

Strengthening Peace and Democracy: Lessons from the Tanzania's 2025 Election

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Abstract

The 2025 general election in Tanzania marked a historic milestone with the election of President Samia Suluhu Hassan, the nation's first woman president, who won with 97.66 percent of the vote. This pivotal event, however, was accompanied by unprecedented violence in regions such as Mwanza, Dar es Salaam, Arusha, Mbeya, and Songwe, challenging the country's longstanding tradition of peaceful political transitions. The unrest raised urgent questions about the resilience and character of Tanzania's democracy, which has always prioritized unity, peace, and stability, drawing from the foundational vision of Julius Nyerere. The turmoil revealed the vulnerability of peace in the digital age, as misinformation and social media-fueled outrage contributed to the escalation of conflict. Key lessons from the election include the necessity of safeguarding peace both online and offline, fostering civic awareness, and maintaining dialogue and justice as primary tools for conflict resolution. President Hassan's post-election call for humility, unity, and responsible citizenship underscores the need to strengthen institutions, communication, and public trust. As Tanzania confronts the realities exposed by the 2025 election, the nation is reminded that democracy is an ongoing process—one that requires collective responsibility, adaptability, and a renewed commitment to its founding values.

Keywords

Tanzania, democracy, election, peace, unity

1 Introduction

For the first time in Tanzania's political history, a woman has been elected through a general election in 2025, President Samia Suluhu Hassan of the United Republic of Tanzania. According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), she secured a victory with 97.66 percent of the vote against 16 other candidates from various political parties. This election will go down in Tanzanian history as a turning point and a test of our democracy, our unity, and our collective commitment to peace. For decades, Tanzania has stood out in the region as a beacon of stability, even in moments of intense political competition. Yet, the violence that unfolded this year in Mwanza, Dar es Salaam, Arusha, Mbeya, and Songwe has forced us to pause and ask: What kind of democracy are we building, and what lessons must we learn? President Hassan's post-election call for humility, unity, and responsible citizenship underscores the need to strengthen institutions, communication, and public trust. As Tanzania confronts the realities exposed by the 2025 election, the nation is reminded that democracy is an ongoing process—one that requires collective responsibility, adaptability, and a renewed commitment to its founding values.

2 Foundations of Tanzania's democracy

Tanzania's democratic tradition has never been a mere replication of Western liberal models; rather, it is an indigenous system deeply rooted in the nation's unique historical trajectory, cultural values, and collective experience of nation-building. As Samuel P. Huntington, a prominent American political scientist, observes in his seminal work, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, the transplantation of democratic systems from one context to another is inherently fraught with challenges. Huntington contends that the stability and efficacy of democratic governance are contingent upon the degree to which political institutions are adapted to a society's distinct historical circumstances, cultural norms, and developmental stage. In this light, Tanzania's democracy privileges not only the principle of popular participation but, perhaps more fundamentally, the ideals of unity, peace, and stability. These foundational tenets are legacies of the visionary leadership of Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, whose guidance during the formative years of the nation laid the groundwork for a cohesive and harmonious polity. In his influential "Freedom and Development" speeches (1968-1973), Nyerere eloquently asserted that "there must be freedom because every individual is not served by the society unless it's his. And there must be unity because only when the society is united can its members live and work in peace, security and wellbeing." This Nyererean philosophy not only distinguishes Tanzania's democratic system from those patterned after Western prototypes but also imbues it with a sense of intentionality and authenticity. Tanzania's democracy is not without imperfections, yet its strength lies in its deliberate synthesis of inclusive political participation and robust social cohesion. It is this context-specific approach that has enabled Tanzania to maintain peace and stability, even as neighboring states have often faced turbulence and discord. Ultimately, it is the country's capacity to harmonize democratic engagement with the imperatives of national unity that constitutes the enduring foundation of Tanzania's political resilience.

Tanzania's enduring peace has not been a product of mere happenstance, but rather the outcome of a deliberate and methodical process rooted in policies of equality and inclusive development. From the foundational era of Ujamaa villages—where communal values and collective advancement were emphasized—to the ambitious construction of modern infrastructure, the nation's political identity has been shaped by an unwavering commitment to nation-building. The establishment of roads, schools, hospitals, and industries transcended their utilitarian economic purposes; they emerged as potent symbols of national belonging and unity. This ethos of inclusivity, encapsulated in the principle "we are one nation," has historically provided a crucial safety valve, mitigated the risk of political unrest and ensured that even contentious disagreements were resolved peacefully—most notably, through the tradition of elections that conclude with handshakes rather than violence.

3 The 2025 General Elections and its lessons

The general election of 2025 laid bare significant fissures within this long-standing tradition. In several regions—most prominently Mwanza, Dar es Salaam, Arusha, Mbeya, and Songwe—post-election tensions escalated into violent confrontations. The imposition of curfews, widespread vandalism of businesses, and the tragic loss of life shocked a nation unaccustomed to such upheaval. Though the official results affirmed a continuity of leadership, the ensuing turmoil underscored a sobering reality: peace, so painstakingly constructed, cannot be assumed as permanent or invulnerable.

A significant driver of these disturbances was not solely the articulation of political grievances, but also the pervasive influence of misinformation, unfounded rumors, and

unverified claims disseminated rapidly through social media platforms. Digital spaces, once envisioned as tools for unity and civic engagement, instead amplified divisions and fueled collective anxiety and outrage. What began as online agitation quickly translated into street-level unrest, powerfully demonstrating that the digital domain can either fortify national cohesion or undermine it, contingent upon the responsibility with which it is used.

From these events, several critical lessons emerge. Foremost, the fragility of peace must be acknowledged and vigilantly protected—both in physical spaces and online. The distinctiveness of Tanzania’s democracy lies in its preference for dialogue and consensus-building over digital outrage and polarization. Second, the project of nation-building must extend beyond the material construction of infrastructure to encompass the cultivation of civic awareness and responsible communication. In contemporary democracies, it is imperative that citizens verify information before sharing it, deliberate before acting, and remain cognizant that a single reckless message can unravel years of tranquility. Third, justice and dialogue remain Tanzania’s most reliable instruments for the preservation of social harmony. The outbreak of violence yields no true victors; it merely inflicts economic damage, tarnishes the nation’s global reputation, and weakens the social fabric. Historically, Tanzania’s political culture has been anchored in conversation rather than confrontation—a tradition that must be actively reclaimed and reaffirmed.

This commitment to dialogue and unity was poignantly reinforced by President Samia Suluhu Hassan during her swearing-in ceremony in November 2025. She reminded the nation, “Dear citizens, one attribute of a human being is imperfection; only God is without flaw. That is why in our human journey we are bound together by dialogue, communication and understanding. As we move forward, we shall not tire nor turn back from upholding everything that concerns building unity and the stance of our nation.” Her message, grounded in humility and hope, acknowledged both the pain of loss and the imperative of national healing. She called upon the country to steadfastly pursue dialogue and unity, insisting that these values must guide collective action in the aftermath of unrest.

4 Conclusion

Progress, therefore, necessitates a willingness to learn from past challenges rather than exploit them for partisan advantage. It demands the strengthening of institutions dedicated to peace, the improvement of communication infrastructures, and the cultivation of public trust. Both government officials and ordinary citizens bear the responsibility to eschew inflammatory rhetoric and to embrace truth and restraint, particularly within digital environments. The path forward is inherently collective. Safeguarding peace requires the same intentionality and perseverance that characterized its original construction. Responsible dialogue, civic maturity, and national unity must be upheld as active, lived values rather than empty slogans. The 2025 election should serve as a solemn reminder to every Tanzanian that democracy is a dynamic, evolving process—one that demands vigilance, accountability, and a willingness to adapt. We owe it to those who lost their lives to ensure that such violence is never repeated. To future generations, we bear the responsibility of preserving Tanzania’s hard-earned stability. To ourselves, we must continually demonstrate that our uniquely Tanzanian democracy is not only resilient and adaptable but also capable of learning and growing in the face of adversity.

5 Author Biography

Mariam Gichan Athman is a freelance journalist and communications practitioner based in Mwanza, dedicated to impactful storytelling and the advancement of equality for all. With a

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strong academic foundation in archaeology and communication, Mariam's work explores complex topics such as colonial legacies, archaeology, and human rights, underscoring her commitment to justice and social change. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Archaeology and a Postgraduate Diploma in Mass Communication, both from the University of Dar es Salaam.

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