the sending of unsolicited messages via computer—as Karen Attiah at the Washington Post (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2015/05/15/the-u-s-needs-to-stop-ignoring-tanzanias-media-crackdowns/>) notes “In other words, in Tanzania one could be sent to prison for sending spam to a friend.”

These legislative initiatives are in the same spirit as proposed legislation in Uganda (<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jun/24/uganda-ngo-bill-aims-muzzle-civil->

society-say-activists), in which NGOs would have to be granted permits by the government—who would retain the authority to regulate the NGOs and revoke their licenses. Nicholas Opio, an activist and lawyer, asserts that the bill “unjustifiably restricts the space for civic engagement, civic association [and] civic participation in governance and in service delivery.” Uganda’s law follows in the mold of a 2008 law adopted by Rwanda, which has placed a significant administrative burden on NGOs attempting to operate in the country; according to the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, “CSOs are often required to produce extensive documentation (<http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/rwanda.html>) to obtain legal status, though the law sets out a limited number of requirements.”

The result of such an opaque political process and the restrictions on communication in Tanzania has been an under-informed electorate. A poll conducted by Twaweza found that the public was “misinformed about the status of the opposition coalition, known as UKAWA,” with 49% of the respondents believing that UKAWA, the coalition, rather than Chadema, the party, would appear on the ballot. Even more disturbingly, the poll found that “only 57% knew the correct date of the election.” (<http://www.voanews.com/content/tanzania-poll-shows-ruling-party-candidate-leads-presidential-contest/2980152.html>) The faults within the country’s political infrastructure revealed by the 2015 electoral campaign threaten to undermine Tanzania’s reputation as “one of Africa’s leading democracies and most peaceful countries.” (<http://southernafrican.news/2015/09/25/tanzania-gears-up-for-its-closest-ever-elections/>)”

While the CCM can boast that they have democratically elected a series of leaders that respect term limits, the model of governance is not radically different than that of their overtly anti-democratic neighbors. The dominance of a single ruler has been avoided, which is certainly commendable, however the Tanzanian political landscape is far from a model of plural, democratic competition. And while there are a number of democracies around the world that have survived undemocratic politicking, the regional trend is to take steps back, and the question remains if this will also be the fate of Tanzania.

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