



Inclusion of Independent Candidates in the Electoral System in Tanzania: A Monster to Men and Women Contenders?

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Abstract

Including independent candidates in Tanzania's electoral system has long been viewed as a "monster," symbolising the rigid frameworks stifling democratic voices. These structures have consistently undermined inclusive and participatory elections, creating significant barriers for independents- both men and women- seeking to contest electoral positions. However, women remain the most vulnerable group within this system, facing compounded challenges in their struggle for political representation. This paper examines the roots of these difficulties through interviews and a thematic literature review, highlighting how electoral processes in Tanzania systematically marginalise the voices of women and other independent candidates. Despite attempts by the government to address these challenges through new bylaws and regulations, such measures often exacerbate the problem rather than resolve it. The findings reveal that instead of fostering inclusivity, these conditions entrench exclusion, creating a cycle of systemic bias. In order to enhance democratic election, the paper calls for establishing legal frameworks that are credible, transparent, and legitimate. These reforms are necessary to ensure that all citizens, regardless of gender or affiliation, can participate fully and equally in Tanzania's political processes, thereby promoting a truly inclusive democracy.

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1.0 Introduction

Multipartism was reintroduced in Tanzania in 1992 as a way of instilling the notion of inclusion in democratic elections. Inclusion means that humanity - men, women, and disadvantaged groups would equally participate in political activities. It shows that the inception of multiparty democracy was considered an elixir in leveraging the political landscape for robust human participation in political circles, including elections (Council of Europe Report, 2022; Michaela, 2021). Instead, humanity has encountered significant challenges in exercising its full potential in making decisions or exercising its right to contest in elections as independent candidates, regardless of gender. Standing on the shoulders of numerous scholars and Reports like Makulilo (2012), the issue of '*inclusion*' in the electoral system has raised a great debate among various stakeholders, covering academics, political parties, electoral observers, the parliament, civil societies, and the judiciary. While integrating the above notion in Tanzania is a nightmare, it works in many countries. For example, since the 1980s, 56 independents have served in Australian parliaments. There are also good examples in Pakistan, Russia, and the USA. The system is operational in countries like the Republic of South Africa, Malawi, and Zambia (Council of Europe Report, 2022; Nchofoung & Colleague, 2021; Makulilo, 2011; Brancati, 2008). Although, in principle, incumbents fear independents, this fear is ungrounded because the experience vindicates that where inclusion is operational, the system has had little impact on incumbent political parties. While that is the picture of the orb, it is proscribed in Tanzania.

The prohibition raises different viewpoints; while some favour the system, some are against it. Some people, particularly those from opposition parties, favour 'independent candidacy', supported by Diamond and Colleagues (2024), who believe that independent inclusion reduces partisan polarisation and cheers wider electoral competition. Those from the party in power and the government of Tanzania have opposing viewpoints, per Katz (1993), who believes that independents can weaken party systems, leading to legislative fragmentation and instability. Further, this deed demonstrates a fear of inclusion. Supporters of inclusion maintain that it will increase the number of people participating in the electoral system and influence the quality of representation by escalating democracy through state accountability, responsiveness, and electoral turnout (Brancati, 2008).

Additionally, they view '*exclusion*' as marginalisation or stigmatisation in various aspects, including gender and disadvantaged group participation in political circles. In this regard, the exclusion is taken as the antithesis of democracy. Contrary to that, the ruling party and state (government) view the inclusion of independents as a discovery to destabilise the electoral system, increase chaos, and endanger the whole system's hegemony. Standing on Mateng'e's (2012) viewpoint, supporters of '*exclusion*' use several prescriptions to defend their positions. Some examples they accord include the promotion of representative democracy, the preservation of national values covering peace and harmony, order and security, and political parties' ability to advance populace interests. In this line of thinking, '*inclusion*' threatens them. In this situation, it is evident that the incumbent will try their best not to have a system that embraces inclusion. So, we argue that for the democratic system to prevail, establishing institutions that can enhance the participation of independents is not negotiable now. It is imperative to note that inclusion is an ill-founded and unacceptable concept for the incumbents. It is built around the fear of not only losing Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM) rebellious people within Parliament and LGA's councils but also creating a split opportunity, compromise unity, triggers ethnicity and personality politics issues (Mateng'e, 2012; Makulilo, 2011), which justifies '*inclusion*' is a monster for the party in power and its government survival.

Many scholarly works on the issue of '*indecent candidacy*' vested much effort in trying to interrogate the validity of the claims above and accord little attention to the nature of affected contenders, particularly men and women. This paper will advance the discussion on independent issues to capture the fissure above. It tries to show that the notion of '*inclusion*' in the electoral system is a monster to CCM and the government, for it threatens their polity. While that is the case, '*exclusion*' may also be regarded as a monster by contenders since it denies them the opportunity to exercise their democratic rights. A recall, the term monster, in this perspective, entails the manner institutions form and operate (formal and informal) to limit the smooth running of political activities, including participation or contesting for election, unless a person is affiliated with any political party. It aligns with what Makulilo (2011) calls '*join a party, or I cannot elect you*'. In the case of Tanzania, if one is not affiliated with any political party, then there is no way s/he can be elected, meaning that the current system in Tanzania does not acknowledge independents, and this indicates that any candidate contesting for a political position must be housed or nominated by a political party (Swai, 2017). Therefore, the central thesis

The paper is threefold. First, it aims to explain how the 'monster' works and limits people from echoing their voices, particularly those individuals aspiring to take the conflicting route (exclusion). Second, it covers the fear of inclusion by an incumbent party or the government. Finally, it is inclined to justify the claim with some evidence that while humanity suffers a great deal as a result of this monster, the women in Tanzania are the most vulnerable group in this struggle.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Democratic Theory

This article is guided by the democratic theory (Shapiro, 2009 and Hyland, 1995) which advocates for the active participation of independent candidates in the electoral system. This theory accords four critical characteristics: It first advocates for strengthening principles of democracy. Democratic theory underscores the importance of providing the electorate with diverse options. It ensures that the voices of both men and women contenders, including marginalised groups, are heard and incorporated into governance. Independent candidates can address issues dominant political parties often ignore, enriching the democratic process. In the context of Tanzania, independent candidates offer a platform for smaller communities to be represented more effectively than under the dominance of a supreme political party. Their participation fosters greater inclusivity and ensures that grassroots concerns receive due attention. Second, the theory endorses inclusivity. The theory emphasises the need to provide opportunities for both partisan and non-partisan voices to be heard at all levels of government without unreasonable restrictions. The theory aligns with the principles outlined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which upholds the right of all individuals to participate in public affairs freely. By enabling independent candidates to compete, democratic systems can better reflect the diversity of their societies and ensure equal representation for all citizens.

Third, party supremacy is discouraged. The theory's main concern is preventing party supremacy, which can stifle competition and marginalise alternative perspectives. Independent candidates counterbalance deep-rooted party power, fostering accountability and more dynamic political environments. In Tanzania, the party in power has limited the space for competition. Independent candidates could serve as an antidote or solution to this imbalance, endorsing a better democratic ecology.

Fourth, it bridges practical barriers. Understanding these democratic principles depends on political will, culture, electoral laws, and public awareness. Promoting genuine political commitment is compulsory to have a fair and competitive environment for independent candidates to participate in elections in all tiers of government. Existing of numerous monstrous electoral laws is disheartening. As discussed in several cases, some of Tanzania's electoral laws create noteworthy obstacles for independent candidates to flourish. The theory provides avenues for public consciousness or awareness. In Tanzania, there are limited initiatives for enhancing voter education, particularly on the role and significance of independent candidates, which increases biases that favour party-affiliated contenders.

2.2 Independent Candidacy at Stake

Independent candidacy is not a favour. It is a right (Makulilo, 2017; Tanzania Electoral Monitoring Committee -TEMCO 2016; EU-EOM 2015, REDET, 2010). The notion is thoroughly stipulated in the United Nations International Covenant, Article 25, section one (1), on Centre for International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966, which recognises that humanity has equal participation rights in decision-making within the government and similar opportunities to be elected as independent or through any political organisation to compete in any democratic elections. In line with that,

ICCPR prohibits restrictions except those associated with mental health, age, and citizenship quandaries. No citizen can be restricted from participating in electoral processes because he is not a political party member (UN 1996 general comment number 25 on the ICCPR).

An independent candidate is a non-partisan politician registered as a candidate who is independent or listed without party favourites or associated with a political party ineligible for ballot recognition. Recall that although independents are allowed in many countries, some are restricted or work under catastrophic conditions. Across the orb, various examples of inclusion have benefited all people, men and women, to win the election. For example, Atifete Jahjaga became the female President independent of Kosovo. All of Russia's presidents have been independents. Generally, in Russia and Pakistan, independent votes range from 20 to 40 per cent. In Canada, Jody Wilson-Raybould, MP female in the federal election of 2019, ran as an independent candidate after being expelled from the Liberal Party,

won 32 per cent of votes, and returned to parliament. In the USA, candidates get below 1 per cent of the votes nationwide, but it is essential to exercise their democratic rights.

Further, since the 1980s, the system has worked very well in Australia, where an exceptional 56 candidates stood and served as independents hitherto in the parliaments. Brazil allows individuals with the support of at least 1 per cent of the electors to vote in the region, city, state, or country. Based on the current Constitution, it is impossible to operate in Costa Rica. Only some African countries permit independent candidates, including Zambia, Malawi, and the Republic of South Africa (Makulilo, 2017; Makulilo, 2011; Brancati, D, 2008).

We argue in this paper that an independent candidacy platform is imperative; first, it creates avenues for some politicians to express their political views that do not align with the platforms of any political party. Second, it allows defectors from previous affiliated political parties to stand on their own due to the nomination of another candidate or any imperative reason. Thus, it widens democratic rights and allows citizens to have wider choices or scopes. However, in Tanzania politics, inclusion debates need to be more conclusive.

2.3 Ups and Downs of Inclusion Politics

The debate on including independents in Tanzania's electoral system dates back to the country's independence in 1961. During the early years of multipart, independents were allowed to contest elections, with parties like Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), United Tanganyika Party (UTP), African Muslim National Union of Tanganyika (AMNUT), and African National Congress (ANC) dominating the political landscape. However, the 1965 constitutional change introduced a single-party system, with TANU as the sole political entity, prohibiting independents and limiting gender inclusivity (Kyung, K.E, 2008)

Before 1965, independents, including women, had some opportunities to participate in politics, as reflected in the 1961 Independent Constitution and the 1962 Republican Constitution. Both constitutions provided criteria for candidacy based on citizenship, age, and literacy without explicitly restricting gender. However, patriarchal tendencies largely excluded women from significant political roles (Yoon & Swai, 2024). Notably, Bibi Titi Mohamed played a crucial role in the independence struggle. However, she was excluded from the first cabinet, with President Nyerere citing a lack of experienced women-reflecting the era's systemic gender biases.

The shift to a single-party system concentrated power in the government's executive arm, aligning with Westminster principles but creating a de facto one-party state. This system stifled democracy by eliminating the space for independence and marginalising women further. Scholars argue that while the single-party era claimed to uphold democratic principles like equal voting rights and fair elections, the ruling party's dominance undermined these ideals.

The historical experience, including Sarwatt's case, highlights the challenges of transitioning to a robust democracy in Tanzania. Although earlier constitutions permitted independence and nominal gender inclusivity, systemic barriers and patriarchal norms limited meaningful political participation, especially for women. It underscores the complexities of democratisation and the enduring struggle for inclusivity in Tanzania's political system.

2.4 Sarwattism and Rise of a Monster

In Tanzania, the term Sarwattism is associated with the Sarwatt legacy. Sarwatt was an independent candidate who contested and won the Mbulu constituency in the 1960s. Since then, there has been a move from incumbents or the government to silence independent candidates, which is viewed as the rise of a monster. Many scholars, such as Collord M (2021), Makulilo (2016, 2017, 2008), Mateng'e (2012), and Babeiya (2011), have shed some light indirectly on Sarwattism. According to Mateng'e (2012), tracing the trajectory of independent candidature in Tanzania, there is only one. He further commented that since Tanganyika's independence in 1961 (now Tanzania), Mr Herman Sarwatt is viewed as the only person who contested against Chief Amri Dodo's party (TANU) supported fellow in the Mbulu constituency and won the election. In a nutshell, Mr Sarwatt was first rejected in the intra-party (TANU) nomination; instead of defecting to other parties, he stood as an independent in 1960 (pre-independence elections) to challenge the previously mentioned TANU-supported candidate. He fared and endured well as an authentic member of TANU and represented the Mbulu constituency peacefully, taking on board all the rules and orders of the game.

This victory came when the party in power (TANU) had widespread support and higher command than other parties; It defeated rival parties in all constituencies except one constituency won by Sarwatt (Babeiya, 2011).

After the defeat in ballots, numerous leaders from the ruling party (TANU) were largely unhappy with the defeat' (Michaela, 2021; Makulilo, 2017; Msekwa, 1995); as a result, a new way of ending Sarwattism was forged. This scenario resulted in the formation of a commission that came up with recommendations that led to a single-party formalisation. All candidates wishing to participate in the National Assemblage election and local government bodies belong to or are members of TANU. It was the road to abolish multiparty democracy and independent candidature operations. The commission recommended that the Afro-Shiraz Party (ASP) and TANU jointly nominate one person to contest for the presidency. In response, one supreme party was constitutionally stated in the United Republic on July 10 1965, and all political activities ran under the umbrella of the ruling party (See 1965 Interim Constitution- section 3, *ibid*).

Section 27 of the same act introduced new rules for the National Assembly elections. It required party membership as a qualification for both men and women. According to this rule, any citizen wanting to participate in the election must be a party member at least 21. This rule aimed to eliminate independent and opposition parties in response to Sarwattism. Although Tanzania had allowed multipart since the 1950s, it was perceived as threatening peace and harmony for both parties and the state. It was reported in the TANU Annual Report of 1965.

The year 1975 witnessed a merger of great parties (TANU & ASP) to form a supreme party named CCM. The latter's Election Forum (i.e. electoral conference) was given the power to propose contenders according to Articles 7 and 27. The same articles also set political election qualifications, including citizenship, party membership, and age. For instance, regarding age, for one to qualify to contest for presidency and Member of Parliament, she/he would not be below 30 and 21 years, respectively. The fissures were also reflected in Tanzania's Constitution of 1977, which echoed a party supremacy framework. The constitutional amendments of 1984 aimed at including a Bill of Rights; the amendments introduced similar qualifications for one to be elected to the National Assembly and the Presidency post as per Articles 67 and 39, respectively. However, this scenario conflicts with Article 20 (2), which states that citizens must not be forced to belong to any political party.

It is well explicated in Article 21(1) that every human being is obliged to participate in all matters related to the country's governance activities through direct or representative democracy as required by law. It is imperative to note that Articles 20 and 21 stayed the same with the re-introduction of multipartism in 1992. For example, while Article 39 set the ground for one to be affiliated with a party that supported a party, Article 67 reserved a post for membership qualification to the National Assembly. It was reflected from the 1995 to 2020 elections, although in 2020, as for the case of TANU in the 1960 elections, the ruling supreme party (CCM) won all the seats except one won by the opposition at the Mbulu constituency. All the previous seats in the opposition stronghold were under the Supreme Party's (CCM) custody since 1995. Two candidates from the opposition won ballots, a female Aida Khenani (CHADEMA), Nkasi -North Constituency, against a male Ally Keissy (CCM), and a male Shamsia Mtamba (CUF) against a female Hawa Ghasia (CCM), from Mtwara rural constituency. According to Collord M (2021), these results meant a dramatic reversal or *de facto* reappearance of one-party order or rule. In the 2020 election, women were the most affected compared to males.

2.5 Restating Independents in Tanzania at the Crossroads

It is worth noting that individuals have rights and opportunities to take part or participate in elections as per the principle of self-determination of human rights. This means that elections should be democratic and allow people to exercise their democratic opportunities and rights in public affairs (UN, 2021). Numerous instruments provide the basis for one to exercise his/her right to participate in political circles as required by clauses 25 and 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Although these articles are related, they differ regarding self-determination rights. The aforementioned right is enshrined in the UN Charter clause 1(2), clause 1 of ICCPR, and other instruments. It is reflected in a broad range of Comment No. 12 of 1984 of a committee of Human Rights, which relates to clauses 25 and 27 of ICCPR regarding the rights of minority rights as distinct from Article 1.

Further, it takes on board issues of self-determination, non-self-governing, trust territories, and the like, as articulated in articles 73 (2) and 76 (2). Self-determination rights cover both external and internal

aspects based on existing situations. In a nutshell, the right of independents to populaces and their ability to define their political status means external self-determination; the populaces' rights accorded within a state for self-governance without any interference from outside is viewed as internal self-determination. Based on ICCPR, as per Article 1, the set requirement of humanity is to be independent and define his/her political status with freedom. It means that humanity can make choices regarding his/her representatives with freedom and exercise his/her participatory rights (see articles 1 and 25).

Despite recognising the rights of independents and minority groups in Tanzania, the current environment for their operation remains highly challenging. The existing legal frameworks must provide adequate avenues for robust independent operations, and the country is still struggling to reinstitute independents. It is high time that we take bold steps to address these issues. Various institutions and stakeholders led the struggle to reinstate independents (Rev. Mtikila, Tanganyika Law Society and Legal and Human Rights Centre). The aforementioned stakeholders sued the Court of Africa, which deals with the rights of the people to defy specific changes that violate human rights and prohibit independents from contesting for seats, such as presidential positions, parliamentary locus, and local government seats. Such prohibitions limit citizens' rights, including freedom of association, inclusion (right against discrimination), and participation in public matters. It is unacceptable to hear that the desire by stakeholders to reinstate independents has been encountering numerous challenges, including violating human rights and limiting the possibility of women and other marginalised groups from participating in political circles. The following cases articulate this point.

Case 1: Mtikila

In 1993, Reverend Christopher Mtikila, Chairman of the Democratic Party (DP), challenged Tanzania's constitutional amendments requiring political affiliation for electoral participation (URT, 2010). Mtikila filed Civil Case No. 5 of 1993 in the High Court, asserting that these restrictions violated constitutional rights to freedom of association and participation in public affairs. The High Court ruled in his favour 1994, declaring the amendments unconstitutional as they infringed on clauses guaranteeing democratic rights. However, the government countered this judgment by passing the 11th Constitutional Amendment through Act No. 34 of 1994, nullifying the ruling and restoring the previous position.

Mtikila renewed his fight in 2005 with Miscellaneous Civil Cause No. 10 of 2005, arguing that Act No. 34 of 1994 was unconstitutional. On May 5, 2006, the High Court again sided with Mtikila, affirming that the restrictions on independent candidates infringed on fundamental rights. Nevertheless, the government appealed, and in 2010, the Court of Appeal reversed the High Court's decision, declaring the issue of independent candidacy a political matter to be addressed legislatively.

In 2011, Mtikila, alongside other stakeholders, escalated the matter to the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). The Court ruled on June 14, 2013, that Tanzania's constitutional amendments violated citizens' rights to association, participation, and non-discrimination per the ACHPR. The Court urged Tanzania to amend its laws, but the government has shown reluctance to implement the recommendations, maintaining a political system that excludes independents from contesting elections.

Internationally, protocols such as the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) emphasise the right to participate in public affairs without unreasonable restrictions. Despite Tanzania's ratification of these instruments, the practice of requiring political affiliation for electoral candidacy persists, undermining democratic principles and independent candidacy rights.

Case 2: Constitutional Reforms and Independents

The debate on allowing independent candidates in Tanzanian politics intensified during the constitutional reform discussions starting in 2012. Independents were introduced in the 2014 proposed Constitution, but their inclusion faced strong opposition from the ruling party, CCM, and the government. Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's founding father, criticised the illogicality of compelling candidates to belong to political parties to contest elections, arguing for greater democratic freedom (Nyerere, 1995).

The government justified its resistance to independent candidates by citing peace, unity, and security risks. Officials like Seif Khatib warned that independents could cause chaos and discrimination, though these claims lack empirical evidence. Critics argue that fears stem from the ruling party's concern over losing power, as independents could challenge CCM

candidates, as demonstrated by historical examples like Sarwatt and political defections such as those of Edward Lowassa and Wilbroad Slaa.

Another concern was women's participation. CCM relied heavily on women voters, and independents were seen as threatening this support base. Women's organisations like BAWATA, which championed women's rights and political participation, were deregistered in 1997, further limiting women's independent influence.

The fear of political defections also fuelled opposition to independents. Defections by prominent politicians, such as Seif Sharif Hamad and Edward Lowassa, showcased the potential destabilisation of CCM's dominance. To address this, the 2014 proposed Constitution introduced clauses limiting party members from becoming independents or rejoining parties after contesting as independents.

Additionally, independents were seen as enabling alliances between political parties or individuals, perceived as threats to CCM's supremacy. Provided legal provisions, such as the Political Parties Act No. 5 of 1992, aimed to curb alliances and maintain CCM's dominant position. The ruling party's resistance to independence reflects its reluctance to embrace democratic reforms that could jeopardise its grip on power.

3.0 Methods

A desk review is one of the methods used in data collection. Relevant documents such as national and international frameworks, guidelines, policies, and regulations on the independent candidate were reviewed to inform the study. A Google survey was conducted between October 2022 and January 2023. The Google form has been an alternative data collection method to reach many people who cannot be easily reached physically. The method has been used extensively during the COVID-19 pandemic when people could hardly have physical meetings (Anasel& Swai, 2023). The online tool was designed to capture the contextual information on an independent candidate's understanding, perceptions, and recommendations. The individuals with their contacts were identified, informed about the study, and requested to respond to our questions, which they accepted. They further requested that the same be circulated to their network. The questionnaire was also distributed to the public via social media to collect views from the wider population.

Finally, 101 participants from all zones in Tanzania were reached. The majority, about 61%, were from the coastal zone. Most participants were between 21 and 50 years old, and few were above 51. Of 101 participants, 72 were male, and 29 were female. More than half of the participants have bachelor's and master's degrees. Sex and age showed a significant skewness toward people of average age and males. Education also showed a significant skewness, with most participants being college/university educated. Table 1 displays the demographics of respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics (N101)

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics		
Variables	Frequency	Per cent
Participants from the Tanzania Zone		
Central Zone	7	6.9
Northern Zone	8	7.9
Coastal Zone	62	61.4
Lake Zone	10	9.9
Southern Highland Zone	11	10.9
Western Zone	3	2.9
Age Group of the Participants		
Between 10 and 20	1	0.99
Between 21 and 30	35	34.7
Between 31 and 40	35	34.7
Between 41 and 50	20	19.8
Between 51 and 65	10	9.9
Sex of Participants		
Male	72	71
Female	29	29
The Highest Educational Level of the Participants		
Secondary Education	6	5.9

Diploma	6	5.9
Bachelor degree	44	43.6
Master degree	35	34.7
PhD	10	9.9
Professional of the Participants		
Students	4	3.9
Academia	32	31.7
Administrators	50	49.5
Agriculture	3	2.9
Business	3	2.9
Civilian	9	8.9

Source: Field Data

The questionnaire collected quantitative and qualitative data, and the qualitative questions dominated the tool. The questions were grouped into two categories. The first category seeks to collect the demographic particulars of the participants, including age, gender, region and district, education level, and profession. The second category included open-ended questions to collect qualitative data on their understanding of independent candidates and the electoral system in Tanzania, the challenges associated with the current system, and how including independent candidates will address them. The questions on how the inclusion of independent candidates can increase women's access to the electoral system and the participant recommendations were in the second category.

Data management was conducted, with data from the Google form organised, edited, and combined according to themes. The themes revolve around the challenges and effects of independent candidates and how including independent candidates in the election system can improve democracy. Similar themes were grouped to form families, and memos were created to supplement the researchers' views on the coded concepts used to write the empirical sections.

4. Results

4.1 Women Independents: Why should it be a case?

The exclusion of independent candidates from Tanzania's electoral system is a significant issue, with political parties holding exclusive control over the nomination of candidates for elections. In Tanzania, candidates, regardless of gender, must belong to a political party, be affiliated with it, or be nominated by it. Independent candidates are individuals not tied to any political party and have no formal place in the electoral process (Young, 2009; Swai, 2017). This system creates a situation where only those supported by political parties can run for office, leaving aspirants without party backing entirely excluded. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) receives a list of candidates solely from political parties, which means that candidates cannot contest elections unless nominated by a party (National Electoral Commission, 2001).

Despite widespread awareness of the concept of independent candidacy in Tanzania, existing electoral systems, controlled by political party structures, make it nearly impossible for individuals to contest elections without party affiliation. Many Tanzanians are aware of this exclusion, as highlighted by an interviewee who stated that an independent candidate is "a person or a private candidate, male or female, who is not attached or affiliated or bound by any principles or receiving any support from any political party." Despite recognising the importance of broader community participation, political elites view the exclusion of independents as a way to maintain political stability, preserve peace, and promote the dominance of political parties. For these elites, including independent candidates could threaten the status quo, destabilising the political environment, even though this exclusion severely undermines democracy.

While the issue of exclusion impacts both men and women, women are disproportionately affected due to gender biases embedded in the political system. Female candidates often receive less support from party leadership, which remains male-dominated, and this imbalance further marginalises them in political processes (International Republican Institute, 2015; Swai & Zeegers, 2023). Statistics reveal that women are significantly underrepresented in Tanzania's electoral process; for example, only 19% of women were nominated for constituency seats in the 2015 elections, and this figure only slightly increased to 23% in 2020 (National Electoral Commission, 2016, 2021). Most women in Tanzania are pushed toward special seats, a system designed to increase female representation without challenging male dominance in direct constituency elections. However, many women feel that these special seats

limit their political agency, as they are often seen as supplementary rather than legitimate political positions.

Some African countries, such as South Africa and Mozambique, have implemented voluntary quotas for female candidates to address gender discrimination in political nominations. These quotas have contributed to higher female representation in political offices. However, the success of such quotas depends heavily on party leadership and the mechanisms in place to enforce them. For instance, although the Botswana National Front and Botswana Congress Party have set quotas of 30% for women, these quotas have not been effectively implemented due to the lack of enforcement mechanisms.

In Tanzania, political parties' lack of commitment to gender equality in candidate nominations remains a key obstacle to achieving more inclusive political representation. Although some political parties have attempted to implement gender-responsive mechanisms to ensure equal opportunities for men and women, these efforts have not been successful. One contributing factor is that parties typically favour candidates with long-standing contributions to the party, which disproportionately benefits male candidates. The failure to adhere to gender balance commitments poses challenges to proposed constitutional reforms, which aimed at achieving 50/50 gender representation in decision-making organs—and has led to continued male dominance in Tanzania's political sphere.

The nomination process itself is not transparent and often undermines democratic values. In some instances, party leadership may disregard the outcomes of primary elections, replacing winning candidates with others chosen by party elites. This practice is particularly detrimental to female candidates, increasing their likelihood of being excluded from the nomination process. A female candidate ranked first by party members but not nominated by her party illustrates this: *"My fellow women elected me, and I received many votes compared to other women; unfortunately, my party did not nominate my name for election"* (Interview 1). This situation has led to frustration and disillusionment among female aspirants, who see their efforts to engage politically thwarted by the system meant to empower them.

Further complicating the nomination process is the tendency of political parties to favour candidates with prior experience or strong party connections. Aspiring candidates with limited political experience, especially women, are often overlooked in favour of more established figures, regardless of the actual performance of the candidates in primary elections. This situation perpetuates the underrepresentation of women in direct electoral contests, as evidenced by interviews with female political candidates who were ranked first in primary elections but were not selected by their parties for the general election.

While gender inequalities are prevalent in the nomination process, political parties' failure to nominate strong women candidates exacerbates the issue. A female Member of Parliament (MP) shared that to be nominated by a party, women must prove their worthiness by demonstrating their ability to win elections: *"Women must demonstrate their ability to win elections more or less the same and clearly understood than most of the men"* (P3). Political party leaders often emphasise the need for women to prove their competence before they can be considered for nomination, adding a layer of scrutiny that male candidates do not face. This expectation places women at a disadvantage, as they are often judged more harshly, and their abilities are undervalued.

To address these barriers, including independent candidates in Tanzania's electoral system is critical. Allowing independent candidates, particularly women, to run for office without the constraints of party affiliation would increase political diversity and allow a broader range of individuals to participate in the political process. Many interview respondents highlighted the importance of this inclusion for broadening democratic engagement, noting that political spaces should be open to all individuals, regardless of party membership or gender.

The exclusion of independent candidates in Tanzania's electoral system limits political representation and hinders the full enjoyment of democracy. This system, which prioritises party allegiance over individual merit, results in an inefficient democratic process that fails to represent the diverse interests of the Tanzanian population. Incorporating independent candidates into the electoral system, along with reforms aimed at ensuring gender equality, would foster a more inclusive and representative democracy. As one interviewee stated, *"Inclusion is imperative and can be allowed, for it will abandon the patriarchal system that believes more in men than women"* (Interview). This shift towards greater inclusion would allow individuals—especially women and other marginalised groups—to participate more fully in Tanzania's political life, ultimately enhancing the democratic process.

Another challenge posed by respondents is voter registration. The current system fails to ensure complete enrolment of the voters to participate in the election. It will likely be politicised for a purpose

Scenario One

A woman aged 30 years has decided to stand for election for a special seat member of the parliament in 2020 in one of the regions in Tanzania. A decision to stand for an election is always followed by three other important steps: nomination, campaigning, and gaining votes. This woman did not pass the second step of nomination by the political party. Again, this woman did not know why she was not nominated, only because the political parties did not provide feedback to their contestants. Winning the political party nomination has indicated winning the election at all levels. This is because of the huge competition in the political parties, which is the only entrance to participate in the election. The political party leaders have the power to determine the nomination and may have interests in a person to be nominated. With all other criteria, the important factor is that the political party nominates a person who will survive the competition from other political parties. This woman shared her experience of being seduced by three political party leaders and promised to be considered during the nomination. Apart from the promises, some political party leaders threatened her that the name would not be approved for nomination if she did not accept their request for a sexual relationship. This woman explained that it was a hard time for her to decide because she wanted the position, and at the same time, she was not ready to sacrifice her life and her family. Even though this woman was not nominated, she plans to make another attempt in 2025 and expects to be nominated because she has established connections with some political party leaders.

Scenario Two

A woman aged 37 years contested a special seat through the youth wing in 2015 and a constituency seat in 2020 but was unsuccessful. She is preparing to make another attempt in 2025 for the constituency seat. This woman shared her experience of contesting through special seats and constituency positions, suggesting that the election process is dominated by men who sometimes use their positions to fulfil their interests. She further clarified that when men are in the decision-making, they use their power over women, and women are sometime desperate, especially when they want political support. Women are perceived to be vulnerable on political grounds because they do not have networks, financial resources, and experiences like males. The experience shared by this woman is a good example of the hurdles experienced by women in their political journey, yet most do not secure the nomination. Being asked to meet a political party leader at the hotel is not new to most women who have attempted to contest a political position. For a woman to survive the political processes, especially nomination, they must have money, a network, and support from the influential leaders in the political party. She also shared her bad experience of refusing sexual relationships to avoid sextortion scandals that may disqualify her from the election. This situation reflects the perceptions around women's participation in elections that if a woman joins politics, the likelihood of sexual relationships with political party leaders is high. Men dominate the political party leadership, and therefore, women feel that the political ground may not be safe for women, especially young girls, considering the number of women seeking nominations and the number of positions available.

that needs to be known. Further, voters need to be made aware of the leaders they wish to choose for various reasons, including keeping the process of getting the candidates private. Another area for improvement is that the President has the power to select the electoral board members, which gives no room for transparency. The appointed electoral commissioners and directors are more accountable to the President who appoints them, so they have less power to exercise election activities.

Further, the respondents showed that the system does not treat opposition parties fairly compared to the ruling party. It makes the electoral commission an arm of the government and thus disfavour independents. The other issue is related to ineffective representative democracy. That is, the elected members are more accountable to their national leaders rather than being accountable to their voters. It also involves the fact that when the presidential results are out, no one can go against them.

Generally, the challenges mentioned in the scenarios by respondents include lack of democracy in the entire process, sextortion, prevailing undemocratic practices within political parties before the primary election (interparty nomination process), and lack of transparency in electoral processes and the reluctance of few options of credible leaders as the mandatory requirement is to belong to a political party to be able to contest. Also, the freedom to contest for a political post is limited by the requirements for contestants who wish to participate in political positions. These experiences make qualified women think twice before deciding and sometimes decide not to join politics only because they do not have the money, connection, and influence to survive the nomination from the political party. The chances of having women who are not qualified are high because the qualified exit themselves from politics.

5.0 Conclusions

Including independent candidates in Tanzania's electoral system should be fastened by strict regulations to ensure that the electoral process is not cumbersome but strengthens democracy and accountability to the people. Introducing independent candidates broadens the scope of political participation and empowerment of the individuals who do not belong to political parties. To have the strongest democratic nation, independent candidates must be part of the whole process of the electoral system because not all Tanzanians are politically affiliated, and it does not mean that they have no constructive contributions (ideas) toward the nation's development. Independent candidates in the electoral system are significant for men and women contenders who feel constrained by party politics to present themselves as genuine alternatives to party candidates. Reforming the electoral system is critical to ensure that the system is more inclusive and accessible and fosters fairness, inclusivity, and equality. This would benefit independent contenders and enhance the overall democratic electoral system, ensuring that all citizens, regardless of gender or political affiliation, have the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the nation's governance. Through the Tanzania Electoral Commission, national dialogue should be encouraged for an easy transition period of having the candidates on board.

5.0 Recommendations

To strengthen democracy and enhance the accountability of the electorates or people in Tanzania, there is a pressing need to include independent candidates in the electoral system. This inclusion would provide greater access and opportunities for all groups, particularly women, who often face significant challenges in gaining support within the political party system. By allowing independent candidates to participate, the electoral process can become more inclusive and representative of the diverse voices and needs within society. To have an inclusive system, a national dialogue is highly recommended. Such a dialogue would engage stakeholders across the electoral system, ensuring a comprehensive and participatory approach to integrating independent candidates into the framework. This collaborative process would foster inclusivity and help build consensus on necessary reforms, strengthening democratic principles and accountability in Tanzania.

6.0 Limitation of the Study

The study encountered several limitations, including data availability and reliability challenges, limited media coverage of the topic, and potential cultural bias. The study employed a carefully designed methodology to address these challenges, utilise diverse data sources, and apply various research methods. These limitations were anticipated during the planning phase and mitigated through strategic approaches to ensure that the research on including independent candidates in the electoral system in Tanzania, particularly from a gendered perspective, accurate, insightful, and meaningful results. As a result, the study has enhanced its validity and inclusiveness, contributing valuable knowledge to the ongoing discourse on electoral reform, gender equality, and democratic participation in Tanzania. By addressing these challenges effectively, the research offers a robust foundation for informed decision-making and advocacy for more inclusive electoral practices in the country.

7.0 Areas for further studies

Including independent candidates in the democratic system represents a relatively new area, presenting noteworthy chances for further research to expand our understanding. Future studies might focus on themes such as the comparative analysis of independents across different electoral levels, the role of electoral laws and political reforms in shaping independents, and the gender dynamic forces promoting the electoral success of aforesaid independents. Such research could provide valuable insights into how Tanzania can strengthen its democratic processes, promote diversity within the political landscape, and foster more inclusive electoral participation. By addressing these areas, future studies can contribute meaningfully to the ongoing efforts to build a more representative and equitable electoral system in the country.

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