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EDITORS TO ADD TITLE

New Driver, Same Taxi: The Authoritarian Foundations of CCM Rule in Tanzania

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Nobody was surprised that President John Magufuli and his ruling party won Tanzania's 2020 general elections. Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) – then the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) – has been in power since independence in 1961, and has never come close to losing power nationally. What did surprise many foreign commentators and academics was the size of the victory, the strategies used to bring it about, and the continued closing of political space even after the votes were tallied. Despite CCM officially winning 84 percent of the presidential vote and 97 percent of legislative seats, a number of senior opposition party members were arrested after the vote. Following a decade of putative democratization, the events of 2020 laid bare the crude authoritarian logic of the ruling party, and highlighted how ready, willing, and able it is to resort to coercion.

Some blamed this authoritarian turn on President Magufuli himself.¹ Yet his tenure has not taken CCM off a democratizing path that it was never on, and it is unlikely that a different figure at the head of this party and government would have given Tanzania a free and fair election. Focusing on Magufuli is therefore problematic because it obscures the authoritarian foundations of CCM rule. While academic analysis has tended to explain the ruling party's

durability on the basis of its relative coherence, clientelism, the resonance of its nation-building message, and the unifying legacy of first president Julius Nyerere, CCM rule has always had coercive characteristics . It is this, and not only government's policies and rhetoric, that explain how CCM has bucked the trend of dominant parties losing power following prolonged economic decline.

By placing CCM's guaranteed-landslide methods in historical context, we can see the continued relevance of three interconnected authoritarian control mechanisms. First, the government manipulates the rule of law to harass and detain opponents. Nyerere did this—whatever his reputation as an enlightened leader, he was fond of jailing critics and rivals—and Magufuli follows in his footsteps.

Second, CCM uses tight control of media and information to conflate loyalty to the party with being a good citizen. This too is nothing new. Tanzania has never had a fully free and open media and so the intensification of media suppression and nationalism under Magufuli represents a continuation of the ruling party's playbook rather than a dramatic change.

Over the last sixty years, these two strategies have been consistently complemented by a third: the diversion of state resources to sustain the ruling party, build patron-client networks, and deny resources to potential rivals. While many accounts trace this to the 1980s and 1990s, the use of state funds for partisan purposes began much earlier, with the fusion of the ruling party and the state apparatus under Nyerere.

What is distinctive about Magufuli's rule is thus not the ruling party's authoritarian capacity, but rather its growing recognition that opposition parties might defeat it at the polls, and the president's ability to dominate intraparty affairs as no one has done for a generation. It is Magufuli's reassertion of central authority—not his rhetorical glorification of the past—that

represents his primary return to the Nyerere era. By the time he retired in 1985, after almost a quarter-century in the highest office, Nyerere stood atop a ruling party whose factions had been tamed or eliminated. Then economic and political liberalization gave rise to wealthy financiers backing different sections of CCM. This created rival centres of power with the potential to constrain presidential authority, and so limited the centralization of power.²

To overcome that constraint, Magufuli spent his first term carrying out a presidential clawback of patronage and revenue, cutting off potential rivals. To keep disgruntled CCM members from defecting, their likely landing places—opposition parties—came in for heightened repression. Bolstered by these measures, Magufuli pushed the country back toward the one-party state. Now there are worries that he will overturn presidential term limits and make himself president for life.

There are significant barriers to Magufuli remaining at the helm of the CCM beyond his term limit, however. Despite the centralization of power, the ruling party still runs on a bargain that incumbents will step aside for younger candidates, and that Christians and Muslims will alternate in the presidency every ten years. To overturn these arrangements would require a tremendous struggle even now, when Magufuli is riding high, and the president has insisted that he does not play to stay. Yet, given the long-standing characteristics of the CCM, Tanzania is unlikely to reset to a democratizing path even after Magufuli's departure.

How to Control an Election

Since taking office in 2015, Magufuli has deployed physical violence, censorship, and harassment to close off political space for opposition and civil society groups. As the Africa Center for Strategic Studies notes, “violence has become deeply embedded in CCM's current

calculus of control.”³ A particularly chilling instance of political violence was the September 2017 attempt on the life of Tundu Lissu, the leader of Chadema, the main opposition party. Shot multiple times by assailants who have never been caught, he spent years undergoing surgeries and rehabilitation in Belgium. Intimidation and persecution of the opposition continued after the election, as the regime feared protests against the implausible results.

To choke information flow, the government shut down multiple news outlets between the start of 2020 and the election ten months later. Legal changes gave terms like “news-related content” and “online forum” definitions that were “so vague that their application is potentially boundless in scope.”⁴ Anyone conveying information online was required to pay a large fee, while a new law gave the state power to oversee and even suspend civil society groups. The message was received: When Lissu returned, the print and broadcast media almost completely ignored his arrival.

Irregularities and antidemocratic practices continued in the run-up to the 2020 elections. In January 2019, as local elections loomed, the National Assembly passed the Political Parties Act, which gave the government “sweeping powers to de-register parties and provide for up to a year in jail for anyone engaging in unauthorized civic education—for example, a voter registration drive.”⁵ Angered by candidate disqualifications, the opposition boycotted and CCM cemented its control at the subnational level.

To further tighten its political stranglehold, 2020 saw the disqualification of hundreds of opposition legislative and local government candidates, in some cases with the clear aim of giving CCM a better chance of winning the seat.⁶ The government also successfully pressured mobile-phone carriers to block messages containing the words “Tundu Lissu.” Opposition poll

watchers were unable to obtain credentials, while restrictions on gatherings and campaign activities were unfairly enforced to benefit CCM.⁷

During the voting itself, oppositionists charge, CCM stuffed ballot boxes and obstructed opposition poll watchers.⁸ Such claims are by nature hard to substantiate, but evidence collected by Tanzania Election Watch,⁹ and the remarkable discrepancy between the 2015 and 2020 results—CHADEMA’s share of the presidential vote plummeted from 40% to just 13%—suggest considerable fraud.

CCM Rule: Historical Foundations

Much of the media treated the official election results with surprise. Had not Tanzania been on a democratizing arc? Magufuli’s eccentric leadership must have wrenched it off track. This reaction was based on a misunderstanding. The authoritarian strategies used to produce the lopsided 2020 results were in fact familiar CCM tactics. Repression, censorship, indoctrination, and the misuse of state resources for partisan ends have changed in terms of their exact mix over the years, but they have always been the methods that CCM presidents deploy to retain control. Taken together, they have long provided CCM leaders with both the carrot and the stick, as well as the ability to win—or perhaps more accurately “secure”—hearts and minds.

The disturbing side of the Nyerere legacy. Tanzania has never had anything but CCM presidents, and the first of these was Julius Nyerere. An anticolonial activist and intellectual who became the 38-year-old chief minister of British Tanganyika in 1960, he would stay at the top for the next twenty-five years, becoming first prime minister and then president of independent

Tanzania. Known as Mwalimu (the teacher), Nyerere is often credited with cementing political stability and giving Tanzanians a coherent national identity that has spared the country much ethnic conflict. His more troubling side is usually overlooked. In truth, Nyerere consistently used repression to maintain political control.

In 1965, Nyerere introduced a single-party system, inspiring many other leaders on the continent to follow suit. This political system empowered him as president by both outlawing political opposition and making it easier to manage the ruling party. The lack of an opposition left dissatisfied ruling-party factions nowhere to defect and so made them easier to keep in line.

The barrage of authoritarian laws that Nyerere used to cow dissent is the basis for the “lawfare” that Magufuli has been waging. Anyone held to be a threat to state security could be detained at presidential discretion; many a Nyerere rival or foe wound up being held for a long time without trial.¹⁰ By 1977, Amnesty International estimated that there were up to two-thousand such detainees in Tanzania—the equivalent of 8 out of 100,000 people—more than in apartheid South Africa.¹¹ President Magufuli’s decision to arrest hundreds of opposition leaders following the 2020 elections is thus not an unprecedented authoritarian endeavor .

By the time Nyerere retired, hundreds of his critics had left for exile, generating what James Brennan describes as a genre of prison diaries and bitter criticism featuring titles such as *I Was Nyerere’s Prisoner* and, later, *The Dark Side of Nyerere’s Legacy*.¹² It was not only Nyerere’s political opponents who faced authoritarian tactics. His decision to move citizens to larger more centralised villages in support of his vision of “African socialism” was meant to be voluntary but turned out to be extremely violent. When people proved reluctant to uproot their families, beatings and even house burnings were employed to force families to relocate.¹³

Michael Jennings recounts how NGOs and international donors looked the other way: “In Tanzania, on hearing reports of babies left in huts set alight by soldiers, of violence used against villagers, property destroyed in attempts to force people to move, and so on, such events were put down to the actions of a few ‘overzealous’ officials.”¹⁴

Securing hearts and minds. Nyerere gained credit by voluntarily leaving office in 1985, becoming one of the first African leaders to do so. Yet he left behind a legacy of censorship and ideological indoctrination that has cast a long shadow – and helps to explain why his regime’s worst abuses have been largely covered up. The Newspaper Act of 1976 and associated laws allowed the president to ban publications—domestic and imported alike—on vague grounds of jeopardizing peace and order. When a newly elected Magufuli shut down critical newspapers in 2015, more than a dozen years into the multiparty era, the Media Services Act—the Newspaper Act’s successor—was his tool. Thus, many years after the transition to multi-party politics, “Post-independence nationalism and ideology inform the contemporary media regulatory environment and conceptions of freedom of expression.”¹⁵

Beyond this, CCM pursued one of the most concerted efforts to push an official state ideology that Africa has ever seen. The content of education became increasingly political and invasive over time. Thus a 1969 grade-school curriculum that focused on “educating children about the African view of life and its advantages” evolved into a 1978 version that aimed “to build and develop children’s minds to recognize and carry on the politics of Ujamaa and development; to know and carry out the Arusha Declaration.”¹⁶

Although the impact this had on popular attitudes is hard to assess, it appears that political indoctrination, systematic censorship, and state propaganda played an important role in

legitimizing CCM rule. As early as 1967, a survey found that Tanzanian secondary-school students saw “teaching students to be good citizens” as the most important function of school. Tanzanian secondary-school students, moreover, were more likely than their Kenyan counterparts (75 versus 64 percent) to agree that the “best” citizen should “obey.”¹⁷

One of the most systematic attempts to track and evaluate civic and political education from 1967 to 1994 concluded that over time teachers “internalized the authoritarian values concerning the outcomes of teaching and learning of Civics (e.g. unconditional obedience/loyalty to authority).”¹⁸ This helps to explain why, despite CCM’s consistent failure to foster economic growth and development, there was relatively limited mass pressure for political liberalization. Instead, Tanzania experienced a “top-down democratization,”¹⁹ as Nyerere pushed ruling-party elites to hold multiparty elections in the belief that this would enable the country to better access the international aid that it so desperately needed.

Playing patronage politics. In addition to developing a cohesive national identity, the ruling party has also proved adept at mobilizing supporters and using state resources to win elections. Many accounts of African politics suggest that the widespread diversion of state funds into patronage and campaign funding came fairly late in Tanzania due to Nyerere’s moral values, but it is misleading to suggest that corruption has been a feature only of the two decades since the *ruska* (“all is allowed”) Mwinyi administration. Rather, it also has deep roots. Yonatan Morse recounts how a senior CCM official explained to him that under the one-party state party cadres were involved in dishing out patronage, buying votes, and intimidating political foes.²⁰

In line with this, William Freund wrote in 1981 of how “[b]lack market operations and corruption at all levels have become very rife and, in their wake, a general cynicism has

developed about the gap between official rhetoric and practice.” Heavy state involvement in the economy, including attempts to deal with shortages by decreeing that only certain shops could sell necessities, led to what Freund called “a spiral of corruption and more intense hoarding.”²¹ This corruption was not always explicitly political, but it enabled those close to the ruling party to get wealthier, and hence sustained a stable support base for the government even when its economic policies failed.

By seizing such enrichment opportunities, lawmakers and other leaders could fund their own local-patronage networks, which in turn built support for the system: Even if the larger economy was failing, individuals and communities with access to patronage used it to sustain backing for CCM. The shift to multiparty politics three decades ago did not end this. Instead, as Alexander Makulilo has shown, the top-down nature of the democratization process enabled the ruling party to “determine the transition pace, design the rules of the game, as well as to own and benefit out of it.”²²

The abuse of state power for partisan ends has enabled the ruling party to discipline and mobilize millions of citizens in both rural and urban areas, underpinning CCM’s political control from the 1960s onwards. The government does not repress and censor in constant measure, however. Instead, under Magufuli as under Nyerere, it knows how to let up and bear down. When it does the latter, no space is left for political opposition.

Multipartism and Democratic Backsliding

Given that CCM has always been authoritarian, why has democratic backsliding become so acute under Magufuli? Perhaps the most important factor has been the extent of the

electoral threat. Unwilling as it is to lose power, CCM nonetheless grasps the value of at least appearing to respect democratic norms and values. When it senses little threat, it can ease up. In the 1990s, CCM won elections on the mainland with ease (the offshore-island region of Zanzibar was and is a different story), so civil society groups and opposition parties were allowed to operate with relative freedom. This changed in 2010, when CCM's vote-share drop alarmed the regime. In a nutshell, more support for Chadema meant more repression.

A second factor is rivalry among CCM factions, especially over patronage. Nyerere concentrated patronage and political control in the president's hands, but the economic and political liberalization that followed his exit sparked the rise of a new business elite and wealthy financiers.²³ They began pairing up with rival CCM factions, splitting the party and giving its leaders fresh headaches.²⁴ Magufuli's success, in turn, at bringing CCM back into line under the presidency has increased the scope for abuses of power.

External political competition. Since multipartism's return, the electoral threat to CCM has grown. In the early 1990s, the party was internally split but electorally dominant. Its lighter hand created fresh opportunities for the opposition. In 2010, CCM won 63 percent of the presidential and 78 percent of the parliamentary vote. Those figures were down from 80 and 88 percent, respectively, just five years before. Opposition leaders, it seemed, had found in Chadema a vehicle that could turn popular frustration with corruption and the poor economy into votes.

It was against this background that CCM began moving against civil society. New laws appeared with key clauses left so vague they could be used to limit the freedoms of the press, expression, and access to information. Significantly for our argument that CCM's authoritarian

inclinations predate Magufuli, fresh planks in Tanzania’s authoritarian legal edifice were nailed into place *before* he became president.²⁵

It is also worth noting that CCM has long known it cannot win free and fair elections in Zanzibar, and so has been more violent there than on the mainland. The semi-autonomous island is important for both tourism revenue and exports. It is also culturally distinct, with a mostly Muslim population that has long distrusted the mainland establishment. This has made for impressive levels of opposition mobilization, countered by the ruling party’s striking determination to do anything—intimidate, repress, cancel whole elections, or manufacture unlikely results—to keep control. One can view Magufuli’s presidency as an exercise in treating mainland Tanzania the same way CCM has long treated Zanzibar: No one familiar with CCM’s behavior in Zanzibar should be surprised by the repressive zeal and authoritarian resolve that the party has shown on the mainland.

Internal political competition. While external competition has driven repressive strategies, internal political competition has tended to act as a brake on the personal ambitions of CCM leaders. In Tanzania, ruling-party factions are based not on ethnicity or region, but on personal ties and networks that may go back as far as school days. There are generational cleavages too, as young CCM up-and-comers expect senior leaders to take a turn at the helm and then step aside. This expectation creates pressure to respect term limits.

As noted above, post-Nyerere economic liberalization yielded what President Benjamin Mkapa (1995–2005) lamented as the “privatization” of the ruling party, with rich backers funding factions and those factions then using power to make backers even richer. There was no dominant faction; instead, it was more like a free-for-all that presidents had a hard time

containing. Partly as a result, a series of major scandals hurt Tanzania's reputation with international donors and foreign investors.²⁶

After coming to power Magufuli made regaining control of CCM his number-one goal and his major policies and reforms must be seen in this light. The president's anticorruption drive has cut off rival CCM factions from their respective funding sources and made internal dissent more difficult. Positioning himself as a corruption foe has moreover allowed him to deflect criticism while cultivating support from both the local and international communities.

These intensity of these changes, and the number of people that they disadvantaged, encouraged Magufuli to adopt an increasingly authoritarian approach. As Dan Paget has argued, 'Magufuli's war on corruption makes CCM's authoritarian turn doubly necessary. By constricting political space, the party sends a clear signal that it intends to win at any cost. In doing so, it depreciates the benefits of defection to the opposition'.

Financial coercion to stop private business interests from paying rival CCM factions has therefore gone hand-in-hand with physical intimidation including purges of party ranks and even abductions. In 2017, he had the party charter amended to make general meetings less frequent and to shrink the membership of key committees. In this way, Magufuli's war on corruption and quest for internal control cannot be divorced from the abuses and manipulation that characterized the 2020 election.

Magufuli's faux-populist stylings,²⁷ his personalization of power, and his downgrading of intraparty organs that might act as forces for restraint do not mean, however, that all informal norms are gone. The two-term limit remains, as does the expectation that the presidency will rotate between Christians and Muslims. It would therefore be a mistake to assume that Magufuli has already decided to try for a third term, or that he would necessarily be successful if he did.

Any move in this direction would generate massive opposition from ex-presidents and the next generation of CCM leaders, and would make for a far sterner test of Magufuli's grip.

The Lessons of 2020

The recent intensification of authoritarian practices in Tanzania underlines the risks of engaging with new democracies while wearing rose-tinted glasses. The CCM regime has long penetrated and regulated Tanzanian society. Magufuli has been presented as a uniquely authoritarian force, but he is enabled by this system and the realities of one-party rule. Tanzania's reputation as a "success story" of gradual democratization rests on a selective view of the country's politics and an overlooking of the threat inherent in one-party dominance.

The hegemonic rule of a single party, even if it talks a liberal-democratic game, is likely to be grounded on authoritarian structures that can be activated at any time. Tanzania is not a case of a ruling party that turned authoritarian over the last five years. Rather, that party has always been authoritarian, but did not always need to use the full weight of its powers. Development partners, commentators, and academics who have identified with this party—whether because of its initial socialist leanings or its recent anticorruption drive—have overlooked this harsh reality to a remarkable extent, especially given the consistent election-related violence that the CCM regime has inflicted on the people of Zanzibar.

Developments in Tanzania also remind us that anticorruption efforts should not be taken as signs of broader democratization. Magufuli's drive against corruption also tightens his grip on his party, while its success both presupposes and necessitates the creation of a more authoritarian

political landscape. Supporting anticorruption efforts that take place in such a compromising manner can therefore do as much harm as good.

The prospects for democratization and good governance are therefore bleak. Civil society cannot mobilize, elections are neither free nor fair, the media is hamstrung, advocates of democracy and accountability such as Aidan Eyakuze (head of the NGO Twaweza) have their passports seized, and opposition leaders including Tundu Lissu are now in exile. A more democratically inclined CCM leader may eventually replace Magufuli, but even if that were to happen any revival of civil society and opposition political life would be solely at CCM's pleasure as long as the old authoritarian structures remain.

Tanzania was able to gain its unmerited reputation as a “democracy success story” in part because international actors were unwilling to deal with the CCM as it was, rather than as they wanted it to be. As in other cases of stunted or stalled democratization (Rwanda and Uganda come to mind), superficial reforms were hailed as landmarks of democratic progress while coercive state structures and clientelism continued to sustain the ruling party's grip on power.²⁸ In Ethiopia, Prime Minister Abiy was initially lauded as a progressive reformer, but has quickly fallen back on the ruling party's usual structures of control.²⁹

Charismatic individuals can claim the reformer's mantle, but giving them too much credence *before* serious structural reforms have taken place both sells democracy short and increases the risk of authoritarian relapse when political opposition begins to rise.

NOTES

Alitalali Amani is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of this author. The authors would like to thank Dan Paget and Michaela Collord for thoughtful comments on this paper.

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