

Modeling the President of Tanzania's Decision to Stop Ongoing Protests

In the aftermath of Tanzania's October 29 elections, the country has witnessed a wave of deadly protests driven largely by electoral grievances. Opposition parties and civil society groups have accused the ruling party and the electoral commission of manipulating results, intimidating voters, and abducting opposition activists in the weeks leading up to the polls. These tensions culminated in widespread demonstrations before and after the announcement of the results, met with a violent state response. Despite the internet shutdown, social media and international reports from the UN, Al Jazeera, and the BBC indicate that security forces have used live ammunition against protesters, resulting in several deaths and injuries. Yet, rather than intervening to halt the violence, President Samia Suluhu Hassan has defended the state's actions, condemning demonstrators as "unpatriotic." Against this backdrop, the president faces a consequential decision: whether and how to stop the ongoing protests.

The President of Tanzania serves as the central decision-making actor, wielding extensive executive power that blends formal constitutional authority with informal political influence. She commands the police and military, shapes the national narrative through state-controlled media, and leads the ruling party, *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM), which has governed since independence. In this context, power can be understood as the ability to make and affect choices; in this case, the choice of how to respond to mounting unrest rooted in contested electoral legitimacy. Her decision is not merely administrative; it reflects the broader political logic of maintaining regime stability in the face of challenges to authority.

The president's decision space includes several strategic options. The first is repression, in which she continues to authorize the use of force to disperse demonstrators, detain opposition leaders, and restrict communication. This option could restore control and project state strength, but it carries high risks: it deepens domestic resentment, attracts international condemnation, and can delegitimize the presidency in the long term.

The second option is accommodation, which would involve acknowledging protesters' grievances and addressing their core demands: the cancellation of the disputed election, the creation of a new independent electoral commission, the drafting of a new constitution, and the release of all abducted individuals and detained opposition leaders. This path would demonstrate responsiveness to citizens' demands and could open the door to national reconciliation. However, the political costs are severe. Meeting these demands would likely require President Hassan to relinquish significant power or even step down while exposing her and her party's hardliners to prosecution, loss of patronage networks, and an uncertain political future. Thus, while accommodation could restore public trust and international credibility, it poses an existential threat to the regime.

A third option is to ignore the protests, betting that fear, fatigue, or the dispersal of opposition

networks will cause demonstrations to fade. However, such inaction risks allowing grievances to fester, potentially leading to more radicalized and organized resistance over time. Finally, the president could adopt a hybrid approach, combining limited repression with controlled gestures of dialogue or reform, an effort to preserve authority while managing reputational costs.

In deciding among these options, the president must rely on information about several key factors: the scale and persistence of the protests, the organizational capacity of the opposition, the public's tolerance for continued violence, and the loyalty of the police and military. She must also consider Tanzania's international standing, particularly with development partners and regional allies, given that sustained political violence can threaten donor funding and foreign investment. Yet, in practice, the flow of information may be distorted by the hierarchical nature of the Tanzanian political system. Security agencies and political advisers may underreport the severity of unrest or exaggerate regime support, shaping a decision environment marked by uncertainty and bias.

The president's decision can be modelled as a probabilistic calculation of expected political outcomes in the face of uncertainty. Let the expected utility of her decision be expressed as:

$$[U = P(S) + P(L) + P(C) - P(R)]$$

where (P(S)) represents the probability of achieving stability, (P(L)) the probability of maintaining legitimacy, (P(C)) the probability of retaining control, and (P(R)) the probability of backlash or risk, including international sanctions, domestic unrest, or elite fragmentation. Her perceptions and available information shape each probability. If she perceives the probability of maintaining control and stability through repression as high and the probability of backlash as low, coercive strategies become more attractive. Conversely, if she judges that repression risks eroding legitimacy or provoking donor withdrawal, she may shift toward a hybrid or conciliatory approach.

In the current context, the president's rhetoric and actions suggest that her internal calculus assigns a high probability to (P(C)) and (P(S)), maintaining control and projecting order while downplaying (P(L)) and (P(R)). By framing protesters as "unpatriotic," she signals a narrative that equates dissent with disloyalty, legitimizing continued force. This framing reinforces her authority among security elites and within the ruling party but undermines legitimacy with the public and international community. If violence persists or escalates, however, (P(R)), the risk of domestic and international backlash will increase, potentially shifting the equilibrium of her decision toward moderation or limited dialogue.

The costs and benefits of this decision are also shaped by the actions of other powerful actors. Military and police commanders' willingness to obey orders without restraint affects the feasibility and fallout of repression. The unity or fragmentation of opposition parties

influences whether accommodation could realistically succeed. International actors, especially major donors and regional organizations, can alter the risk environment by threatening sanctions, suspending aid, or offering mediation. Thus, while the president holds immense power, it is conditional power, exercised in relation to the strategic responses of others.

Ultimately, the president's decision about whether to stop the protests encapsulates the enduring tension between authority and accountability in Tanzania's political development. Choosing repression may preserve immediate stability, but it deepens the structural legitimacy crisis created by the contested election and the pre-election abductions of opposition figures. Choosing accommodation would open space for genuine reform and reconciliation, but at the cost of conceding power and undermining her regime's survival. The decision thus mirrors a broader regional pattern: the dilemma of leaders in hybrid regimes who must manage electoral dissent without conceding control.

In this moment, President Hassan's choice reflects not only the limits of institutional reform but also the nature of power itself in Tanzania and other Sub-Saharan African countries where stability, legitimacy, and control coexist in uneasy balance, and where the decision to stop protests becomes, ultimately, a decision about the future trajectory of democracy.