Research Article

A Philosophical Analysis of the Legitimacy of Political Power in Tanzania from a Lockean Perspective

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Abstract

This article conducts a philosophical analysis of the legitimacy of political power in Tanzania using John Locke’s political theory as a framework. It evolved from researcher’s observation and empirical studies that concerned political legitimacy in Tanzania. The lack of philosophical approach opened away for philosophical investigations and the necessity of involving philosophical views like that of the John Locke, in addressing of the shaking political legitimacy in Tanzania. The factors such as; allegations of corruption, restricted freedom of expression and limited access to justice, stimulated the author into philosophical inquiring, in accordance to John Locke’s political philosophy on the theory of legitimacy of political power. The Article examines how Locke’s principles of consent, protection of individual rights, and limited government apply within Tanzania’s socio-political context. The study highlights significant challenges to political legitimacy, including allegations of electoral manipulation, constraints on political freedoms, and governance issues such as corruption and lack of transparency. Recommendations are proposed to enhance democratic governance and accountability in Tanzania, emphasizing the critical need to strengthen electoral integrity, protect fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and assembly, and bolster institutional frameworks for transparency and judicial independence. By applying Locke’s principles, this analysis aims to contribute insights into the dynamics of political authority in Tanzania and suggest pathways for fostering a more inclusive, accountable, and legitimate governance framework aligned with the aspirations of its citizens.

Keywords

Political Legitimacy, John Locke, Tanzania, Consent, Governance

1. Introduction

The legitimacy of political power has been a subject of intense debate throughout human history [11]. Max Weber [32] argues that understanding the authority and power wielded by governments has been a core concern, with discussions addressing a range of issues from the moral foundations of political authority to the practical mechanisms by which governments maintain their power and ensure compliance from their citizens as emphasized by Rawls in his *A Theory of Justice* [27]. In this context, legitimacy is not merely about the legality of power but also its ethical justification and the extent to which it aligns with the values and aspirations of the governed [16]. This paper adopts John Locke’s political theory to provide a framework for examining the relationship between the government and its citizens, particularly in the context of Tanzania. Through this perspective, the paper aims to critically analyze the legitimacy of political power in Tanzania, offering insights into the strengths and weaknesses of its political system and providing recommendations for enhancing democratic governance and accountability.

Studying political legitimacy is crucial for understanding how governments justify their authority and maintain the consent of the governed. In democratic societies, legitimacy is foundational for ensuring that political power is exercised in a manner that is just, fair, and reflective of the will of the people [10]. For Tanzania, examining political legitimacy is particularly significant due to its complex political history and ongoing challenges in governance, transparency and human rights. Since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1961, Tanzania has undergone several political transformations [22]. The *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM) party has predominantly governed the country since its formation in 1977, raising questions about the legitimacy of its prolonged authority and the consent of the governed [13]. While Tanzania’s political system allows for popular participation through elections and political parties, the dominance of the CCM has led to concerns about genuine political competition and the representation of diverse voices [7]. Analyzing the inclusiveness and fairness of Tanzania’s electoral processes, as well as the government’s commitment to transparency, the rule of law and the protection of individual rights, is essential for understanding the legitimacy of its political power.

John Locke’s political theory emphasizes the importance of consent, the protection of individual rights, and the principle of limited government. Locke’s theory provides a robust framework for examining the relationship between the government and its citizens, particularly in the context of ensuring that political power is exercised in a manner that is just and legitimate. This paper employs Locke’s principles to investigate the legitimacy of political power in Tanzania. The research seeks to address the following questions: How does the Tanzanian government maintain its authority and to what extent does it have the consent of the governed? What are the key challenges to political legitimacy in Tanzania, including issues of corruption, restricted freedoms and judicial independence? How can democratic governance and accountability be enhanced in Tanzania?

The critical analysis of the legitimacy of political power in Tanzania in this paper aims to offer insights into the strengths and weaknesses of its political system and provide recommendations for enhancing democratic governance and accountability. Through the perspectives of Locke’s political theory, the study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on political legitimacy and the practical steps necessary to achieve a more just and representative government.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework of Political Legitimacy

The concept of political legitimacy [3] is central to understanding the moral and ethical foundations of political authority. Political legitimacy involves the rightfulness or justifiability of a government’s power and the acceptance of this authority by its citizens [1]. This legitimacy is crucial for maintaining social order and ensuring that governance is conducted with the consent and trust of the governed. Theoretical explorations of political legitimacy span classical to contemporary thought, offering various perspectives on what makes a government legitimate.

2.2. Classical and Contemporary Theories

Classical theories of political legitimacy, such as those posited by Aristotle and Plato, focus on the moral and ethical responsibilities of rulers. These theories emphasize the importance of virtue and justice in governance. Contemporary theories, however, have expanded to include sociological and legal dimensions. Max Weber’s typology of legitimate authority—traditional, charismatic and legal-rational—remains influential, highlighting the different bases upon which legitimacy can be claimed and maintained. Meanwhile, modern political theorists like John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas emphasize the role of democratic processes and communicative rationality in establishing legitimacy.

2.3. John Locke’s Theory of Political Legitimacy

John Locke's theory of political legitimacy is rooted in his ideas about the social contract and the state of nature. Locke’s political theory, elaborated in his seminal work *Two Treatises of Government*, asserts that political authority is derived from the consent of the governed. In Locke’s view, individuals in the state of nature have natural rights to life, liberty, and property. The formation of government is based on a social contract wherein individuals consent to establish a government to protect these natural rights. In this regard, the legitimacy of political power, therefore, hinges on the government’s ability to uphold the social contract and maintain the trust of the people. If a government fails in its duties or violates the rights of its citizens, it loses its legitimacy, and the people have the right to overthrow it.

2.4. Previous Research on Political Legitimacy in Tanzania

Research on political legitimacy in Tanzania has often focused on the historical and political evolution of the state, the dominance of the *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM) party, and the challenges of democratic governance.[[1]](#footnote-1) Studies have examined the legitimacy of Tanzania’s political system in the context of its single-party history, the transition to multi-party democracy, and the various socio-economic challenges the country faces. Issues such as corruption [8], restricted political freedoms,[[2]](#footnote-2) and the judiciary’s independence [6] are central themes in this research. However, there is a gap in the literature regarding an analysis of political legitimacy in Tanzania through the lens of Locke’s theory of political legitimacy.

2.5. Gaps in Existing Literature

While there is substantial research on political legitimacy, specific gaps remain, particularly concerning the application of classical political theories to contemporary political contexts like Tanzania. Existing studies often focus on empirical assessments of governance, corruption, and democratic processes without deeply engaging with theoretical frameworks that might offer new insights. There is a need for a more nuanced analysis that combines empirical data with theoretical perspectives, particularly those of John Locke, to better understand the legitimacy of political power in Tanzania.

3. Locke’s Theory of Legitimacy of Political Power

3.1. Social Contract Theory

John Locke’s theory of legitimacy is indirectly explained through his concept of the social contract. According to Locke, individuals in a state of nature agree to form a society and establish a government through mutual consent. This government is entrusted with the power to protect the natural rights of the people—life, liberty, and property. The legitimacy of this government is contingent upon the continuous trust and consent of the governed [9]. If the government fails to protect these rights or acts contrary to the common good, it becomes illegitimate. Locke argues that under such circumstances, people have the right to rebel and establish a new government.

3.2. State of Nature and Natural Law

For Locke, the state of nature is a condition of perfect freedom and equality where individuals are bound by natural law. This natural law dictates that individuals should not harm others in their life, liberty, or property. The inconveniences and uncertainties of the state of nature lead individuals to form a social contract, creating a government to enforce laws and protect rights. The legitimacy of this government is rooted in its adherence to natural law and its ability to safeguard the natural rights of its citizens.

3.3. Conditions for Government Legitimacy

According to Locke, a legitimate government must satisfy two conditions: it must be constituted through the consent of the governed, and it must continuously maintain the trust of the people. Political power should be exercised in accordance with the constitution and the principles of natural law [31]. When a government fails to fulfill its obligations, loses the trust of the people, or acts against the common good, it becomes illegitimate [12]. Locke emphasizes that it is not the people who rebel against the government, but rather the government that rebels against the people by exceeding its rightful authority.

3.4. The Fall of Government

Locke outlines several conditions under which a government may lose its legitimacy. These include the unlawful invasion of people’s properties, the dissolution of established legislative processes, and the failure to enforce the natural law and further the common good. When a government acts contrary to the purposes for which it was established, it enters a state of war with its citizens, justifying rebellion.[[3]](#footnote-3) Locke's theory underlines the idea that political power is fiduciary, held in trust for the people, and must be exercised with their consent and for their benefit.

4. Methodology

This article employs the analytical-synthetic and phenomenological methods to analyse the legitimacy of political power in Tanzania. The analytical method emphasizes clear, precise argumentation and evidence, aiming to break down complex systems of thought into simpler elements for better understanding.[[4]](#footnote-4) This approach, rooted in language clarity, formal logic, and rigorous argumentation, allows for a detailed examination of the components and their relationships within the political landscape.[[5]](#footnote-5) By integrating insights from various disciplines, the synthetic method aims to form a coherent account of complex systems, providing a more comprehensive understanding than merely examining individual parts.

The phenomenological method, originating from the work of Edmund Husserl, focuses on studying subjective experience and consciousness. It involves suspending preconceived notions to understand phenomena as they appear in experience. This method distinguishes between phenomena (perceptions or appearances) and noumena (the essence of things) and is particularly useful in interpreting the subjective experiences and narratives of participants.[[6]](#footnote-6) By listening to participants’ stories, phenomenology investigates the effects and perceptions of shared experiences, emphasizing the need to understand how individuals perceive themselves and the world around them.

Combining these methods, the research clarifies key concepts and variables related to the legitimacy of political power in Tanzania. The analytical-synthetic method helps break down and classify aspects of legitimacy and their interrelationships, developing patterns and themes that enhance the overall understanding. Meanwhile, the phenomenological method integrates the researcher's and participants' subjective experiences, providing a comprehensive view of the political dynamics. This combined approach ensures a thorough analysis of political legitimacy, incorporating both objective analysis and subjective experiences.

5. Historical and Political Context of Tanzania

Tanzania’s political landscape is a tapestry woven from its rich pre-colonial heritage and the transformative impacts of colonialism, independence struggles, and post-independence governance [5]. Prior to European colonization, Tanzania’s diverse territories were home to flourishing societies with distinct political structures. Chiefdoms, such as the *Hehe* under Chief Mkwawa in the central highlands, exemplified strong centralized governance systems that facilitated trade, agriculture, and territorial defense. These societies were shaped by local dynamics, including resource availability and inter-tribal relations, which influenced their political organization and social cohesion [15].

The arrival of German colonizers in the late 19th century and subsequent British rule introduced profound changes. Tanzania, then known as Tanganyika, became a contested frontier for European powers seeking to exploit its natural resources and establish colonial dominance. The imposition of colonial boundaries and the institution of indirect rule disrupted existing political entities, replacing traditional leadership structures with colonial administrators and disrupting local governance systems [18]. This period marked a pivotal shift towards centralized colonial authority and the marginalization of indigenous political institutions [2].

Independence in 1961 heralded a new era under the leadership of Julius Nyerere, Tanzania’s first President. Nyerere’s ideology of *Ujamaa* (African socialism) aimed at fostering national unity, economic self-reliance, and equitable development [23]. His policies included nationalizing key industries, redistributing land, and promoting cooperative farming [26]. The ruling party, CCM, emerged as a dominant force, shaping Tanzania’s post-independence political landscape. Despite the introduction of multi-party democracy in 1992, CCM has maintained its stronghold through successive electoral victories [17], reflecting its historical role in liberation struggles and enduring popularity.

5.1. Role and Dominance of Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM)

CCM has been central to Tanzania’s political trajectory since independence, evolving from a liberation movement into the country’s predominant political party [20]. Founded on principles of African socialism and nationalism, CCM facilitated Tanzania’s transition from colonial rule to sovereignty and played a pivotal role in shaping the nation’s governance structures [19]. The party’s organizational strength, grassroots support, and historical legacy have cemented its electoral dominance, enabling it to navigate political transitions and sustain stability amid socio-economic challenges [14].

5.2. Political Transformations and Current Situation

Tanzania’s political evolution has been marked by reforms aimed at democratization and governance enhancement [21]. The transition from single-party rule to multi-party democracy in 1992 represented a pivotal moment, promoting political pluralism and expanding opportunities for opposition parties and civil society engagement [28]. Despite these reforms, CCM has maintained electoral dominance, underscoring its resilience and adaptive capacity within Tanzania’s evolving political landscape.

Presently, Tanzania operates as a presidential constitutional republic, with the President serving as both head of state and government.[[7]](#footnote-7) The political framework includes a multi-tiered system of governance comprising executive, legislative, and judicial branches [24]. While constitutional provisions safeguard civil liberties and rights, including freedom of speech and assembly, challenges persist, including concerns over electoral transparency, human rights abuses and governmental accountability. Calls for constitutional reforms reflect ongoing debates on governance effectiveness and the need for inclusive political processes that uphold democratic principles and foster national unity.

6. The Political Legitimacy in Tanzania from a Lockean Perspective

John Locke’s political philosophy provides a framework to evaluate the legitimacy of governments based on principles such as consent, protection of individual rights, and limited government. Applying Locke’s principles to Tanzania’s political context reveals both strengths and challenges.

6.1. Principle of Consent in Tanzania’s Political System

Locke posited that political legitimacy arises from the consent of the governed, implying that governments derive their authority from the people they govern. In Tanzania, the principle of consent has been challenged by allegations of electoral manipulation and suppression of opposition voices [25]. For instance, reports of intimidation tactics during elections and restrictions on political freedoms raise concerns about the fairness of Tanzania’s electoral process. These actions undermine the foundational idea that political authority should be based on the consent and choice of the people. The dominance of the ruling party, CCM, has contributed to perceptions that elections may not always reflect genuine popular will, thereby questioning the legitimacy derived from consent.

6.2. Protection of Individual Rights

Locke emphasized the protection of natural rights, including life, liberty, and property, as essential for legitimate governance. In Tanzania, despite constitutional guarantees of rights such as freedom of speech and assembly, there have been instances of rights violations, including suppression of media freedoms and crackdowns on dissent [4]. The government’s actions, such as using excessive force against protesters and political opponents, undermine the protection of individual rights as envisioned by Locke [29]. Moreover, restrictions on civil society organizations and limitations on judicial independence further erode the safeguarding of individual liberties.

6.3. Principle of Limited Government

Locke advocated for limited government, where governmental authority is restrained by the rule of law and separation of powers. In Tanzania, the concentration of power in the executive branch, particularly in the presidency, raises concerns about checks and balances. The lack of effective oversight mechanisms and the executive’s influence over other branches of government weaken the principle of limited government [30]. Additionally, allegations of corruption and misuse of public resources suggest a deviation from the common good and the responsible use of governmental power as defined by Locke.

6.4. Challenges to Political Legitimacy in Tanzania

Tanzania faces several significant challenges that undermine its political legitimacy from a Lockean perspective. One of the foremost issues is corruption, which not only erodes public trust but also diverts resources away from public welfare. Allegations of corruption scandals and lack of transparency in governance processes have perpetuated a perception that the government prioritizes personal gain over the common good. This violates Locke’s principle that government should act in accordance with the consent and for the benefit of the governed, rather than for personal interests or enrichment.

Another critical challenge is the restriction of freedoms, including freedom of speech, press, and assembly. These rights are fundamental for a democratic society as they enable citizens to express dissent, hold public officials accountable, and participate actively in governance. However, in Tanzania, there have been instances of suppressing media freedoms, cracking down on dissenting voices, and limiting the activities of civil society organizations. Such actions not only stifle democratic discourse but also undermine the principle of government legitimacy, which Locke argued should protect individual liberties as a cornerstone of its authority.

Additionally, the limited access to justice in Tanzania poses a significant barrier to political legitimacy. Weaknesses in the judicial system, such as political interference and delays in delivering justice, undermine the rule of law and diminish public confidence in legal institutions. Citizens’ ability to seek redress against governmental abuses or to challenge unfair policies is compromised, further eroding the perceived fairness and legitimacy of the government’s actions.

Moreover, the dominance of the CCM party in Tanzanian politics presents a challenge to pluralism and fair political competition. While multi-party democracy exists formally, the CCM’s longstanding control over political institutions and electoral processes has raised concerns about the fairness and inclusivity of Tanzania’s democratic practices. Challenges faced by opposition parties and limited success in achieving meaningful political change suggest institutional barriers that restrict broader participation and representation in governance.

From a Lockean perspective, Tanzania’s government faces significant challenges to its legitimacy. The failure to uphold the principles of consent, protection of individual rights, and limited government raises doubts about the government’s commitment to democratic governance and the social contract with its citizens. The concentration of power, restrictions on freedoms, and allegations of corruption further underscore the erosion of political legitimacy.

6.5. Lockean Solution to Illegitimate Power

To address these challenges and restore political legitimacy in Tanzania, adopting Locke’s principles offers a strategic framework. First and foremost, enhancing democratic processes and electoral integrity is crucial. This involves establishing independent electoral bodies with the mandate to oversee elections impartially, ensuring fairness, transparency, and credibility in the electoral process. Strengthening legal frameworks to protect freedom of expression, assembly, and press is equally essential, promoting an environment where citizens can freely engage in political discourse without fear of reprisal.

Furthermore, reinforcing the independence and efficacy of the judiciary is imperative. Implementing measures to reduce political interference, ensuring timely delivery of justice, and enhancing judicial accountability are necessary steps. A robust and impartial judiciary not only upholds the rule of law but also serves as a check on executive power, thereby fostering greater trust in governmental institutions and bolstering their legitimacy.

Limiting the concentration of power within the executive branch is another critical aspect of Locke’s prescription. Implementing effective checks and balances between different branches of government—executive, legislative, and judicial—helps prevent abuses of power and ensures that decision-making processes reflect broader societal interests rather than narrow partisan agendas. Devolving authority to local governments can also empower communities and enhance citizen participation in governance, promoting accountability and responsiveness at all levels of administration.

Finally, combating corruption through enhanced transparency measures and accountability mechanisms is essential. Requiring public officials to disclose assets, strengthening anti-corruption agencies, and promoting a culture of transparency in government operations are vital steps towards rebuilding public trust and reinforcing the legitimacy of governmental authority.

7. Discussion

Tanzania’s political situation is deeply influenced by its colonial legacy and subsequent post-independence development, presenting challenges to its legitimacy when viewed through the prism of John Locke’s political philosophy. Locke emphasized principles such as consent, protection of individual rights, and limited government as essential for legitimate governance. However, in Tanzania, the principle of consent is under scrutiny due to allegations of electoral manipulation and constraints on political freedoms. The overwhelming dominance of the ruling party, CCM, has cast doubt on the fairness of electoral processes and their alignment with the genuine will of the populace. Incidents of voter intimidation and suppression of opposition voices further erode the foundational notion that political authority should derive from the consent and choice of the governed.

Furthermore, the protection of individual rights in Tanzania remains precarious despite constitutional guarantees. While freedoms of speech, press, and assembly are theoretically safeguarded, there have been documented cases of media censorship, crackdowns on dissent, and limitations on civil society activities. These actions not only contravene Locke's principle of protecting natural rights but also diminish public trust in governmental institutions. A robust defense of these rights is crucial for nurturing a democratic culture where citizens can freely express their opinions, participate in governance, and hold their leaders accountable.

Moreover, the principle of limited government, as advocated by Locke, faces significant challenges in Tanzania. The concentration of power in the executive branch, particularly in the presidency, limits effective checks and balances within government. Allegations of corruption, misuse of public resources, and lack of transparency further undermine the government's legitimacy and its ability to act in the public interest. Strengthening institutional frameworks to promote transparency, accountability, and judicial independence is essential for curtailing abuses of power and restoring public confidence in governmental processes.

8. Implications for Democratic Governance

The implications of these challenges for democratic governance in Tanzania are profound. Firstly, enhancing electoral integrity is critical to restoring public trust in democratic institutions. Tanzania should prioritize reforms that ensure independent oversight of electoral processes, fair competition among political parties, and protection of voters' rights. Strengthening the capacity and independence of electoral bodies can mitigate electoral irregularities and enhance the legitimacy of elected representatives.

Secondly, protecting and promoting individual rights is essential for fostering a vibrant democratic society. Tanzania must repeal laws that restrict freedom of expression, dismantle barriers to media independence, and create an enabling environment for civil society organizations to operate freely. By safeguarding these rights, the government can empower citizens to actively participate in political processes, contribute to policy debates, and advocate for social change.

Thirdly, promoting a system of limited government requires reinforcing checks and balances across all branches of government. Tanzania should enhance legislative oversight, judicial independence, and anti-corruption measures to prevent abuses of power and ensure accountability. Devolving authority to local governments and promoting decentralization can also empower communities, enhance service delivery, and promote responsive governance at the grassroots level.

9. Conclusion

In examining the legitimacy of political power in Tanzania through the lens of John Locke’s political philosophy, this study illuminates both the enduring relevance of Locke's principles and the stark challenges facing Tanzania's governance. Locke's emphasis on consent, protection of individual rights, and limited government provides a robust framework for evaluating the dynamics of governance in Tanzania. However, the analysis reveals significant discrepancies between these principles and the realities of Tanzania's political landscape, which raise profound concerns about the legitimacy of governmental authority.

The principle of consent, foundational to Locke's theory, is critically compromised in Tanzania by persistent allegations of electoral manipulation and severe restrictions on political freedoms. The dominance of the ruling party, CCM, casts doubt on the fairness of electoral processes and the genuine representation of diverse voices, thereby challenging the notion that political authority derives from the consent of the governed. Instances of voter intimidation and suppression of opposition voices further erode the legitimacy derived from authentic popular will.

Moreover, the protection of individual rights in Tanzania remains precarious despite constitutional guarantees. Instances of media censorship, crackdowns on dissent, and constraints on civil society activities undermine Locke's principle of safeguarding natural rights. These actions not only infringe upon fundamental freedoms but also undermine public trust in governmental institutions, essential for ensuring legitimacy and fostering democratic participation.

The principle of limited government, advocated by Locke to prevent abuses of power, faces formidable challenges in Tanzania. The concentration of executive authority, coupled with allegations of corruption and a lack of transparency, weaken effective checks and balances within government. Strengthening institutional frameworks to promote transparency, accountability, and judicial independence is imperative to restore public confidence in governmental processes and uphold the legitimacy of political power.

While Tanzania has made strides towards democratic governance, persistent challenges threaten the integrity and legitimacy of its political system. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to enhance electoral integrity, protect individual rights, and strengthen democratic institutions. By upholding principles of consent, rights protection, and limited government, Tanzania can forge a path towards a more inclusive, accountable, and legitimate governance framework that reflects the aspirations and will of its citizens.

Abbreviations

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| CCM | Chama Cha Mapinduzi (Revolution Party) |

Author Contributions

Robert Masandiko is the primary author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Thomas Marwa Monchena (PhD), is the co-author, his contributions on supervision and validation.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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