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Ideologies, Power Dynamics, and Discursive Strategies in the Twitter (X) Discourse on Electoral Law Reforms in Tanzania: A Public Sphere Analysis

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Abstract

This study explores the ideologies, power dynamics, and discursive strategies in Tanzania's X (Twitter) discourse on electoral law reforms, framed through Jürgen Habermas' Public Sphere Theory. Focusing on influential accounts like JamiiForum and Maria Sarungi, this research investigates how Tanzanian social media has become a contested arena where issues of electoral integrity, governance, and political accountability are debated. Analyzing tweets from August to October 2023, it uncovers a stark ideological divide: the ruling CCM is frequently seen as resistant to change, while opposition parties, especially CHADEMA, align with public calls for democratic reforms. This research examines the rhetorical and linguistic strategies, such as code-switching between Swahili and English, persuasive rhetoric, and slogans, that shape discourse. These strategies serve to connect with both local and global audiences, allowing certain voices to dominate while marginalizing critical perspectives. Positive framing of particular narratives often promotes a one-sided view, limiting the scope for comprehensive engagement. The findings reveal a polarized public sphere in which power, language, and ideology interact to shape the discourse on electoral reforms, potentially stifling consensus-building and narrowing public debate. By drawing attention to the exclusive nature of some dominant narratives, the study highlights the need for a more balanced approach that includes diverse viewpoints. It concludes by recommending more inclusive discourse practices on social media to foster meaningful civic engagement and policy dialogue, advancing Tanzania's aspirations for democratic reform and inclusive governance.

Keywords: Social media, political discourse, Tanzania electoral law reforms, discursive strategies, and power dynamics

1.INTRODUCTION

Social media communication has become pervasive in today's world, influencing a wide range of social spheres. It permeates homes, organizations, schools, government institutions, non-governmental organizations, religious bodies, and political parties. It is undeniable that social media discourse has become a defining feature of contemporary communication. Platforms like X (formerly Twitter) play a particularly central role in political discourse, with politicians leveraging them as tools for self-promotion and as means to

directly engage with their potential voters.

The rise of social media has been studied extensively, and earlier research by Babeiya (2023) revealed that the increase in social media usage in Tanzania has not significantly altered the political power dynamics, as the social media following for both opposition and ruling political parties remains relatively balanced. This finding challenges the notion that social media usage can disrupt entrenched power structures, with both opposition and ruling parties having similar social media followings.

On the other hand, Smith (2018) argued that higher social media engagement correlates strongly with increased youth political participation, including activities like attending rallies and sharing political content. This highlights the potential of social media to mobilize specific demographics and contribute to greater political engagement.

Tufekci (2012) emphasized that social media enables rapid dissemination of information, coordination of activities, and amplification of protest messages, thereby accelerating political mobilization efforts. Her study suggests that activists should master these tools to enhance the organization and communication of protests.

However, Bakshy (2015) pointed out the prevalence of echo chambers on platforms like Twitter, where users primarily engage with those who share similar views, contributing to political polarization. Social media algorithms and user behavior can reinforce existing political beliefs, making it harder for users to encounter opposing viewpoints. Bakshy recommends diversifying content recommendations to counter this tendency.

This study aims to explore the underlying ideologies, values, and assumptions embedded in the Twitter discourse on electoral law reforms in Tanzania. By examining how power relations shape these discussions, the research provided insights into how political ideologies and strategic communication unfold on social media platforms. This study also seeks to contribute to understanding the socio-political contexts that influence and are reflected in online political debates.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Literature Review

In Tanzanian political discourse, the dynamics of communication among political stakeholders, including politicians, the media, and the public, are constantly evolving (Shash, 2009; McNair, 2017). Political communication involves the exchange of information aimed at influencing opinions and decisions, through persuasion or dialogue. Doris A. Graber (2005) emphasizes that political communication encompasses the creation, dissemination, and reception of messages that can shape public opinion and impact political behavior.

The advent of new technologies, especially the internet, has significantly transformed these communication dynamics. Scholars have approached the impact of emerging communication technologies on politics from both instrumental and dialogical perspectives (Gainous, 2018). Proponents of the equalisation theory suggest that digital platforms democratize information, reduce barriers to political participation, and encourage civil deliberation (Spierings, 2019). Conversely, the instrumental or normalisation theory argues that new technologies serve as tools that reinforce existing political power structures, with social media merely becoming another instrument for political elites during campaigns (Bimber, 2003; Jungherr, 2016).

In Tanzania, social media platforms such as political blogs and Twitter are increasingly seen as tools for bridging the gap between citizens and their political representatives, offering direct channels for communication that bypass traditional political intermediaries like political parties and mainstream media (Zerfass, 2016). These platforms facilitate direct interactions and have proven valuable in overcoming geographical and infrastructural communication challenges (Allcott, 2017).

Social media and ICTs, therefore, hold the potential to redefine representative democracy by enabling

interactive communication between politicians and the public. This model of political engagement emphasizes ongoing dialogue and participatory mechanisms, transforming how democracy is practiced (Engesser, 2017; Zhuravskaya, 2020).

The concept of political discourse, as central to this study, has various interpretations. In political science, it refers to the forms of expression, such as speeches, debates, media coverage, and online discussions, that shape public opinion and influence political behavior (John, 2015). Sociologists view political discourse as communication and interaction around political issues within a society, focusing on how individuals and groups express, negotiate, and contest political beliefs and values. This perspective aligns closely with the views of linguists, particularly in terms of how language, symbols, and narratives contribute to shaping collective identities, social norms, and power relations within communities (Amaglobeli, 2017).

Amaglobeli (2017) offers a practical definition of political discourse by distinguishing between "dominant" and "minor" discourses. Dominant discourse refers to the arguments, views, and messages communicated by those in positions of power, while minor discourse pertains to the views expressed by individuals or groups with lower social status. Amaglobeli defines political discourse as a "manipulative linguistic strategy" that serves ideological goals, depending on the power dynamics between communicators.

With the widespread use of social media, its influence on political discourse has grown exponentially. It is estimated that 4.95 billion people globally use social media, with X (Twitter) alone having 368 million users from December 2022 to November 2023. This demonstrates the centrality of social media as a tool for communication in modern political discourse.

While social media has been credited with promoting democracy and supporting movements for political change, it also plays a role in political polarization. Scholars like Yarchi (2020) and Sunstein (2018) suggest that platforms like Twitter contribute to the fragmentation of political discourse, creating echo chambers where users are exposed primarily to information that aligns with their existing beliefs.

In the context of political decision-making, scholars examine how political actors, including leaders, institutions, and citizens, make choices that influence governance and policy. These decisions are often shaped by rational choice theory, institutional analysis, public choice theory, and other decision-making models, all of which play a critical role in understanding the political dynamics at play on platforms like Twitter (Schwartz, 2013; Engesser, 2017).

2.3 Empirical Literature Review

The empirical literature search for this study utilized systematic techniques, employing keywords such as "social media," "political discourse," "political engagement," and "decision-making." Through platforms like Google Scholar and ResearchGate, a wide range of scholarly articles and books were reviewed to ensure the credibility and relevance of the literature. This approach aligns with the aim of identifying existing research on the influence of social media on political discourse, especially in the context of electoral law reforms in Tanzania.

At the core of the study, the researcher is defining the central meaning of political discourse. Political discourse takes different meanings in different fields. political science means forms of expression, including speeches, debates, media coverage, and online discussions, shaping public opinion and influencing political behaviour. Political analysis often examines language use, power dynamics, and the construction of meaning to understand how communication contributes to political processes and ideologies (John, 2015). Sociologists view political discourse as communication and interaction around political issues within a society. This includes how individuals and groups express, negotiate, and contest their political beliefs and values. Sociologists often share their views with linguists in many fields. For example, just like linguists, sociologists' perspectives on political discourse often focus on how language, symbols, and narratives contribute to forming

collective identities, social norms, and power relations within the given community or society. For that matter analysing political discourse from a sociological standpoint helps understand the social dynamics and structures that shape political communication.

Amaglobeli (2017) attempted to define political discourse practically. He characterizes his definition as schemata, which allows a reader to grasp the schemata of the term easily. To grasp what political discourse is, he suggests that one has to first understand the type of discourse, and to him, the types are dominant discourse and minor discourse.

In his view dominant discourse refers to kinds of debates, discussions, views, and arguments communicated by people who hold relatively higher positions and power in society. In contrast, minor discourse is a kind of communication and opinions and behaviors communicated or suggested to the community by the people who hold relatively lower positions status, and commands in the community (Amaglobeli, 2017).

Therefore, Amoglobeli defines political discourse by considering the social status and elitism of the communicators involved in the communication, which makes him contend that political discourse is a "manipulative linguistic strategy which serves concrete (ideological) goals" (Amaglobeli, 2017:19).

To gain insights into what political discourse is, Amaglobel employed the following keywords: Discourse, dominant discourse, discursive strategy, and frame.

The extent to which people use social media is now so huge. It is estimated that 4.95 billion people are on social media. The number of worldwide X/Twitter users from Dec 2022 to Nov 2023 was 368 million.

The statistics justify the idea that social media are the norm for communication, and so businesspersons, CSOs, government, and politicians need to learn how to best leverage these platforms.

Despite its role in overturning dictatorship regimes in the Arab world, social media still plays a critical role in democratic countries (Castells 2013). It promotes more freedom and challenges the traditional understanding of democracy, which championed only certain views or ways of expressing views, by offering a 'free public space of the internet.'

Decision-making is part and parcel of political discourse. Whenever 'politicians' engage in discussions, debates, and communication, the aim is to influence people and policymakers or make some decisions in favour of certain ideologies, values, and beliefs. Literature often explores decision-making as the central theme, delving into choices' complexities, consequences, and psychological aspects. Characters in literature grapple with moral dilemmas, personal and societal expectations, and the impact of their decisions and the impact of their decisions on themselves and others.

In politics, scholars discuss decision-making through various lenses and frameworks. Political decision-making involves analysing processes by which political actors, such as leaders, institutions, and citizens, make choices that impact governance and policies.

Key aspects that scholars discuss include (1) rational choice theory which assumes that political actors make decisions by weighing the costs and benefits of different options to maximize their utility or interests(Schwartz, 2013) (2) institutional analysis: In this scholars examine how political institutions and structures influence decision making processes, considering factors like checks and balances, separation of powers, ad bureaucratic procedures (3) public choice theory: with this theory scholars extends economic principles to political decision-making ,studying how individuals and groups makes decisions that affect the public interest (4) game theory: scholars use game theory to analyze strategic interactions among political actors, exploring how decisions are influenced by the actions and reactions of others (5) behavioral approaches: Scholars also consider psychological and behavioral factors in decision making, acknowledging that political actors may not always act in a strictly rational ways. Cognitive biases and emotional influences are considered (6) policy process models: Decision-making In politics is often studied within the extent of policy formulation and implementation, considering stages such as agenda-setting, policy analysis, and

evaluation.

Traditionally, political discourses took place and were analyzed from traditional platforms such as political offices, political rallies, TV shows, newspaper columns, letters to the editors, and many others. However, with the advent of social media, it seems platforms to discuss issues and politics affecting people's lives have been and are still transforming or shifting into 'novel ones'—social media. To a large extent, people depend on social media to air out/share and distribute or access and consume views/perspectives and contents that affect and enrich understanding and impact political discourse and decision-making.

With the novel platforms, citizens (subjects) not only discuss and debate issues like they used to (Selective exposure theory by Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfield, 1944, 1948; Cultural studies theory

by Stuart Hall, 1970; Network Society by Manuel Castells, 1996). Technology is probably affecting the manner and possibly the quality of their political discussions and debates (McLuhan, 1964). Some scholars contended that despite giving citizens more voice, social media such as Twitter and Facebook contribute to political polarisation (Yarchi, 2020; Sunstein, 2018; Messing, 2015).

Different scholars define decision-making differently. Some refer to decision-making as the cognitive process through which individuals or groups choose a course of action from various alternatives (Hrbert Simon, Daniel Kahneman,2011). It is also understood as a mental activity that involves assessing information and potential outcomes and selecting the most suitable option based on preferences, goals, and available resources.

Decision-making is influenced by cognitive biases, emotions, and external constraints, and it plays a crucial role in personal, organizational, and societal contexts. Scholars often analyse decision-making models, strategies, and the psychological and social aspects that shape individuals or groups' choices.

Social media plays a significant role in today's elections and politics in general. Scholars credit social media in some countries for determining the success of politicians, including having a strong influence on huge sections of people using social media, mostly youths, to the extent of winning elections (Antonio,2023).

Likewise, leaders and politicians in many countries, including India and the U.S., and many both European and Arabic countries, increasingly dedicate their campaign strategy and time to social media and to encouraging youth to use social media so that they easily excel in elections (Patil Vikrant,2017; Ravi Tondaq,2014). The situation and trend are the same even in African countries (Pellegrino, 2023).

However, social media have different tastes and influences on the citizens. While some prefer Facebook and others prefer Twitter and others prefer other kinds of social media. In the U.S., for example, social media—Facebook in particular—is credited to have contributed to the victory of former U.S. president Barack Obama (Dutta S, Fraser M,2008). Also, according to (Jennifer Golbeck, 2010; Sounman, 2019) almost all senators in the congress have official Twitter accounts.

Moreover, the influence of social media is relative depending on a person's exposure level. This is to say the greater the exposure the higher the influence. Pande Navodita & Shukla Ashrita (2016) contend that people residing in urban areas are relatively exposed to social media and so are more highly influenced than those residing in rural areas.

2.3 Empirical Literature Review

2.3.1 Methodology used to review literature

The methodology used for the literature review involved a systematic approach to searching relevant materials. Initially, the researcher employed a systematic literature search, where information was gathered by inputting keywords into search engines. These keywords were derived from the working title by identifying the independent and dependent variables.

The keywords used in the search were: social media, political discourse, political engagement, and decision-making. The search followed the order in which the keywords appeared, although alternative terms were occasionally used to expand the search.

The researcher primarily relied on Google Scholar and ResearchGate to locate peer-reviewed scholarly articles and books. These published works were then carefully scrutinised for authenticity, based on specific criteria.

The process unfolded as follows:

i). Initial Search: The researcher began by searching the keyword 'social media', which returned 282 potentially relevant articles. A quick review of the titles and abstracts was conducted to determine whether these articles were related to the required content.

ii). Screening for Inclusion: At this stage, the researcher read the abstracts of the 282 articles identified in the initial search. After this review, it was determined that only 33 articles were relevant and suitable for further analysis.

iii). Quality and Eligibility Assessment: The researcher then skimmed the full-text articles to assess their quality. Journal articles and books published by reputable publishers were deemed high-quality research and included in the review.

Other types of publications, such as technical reports and online presentations, were excluded due to the absence of a peer-review process. Only reports with strong merit, such as those with well-cited references, were reconsidered and included.

The quality and eligibility assessment process were peer-reviewed; the researcher consulted with fellow scholars to assess the acceptability of the material. Any concerns regarding the quality of the sources were carefully considered before they were either included or excluded from the review. After thorough evaluation, 7 studies were excluded due to a lack of methodological guidance, and 4 were excluded because the full text could not be located. In total, 20 studies from the initial search were selected for further full-text analysis.

Additionally, other literature was sourced using the snowballing technique. The researcher employed both backward and forward searching to identify relevant articles. Once a highly relevant article was located, the researcher examined the references within that article to identify further materials. This process resulted in the inclusion of additional articles in the review.

2.3.1 Political Discourse

Smith (2018) explored how social media platforms impact the political participation of young adults. The study adopted a longitudinal survey of a diverse sample of young adults, measuring their political engagement and social media usage over time. The study found a strong correlation between higher social media engagement and increased youth political participation, including attending rallies and sharing political content. Social media plays a significant role in mobilising young adults for political activism. The study therefore recommends that political parties and organisations should prioritise digital engagement strategies to harness the energy of young activists.

Bakshy (2015) investigated the existence of echo chambers on Twitter and their contribution to political polarisation. The study adopted a computational analysis of Twitter user interactions, measuring the extent of exposure to diverse viewpoints. Echo chambers are prevalent on Twitter, with users primarily engaging with

like-minded individuals, leading to increased polarisation. Social media algorithms and user behaviour contribute to the reinforcement of existing political beliefs. The study recommends that social media platforms should diversify content recommendations and users should actively seek out opposing viewpoints.

Bennett (2012) analysed the relationship between online political activism and offline political engagement. The study adopted a mixed-method approach, combining surveys, in-depth interviews, and behavioural tracking of activists' online and offline activities. Online activists are more likely to engage in offline political activities, such as attending town hall meetings and volunteering for campaigns. Online activism serves as a stepping stone to in-person political participation. The study therefore recommended that organisations should integrate online and offline strategies for a comprehensive activist experience.

Vaccari (2015) examined the impact of hashtag movements on shaping political discourse and policy debates. The study conducted content analysis of tweets using popular political hashtags, combined with expert interviews. Hashtag movements generate public awareness, influence media coverage, and lead to policy discussions, but their impact on policy change varies. Hashtags are effective tools for agenda-setting and raising awareness about political issues. Activists should strategically use hashtags to initiate broader public conversations and push for policy change.

2.3.2 Social Media usage in politics

Tufekci (2012) investigated how social media platforms facilitate political mobilisation during protests and social movements. The study used ethnographic observations, participant interviews, and analysis of social media content related to specific protest events. Social media enables rapid dissemination of information, coordination of activities, and amplification of protest messages. Social media accelerates the pace and reach of political mobilisation efforts. The study recommends that activists should master social media tools to enhance protest organisation and communication.

2.3.3 Social Media and Decision-making

Keith (2023) investigated the impact of social media usage on political activism. The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low-cost technique as compared to field research. revealed that there exists a contextual and methodological gap relating to the impact of social media on political activism. The empirical review revealed that social media amplifies the speed and reach of activism efforts. The instantaneous dissemination of information, real-time communication, and dynamic organization have all been instrumental in enabling activists to orchestrate protests, raise awareness, and mobilize support for critical issues. Successful movements have demonstrated the power of synergizing digital advocacy with physical participation, demonstrating that online platforms serve as a means to an end, rather than the end itself.

Pennycook (2018) examined the impact of social media on the quality of political discourse and the spread of misinformation. The study conducted content analysis of social media posts discussing political topics, combined with surveys assessing users' perceptions of content accuracy. Social media contains a mix of informed political discussions and misinformation, influencing users' political knowledge. Efforts are needed to enhance media literacy and promote fact-checking practices on social media. Social media platforms should implement stricter content moderation and provide users with tools to identify reliable sources.

Freddie (2020) examined how a social media video about the environment can spark political deliberation and participation. Drawing from normative democratic theory, an experimental design was employed to test the effect of the video in engaging citizens in the political process and fostering interpersonal conversations, both online and face-to-face. At the core of these normative democratic outcomes is information efficacy, as

individuals are moved to discuss the issue and act to protect the environment from the threat of single-use plastics. The results reveal that social media have the potential to have a positive democratic influence.3. Methodology

The qualitative method was chosen for this study. The study was conducted from July to August 2024.The researcher used a codesheet to collect data from two x accounts; Jamiiforum and Maria Sarangi where a sample of 168 tweets were used, out of which 28 were main tweets and 140 replies or tweets from discussants. The 140 replies were the results of 5 taken for each main tweet. The two main accounts are owned by journalists who are political activists. The study was guided by Public Sphere Theory (PST) developed by the Frankfurt School and articulated by German sociologist Jürgen Habermas. The theory posits that both old and new media serve as integral components of public spheres and describes the public sphere as a realm where public opinion can be formed and access is guaranteed to all citizens, ensuring inclusivity and openness.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 RESULTS

The objective sought to explore and identify the deeper, often implicit beliefs, values, and assumptions embedded in the discussions about electoral law reforms on Twitter (now X) in Tanzania. It aimed to reveal how these underlying ideologies influence people's discussion of electoral law reforms, including the power dynamics that shape these conversations. Essentially, the objective was to understand how power relations—such as who held influence and who was marginalized—were reflected and reinforced in the discourse on this social media platform. This analysis would help to understand the broader political context and the forces driving the debate on electoral law reforms in Tanzania.

The discourse surrounding electoral law reforms on Twitter (now X) in Tanzania revealed a complex interplay of underlying ideologies, values, and assumptions that significantly shape the nature of the conversation. These elements influence the content and tone of the discussions and reflect the power dynamics at play, particularly regarding which voices are dominant and which are marginalized. This section explores these deeper currents within the discourse and their implications for understanding the broader context of electoral reforms in Tanzania.

The findings on discourse ideologies in Tanzanian politics highlighted the intricate dynamics of power, strategy, and advocacy in pursuit of electoral law reforms. While well-intentioned, President Samia Suluhu's emphasis on civic engagement clashes with the public's demand for immediate constitutional change, revealing a significant disconnect between the governing elite and the citizenry. Political figures like Hawa Ghasia and Tundu Lissu use discursive strategies to position their parties favorably, reflecting the ongoing struggle for influence and control.

Despite these challenges, the discourse favoring opposition parties, led by the main opposition party Chadema, underscored a strong commitment to electoral law and constitutional reforms and democratic values. The promotion of free and fair elections, electoral law reforms, and alignment with international human rights standards highlights a vision of democracy that resonates with both national and international audiences.

Table 3.1 Data on Thematic Analysis of Discourse on Electoral Reforms: Ideologies, Power Dynamics, Group Affiliations, and Linguistic Strategies

Tweet Number	Tweet	Variable	Code	Possible Value
1	Electoral reforms are crucial to uphold democratic values and ensure fair representation for all.	Discourse Ideologies	Ideo-Val	Democratic value
2	The current reforms are an authoritarian move to centralize power and silence opposition.	Discourse Ideologies	Ideo-Val	Authoritarian values
3	Prominent politicians dominate the conversation on electoral reforms, sidelining grassroots voices.	Power Relations	Pow-Rel	Dominant voices
4	Civil society groups are struggling to be heard amid the power struggles between major political parties.	Power Relations	Pow-Rel	Power struggles
5	This new reform is strongly supported by our party as a step towards transparent governance.	Group Affiliations	Gro-Aff	Political parties
6	Academic institutions have published multiple studies advocating for these electoral changes.	Group Affiliations	Gro-Aff	Academic institutions
7	Most people are conforming to the belief that these reforms are necessary for a better future.	Social Norms	Soc-Nor	Conformity
8	There is significant resistance to the reforms, with many challenging the norm that the current system is flawed.	Social Norms	Soc-Nor	Resistance
9	Using persuasive appeals, reform advocates emphasize fairness and equality.	Discursive Devices	Disc-Stra	Persuasive appeals
10	Opponents of the reforms are engaging in sloganeering, using catchy phrases to rally support.	Discursive Devices	Disc-Stra	Sloganeering
11	The tone of this discussion is overwhelmingly positive, focusing on the benefits of reform.	Linguistic Features	Ling-Feat	Tone (Positive)

(Source: Research data 2024)

The table above reflects various ideologies, values, and assumptions. It also highlights the power dynamics influencing these discussions, with different stakeholders expressing their positions on the proposed changes. This analysis examines the discourse's underlying ideologies, values, and assumptions and the power relations that shape the debate.

3.1.1 Ideologies and Values

Democratic Values vs. Authoritarianism

The discourse on electoral reforms reveals a sharp division between advocates of democratic principles and critics who view the reforms as tools for consolidating authoritarian power. For instance, some tweets emphasize the significance of electoral reforms in promoting democratic values and ensuring fair representation (see Table 3.1). One such tweet states, "Electoral reforms are crucial to uphold democratic values and ensure fair representation for all." This perspective underscores the belief in transparency, fairness, and inclusivity as essential elements of democracy.

Conversely, other tweets argue that the reforms are authoritarian, designed to centralize power and silence opposition (see Table 4.1). For example, a tweet reads, "The current reforms are an authoritarian move to centralize power and silence opposition." This highlights fears that the ruling party, CCM, might use these reforms to entrench its dominance, reflecting broader concerns about the erosion of democratic freedoms and the suppression of dissenting voices.

3.1.2 Group Affiliations and Support for Reforms

The discourse on electoral reforms also reveals the affiliations of different groups, such as political parties and academic institutions, in shaping opinions about the reforms. For instance, some tweets highlight political parties expressing support for the reforms as a move toward transparent governance (see Table 3.1). One tweet states, "This new reform is strongly supported by our party as a step towards transparent governance," signaling alignment with the values of transparency and accountability, which are seen as essential for fostering political stability.

Academic institutions have also contributed to the discourse by publishing studies that advocate for the reforms (see Table 3.1). For example, a tweet notes, "Academic institutions have published multiple studies advocating for these electoral changes." This contribution reflects an underlying assumption that academic research offers objective insights, reinforcing the legitimacy of the reforms and fostering informed, evidence-based debate.

3.1.3 Power Relations

Dominant Voices and Power Struggles

Power dynamics play a crucial role in shaping the discourse on electoral reforms. Prominent politicians are often the dominant voices, overshadowing grassroots perspectives (see Table 3.1). One tweet observes, "Prominent politicians dominate the conversation on electoral reforms, sidelining grassroots voices." This reflects a hierarchical power structure where political elites control the narrative, potentially marginalizing grassroots organizations and broader public voices.

Civil society groups also face significant challenges in being heard amid the power struggles between major political parties (see Table 3.1). As one tweet states, "Civil society groups struggle to be heard amid the power struggles between major political parties." This highlights the tension between established political entities and civil society, with the latter striving to influence the discourse and advocate for democratic reforms despite limited visibility and influence.

Conformity vs. Resistance

Social norms further influence the discourse, with a substantial portion of the population accepting the reforms as necessary for a better future. For instance, a tweet reads, "Most people are conforming to the belief that these reforms are necessary for a better future" (see Table 3.1). This conformity suggests an alignment

with the dominant narrative, often shaped by powerful political actors through persuasive communication strategies.

However, resistance is also evident, as many challenge the assumption that the current system is inherently flawed. This resistance is captured in counter-narratives questioning the necessity and motivations behind the reforms, reflecting deeper skepticism about the intentions of those in power (see Table 3.1).

3.1.4 Discursive Strategies

Persuasive Appeals and Sloganeering

Advocates of electoral reforms employ persuasive appeals that emphasize fairness and equality (see Table 3.1). For instance, reform advocates strategically highlight themes of just and equitable governance to resonate with public aspirations for transparency and democracy. This reinforces the perception that the reforms align with democratic ideals and foster inclusive political processes.

Conversely, opponents of the reforms use sloganeering and catchy phrases to rally support against the proposed changes (see Table 3.1). By reducing complex issues into memorable slogans, opponents effectively mobilize resistance, simplify dissent, and challenge the dominant narrative advocating for reform.

Positive Tone and Language

The overall tone of the discourse is predominantly positive, focusing on the benefits of reform (see Table 3.1). This framing creates an optimistic outlook on the potential impact of the reforms, likely shaping public perception and garnering wider support for their implementation.

The tabulated data on Tanzania's electoral law reforms highlights a discourse characterised by a clash of ideologies and values, with significant implications for power dynamics. At the forefront are competing narratives of democratic ideals versus authoritarian concerns, shaping how stakeholders engage in the debate. The dominance of political elites, challenges faced by civil society, and the role of discursive strategies and social norms are pivotal in influencing public opinion. Understanding these elements is essential to comprehending the broader implications of electoral law reforms on Tanzania's political landscape.

3.2 DISCUSSION

The findings from this study underscore the complex interplay of ideologies, values, and power dynamics within the discourse on electoral law reforms in Tanzania. These results resonate with various scholarly perspectives on political discourse and the influence of social media. By linking empirical data to theoretical and empirical literature, this discussion highlights how political discourse shapes public opinion, fosters engagement, and, as (Pennycook, 2018) argues, risks propagating misinformation within polarized environments.

Democratic Values and Authoritarian Concerns

The discourse on electoral law reforms in Tanzania reflects two opposing ideological undercurrents: democratic values and authoritarian concerns. Advocates for reforms emphasise transparency, fairness, and inclusivity as core democratic principles. This finding aligns with the observation that political discourse can enhance civic participation and strengthen democratic norms through public engagement (Smith, 2018).

However, some participants perceive the reforms as authoritarian measures designed to consolidate the ruling party's power and suppress dissent. This aligns with Bakshy's (2015) insights on social media's role in

creating echo chambers that amplify polarization, with individuals reinforcing either democratic or authoritarian perspectives within their networks. The tension in the Tanzanian discourse illustrates a broader struggle over governance values, where reforms are simultaneously seen as pathways to democracy and as tools for authoritarian control.

Group Affiliations and Support for Reforms

The study reveals that political parties, academic institutions, and civil society play distinct roles in shaping the discourse. Political parties, by endorsing reforms as steps toward transparency and accountability, reflect Bennett's (2012) claim that online activism often translates into real-world participation, shaping public positions.

Similarly, academic institutions contribute evidence-based studies that validate the reform agenda, aligning with Vaccari's (2015) assertion that online discourse and hashtag movements are key agenda-setting instruments. By lending credibility to reform narratives, academics reinforce the legitimacy of these changes, enhancing public trust and support.

Power Relations: Dominant Voices and Marginalised Perspectives

Power dynamics within the discourse highlight a recurring pattern: dominant political elites overshadow grassroots perspectives. This observation corresponds with Tufekci's (2012) findings that social media enables elites to maintain control over narratives. Such dominance limits diverse perspectives and centralizes power in the hands of influential actors.

Conversely, civil society groups strive to challenge this imbalance by asserting their voices in the discourse. Their efforts to decentralize power and promote inclusive participation align with Freddie's (2020) research, which emphasizes social media's potential to foster political deliberation and interpersonal discussions despite hierarchical constraints.

Social Norms: Conformity and Resistance

The interplay of conformity and resistance within the discourse reflects broader social norms. Proponents of the reforms emphasise their necessity for a better future, fostering widespread acceptance of the dominant narrative. This dynamic aligns with Keith's (2023) findings that social media amplifies activism by rallying users around shared ideals.

On the other hand, resistant voices question the legitimacy of reforms and challenge the motivations behind them, echoing Tufekci's (2012) argument that social media not only facilitates rapid mobilisation but also encourages critical scrutiny of dominant narratives.

Discursive Strategies: Persuasive Appeals and Sloganeering

Strategic communication practices are evident in the discourse, with reform advocates emphasising fairness and equality to evoke democratic ideals. This approach aligns with Smith's (2018) recommendation that digital engagement can mobilise youth for civic causes.

Conversely, opponents rely on sloganeering to simplify complex issues into memorable phrases, facilitating rapid mobilisation of resistance. This tactic mirrors Bennett's (2012) findings on the effectiveness of bridging online activism with offline participation through clear and impactful messaging.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the discourse surrounding electoral reform in Tanzania is shaped by an intricate interplay of ideologies, power dynamics, and discursive strategies. The findings highlight the dual potential of social media to both foster democratic engagement and intensify polarisation, emphasising the importance of critical engagement in online political dialogue.

The results affirm the significant role of political discourse in shaping public sentiment and fostering active civic participation, as observed by Pennycook (2018). Social media serves as a dynamic platform for citizens to express support for reforms or challenge authoritarian tendencies. However, the prevalence of echo chambers and misinformation poses substantial risks, distorting discussions, reinforcing biases, and undermining efforts to build consensus.

To foster a more inclusive and democratic dialogue on electoral law reforms, stakeholders must prioritize transparency, encourage the participation of diverse voices, and adopt robust fact-checking measures to combat misinformation. This approach will help mitigate the negative impacts of social media-driven discourse while amplifying its democratic potential.

Ultimately, this analysis underscores that social media is a double-edged sword: it empowers public participation and ideological expression but simultaneously heightens polarisation and marginalisation. Addressing this paradox requires strategic engagement from all stakeholders—policymakers, civil society, media, and citizens—to ensure informed, balanced, and constructive dialogues that support democratic reform processes in Tanzania.

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